



National Association of Social Workers

2008 Report of the

***NASW Task Force on Social Work
Compensation and Employment Opportunities***

***Including a Recommended Revision of the
“Workplace Standards Document”***

Submitted to:

The Board of Directors

**Massachusetts Chapter of the
National Association of Social Workers**

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Task Force Members

Christopher Hudson, Chairperson; Martha Burke; Eleni Carr; James Cooney;
Jayna Ellsworth; Rhoda Greenspan; Suzan Kamm; Robert Keane; Phyllis King;
Donald Nadeau; James Purdy; Harry Shulman; Carol Trust

Task Force Members and Their Affiliations

Martha Burke, MSW, ACSW, LICSW, Director of Social Work and Clinical Services, Brigham and Women's Hospital (Boston, MA)

Eleni A. Carr, MBA, LICSW, Vice Chair, Massachusetts Commission on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth & Member, NASW Board of Directors (Newton, MA)

James Cooney, MSW, LICSW, Director of Social Work, Erich Lindemann Mental Health Center (Boston, MA)

Jayna Ellsworth, MSW, LICSW, McLean Center at Fernside (Princeton, MA) & Private Practice

Rhoda Greenspan, MSW, LICSW, Private Practice (MA)

Christopher G. Hudson, Ph.D., DCSW, Professor, School of Social Work, Salem State College (Salem, MA)

Suzan Kamm, Ph.D., JD, LICSW, Private Practice (MA)

Robert J. Keane, Ph.D., LICSW, Vice President for Ambulatory Services, Eliot Community Human Services, Inc. (Lexington, MA)

Phyllis W. King, LICSW, DCSW, President, Massachusetts Chapter, National Association of Social Workers (Boston, MA)

Donald Nadeau, LICSW, Associate Chief of Mental Health for Social Work Service, Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Affairs Hospital (Bedford, MA)

James Q. Purdy, MSW, ACSW, Vice President, Behavioral Health, Northeast Hospital Corporation (Beverly, MA)

Harry Shulman, President and CEO, South Shore Mental Health (Quincy, MA) & Instructor, Boston College School of Social Work (Chestnut Hill, MA)

Carol J. Trust, LICSW, Executive Director, Massachusetts Chapter, National Association of Social Workers (Boston, MA)

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background. In response to concerns that were identified as a result of a 2007 NASW statewide survey about compensation and employment opportunities in the profession, NASW's Board of Directors decided to organize a Task Force. It gave this group the charge to *consider the most efficacious and practical means for protecting and enhancing the employment opportunities and career paths of professional social workers in Massachusetts and to recommend steps to achieve these ends*. To achieve this aim, the Task Force has now collected and examined numerous sources of information, on national trends, state salary levels, member experiences and priorities, as well as expert opinions on relevant aspects of the project.

Data Reviewed. The Task Force has concluded from a review of the research and other literature that the problems identified in the 2007 survey have developed out of several interlocking trends, including the globalization of economic activity, expansion in contingent employment, increasing income inequality, organizational mergers and consolidations, expansion of managed care in health care, privatization of public services, and laissez-faire political ideologies. A survey of NASW members indicated that the most frequent problems involve low salaries and inadequate benefits, low payment rates from insurers, insufficient opportunities for promotion, employer devaluation of social work, and the shift of salaried to fee-for-service positions. Members have indicated that their top priorities for NASW action are advocacy for improved payment rates with 3rd party payer, dissemination of higher compensation standards, and the creation of a statewide online social work jobs database.

