

# Social Work Practice: Engaging Individuals, Community, and Systems in Support of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy

Social workers provide HIV/AIDS prevention and early intervention services in a range of practice settings, including child welfare, schools, criminal justice, substance use treatment, mental health centers, primary care clinics, hospitals, and private practice. Social workers have the skills, opportunity, and commitment to engage clients in HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment utilizing a comprehensive bio-psycho-social approach.

Throughout the 30 year pandemic, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has taken an active role in addressing HIV/AIDS policy and practice issues. NASW continues to advocate for health and behavioral health equity and is committed to initiatives designed to increase consumer engagement and to build a skilled and culturally competent social work and allied provider workforce. Through the NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum Project, NASW provides professional development workshops, online training and education, and workforce capacity building targeting providers in HIV/AIDS, mental health, and substance use.

# THE NATIONAL HIV/AIDS STRATEGY AND THE HIV CARE CONTINUUM

The National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS) directs federal agencies to prioritize the HIV Care Continuum in their efforts — be it funding research or implementing community-level interventions to develop best practices and policy guidance. