

# SOCIAL WORKERS YOUR KEY TO BETTER HEALTH



## VALUE OF SOCIAL WORK IN HEALTH CARE

Every day across the United States, social workers work with patients and families to understand what matters most to them and then draw on the knowledge, values, and skills of their profession to improve people's care journeys. This may look like improving access to medication, connecting to employment resources, addressing caregiver burnout, or any other action that supports a patient's overall wellbeing. Clinical social workers (CSWs) are specifically trained to assess, diagnose, and treat mental and behavioral health conditions, which can both affect and develop from a physical health diagnosis. In these times of need, social workers deploy their specialized care coordination strategies to improve the patient's health status by connecting the patient to appropriate resources for better care and quality of life.

## BARRIERS TO REIMBURSEMENT

While social workers are often considered core members of care teams, they are not compensated the same as other allied health professionals. Under current Medicare statutory language, **clinical social workers are restricted from billing any services outside of the direct care they offer as mental health providers** – meaning we are unable to access the full potential of this workforce to improve patient outcomes and reduce medical spending. Social workers cannot independently bill for Health Behavior Assessment and Intervention (HBAI), Advance Care Planning (ACP), and related care coordination codes even though these services already exist within their scope of practice. These professionals are instead limited to "incident to" reimbursements, where they must practice under the supervision of a medical provider. This method restricts care availability as not all health systems have the time, personnel, and resources to implement this practice.

### **Health Behavior Assessment and Intervention (HBAI)**

These services assist patients with making positive behavior changes and with addressing the environmental, psychological, emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal factors that impact treatment of a physical health problem.

### **Advance Care Planning (ACP)**

These services empower individuals to plan for future medical treatment, such as emergencies or end-of-life care. Providers support the personal ethics and values of the patient in exploring and documenting these directives.

## POLICY SOLUTIONS

In 2019, the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) released a report, titled: [Integrating Social Care into the Delivery of Health Care](#), detailing the need for a coordinated strategy and additional infrastructure to improve health care delivery systems and recommended that social workers be recognized as providers eligible for payer reimbursement.

We seek to implement a payment structure and reimbursement for social workers that recognizes our vital role as members of interprofessional care teams in improving health for diverse Medicare beneficiaries. Congress has the ability to do this by passing laws that would modify the federal definition of CSW services to include everything in the CSW's state-recognized scope of practice, rather than limiting payments strictly to only mental health services.

### **Integrating Social Workers Across Health Care Settings**

The Coalition's current legislative initiative is the *Integrating Social Workers Across Health Care Settings Act*, H.R. 4638 which would authorize CSWs to bill Medicare Part B for all relevant services within their state scope of practice. **If you are a social worker, patient, or advocate you can check out action opportunities [here](#) and ask Congress to act on this important legislation.**

In addition to our own legislative initiative, we support the *Improving Access to Mental Health Act* (S.838/H.R.1638) being led by the National Association of Social Workers. This bicameral bipartisan bill would boost the rate that Medicare reimburses CSWs, allow Medicare beneficiaries residing in Skilled Nursing Facilities to receive services from CSWs under Medicare Part B, and make CSWs eligible for billing HBAI codes. More information is available [here](#). Further, we eagerly anticipate the reintroduction of the *Improving Access to Advance Care Planning Act*, which would allow CSWs to bill for ACP services.

## COALITION FOR SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH

Established in 2013, [CSWH](#) is a collective dedicated to elevating and expanding social work's impact in improving health and healthcare. The Coalition engages in policy advocacy, research, and education through the participation of professional associations, practice and academic leaders, and allies.

**To learn more about social work's role, expertise, and value in improving our nation's health, visit [www.chasci.org/cswh](http://www.chasci.org/cswh).**

**#SocialWorkIsKEY**