Task Force Recommendations. The Task Force agrees that since the problems reviewed in this report have multiple causes and manifest in diverse settings, efforts need to be strategically focused to be maximally responsive. The recommendations specifically include the following:

1. A high priority for NASW should be advocacy for improved payment rates and for other policy changes of 3rd party payers (both public and private), including expansion of managed care panels for social workers.
2. A related priority involves advocacy for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to pay fair rates for purchase-of-service (POS) contracts.
3. Continued public education on the value of professionally trained social workers, including their preparation and standards is crucial. Systematic efforts should be made to demonstrate the value, both social, clinical, and financial, that professional social workers brings to the settings in which they work.
4. It is recommend that the Board of Directors review and approve the Task Force's revision of the Workplace Standards document which was originally developed and passed by the Board in the year 2000, including its compensation guidelines (see **appendix**), and that these should be widely disseminated.
5. A priority should be continued development of supports for both social work job seekers and employers that include more complete and up-front information on responsibilities, salary ranges, and fringe benefits. Such supports to be considered and researched should include: (i) the creation of a statewide online social work jobs database, (ii) improvement in the capacity for dissemination of information about employment opportunities and compensation, (iii) a statewide jobs fair and employment listserv.
6. The Task Force recommends that there be a clear designation of responsibility for implementation of each of these recommendations.

II. INTRODUCTION

In 2007 the Massachusetts Chapter of NASW conducted a statewide survey of 1,200 licensed social workers, both members and non-members, in order to assess the current status of compensation and employment opportunities in the Commonwealth. This survey, carried out by Christopher Hudson, Ph.D., DCSW, who was an NASW board member and is currently a professor at Salem State College's School of Social Work, resulted in a detailed report that raised concerns about progress that the profession has made in respect to salaries, benefits, and employment opportunities, both for those entering the field, as well as those in later stages of their careers. Subsequent discussion among the Board of Directors and its Executive Committee led to a decision to appoint a Task Force to further study these issues. This Task Force was asked *to consider the most efficacious and practical means for protecting and enhancing the employment opportunities and career paths of professional social workers in Massachusetts and to recommend steps to achieve these ends*. Specifically, its immediate goals have been to: (i) identify options for maximizing the use and value of the findings from the survey in relation to enhancing both salaries and career/job opportunities; (ii) update the Chapter's Workplace Standards Document (2000); and, (iii) present a draft plan at the June '08 NASW Board meeting for prioritizing options for implementation and further study by the Task Force.

Since the appointment of the Task Force at the beginning of 2008, the group has met five times. Its active membership of 13 social workers includes direct service practitioners, directors of social work in major hospitals, top manager at leading behavioral health agencies, state agency administrators, private practitioners, and social work educators. The group has systematically sought to investigate the nature of the problems uncovered in the salary survey by reviewing relevant literature, studying hundreds of written comments provided in the salary survey, conducting follow up surveys, as well as sharing their experiences and interpretations of relevant trends. The follow-up survey consisted of a brief online survey of the NASW membership that resulted in 710 responses, on questions involving both barriers to better employment opportunities and actions that the respondents wished to see from NASW. Key themes from these investigations are summarized in this report, particularly, in the following sections on trends, barriers, and preferred actions. A key framework used to conceptualize the problems of interest involves an identification of: (i) problems in the demand for professional social workers; (ii) problems in the supply of social workers; and difficulties in bringing out a good fit between such demand and supply, and in assuring the most efficient operation of the professional social work job market. The Task Force has been encouraged by numerous reports about the strong and growing demand for social workers. There is a substantial shortage of social workers in designated areas (i.e. public service, aging, children, leadership positions). There is concern that the market is not responding to the increased demand for social workers by increasing salaries, except in limited areas such as the Veteran's Administration. It is expected that there can be a more efficient operation of the job market with better information and targeted advocacy efforts.

The group struggled to come to reach a consensus on directions that are at once practical to implement, yet can be expected to have an impact. It is, however, under no illusions that the long-term and pervasive forces that have generated the problems of concern can be easily changed, especially in the short-term. Thus, the Task Force emphasizes the need for long-term and concerted efforts on the part of NASW and other human service advocates.

The Task Force would like to acknowledge and thank the NASW staff, particularly Carol Trust, the Executive Director, for her support of the work of the group.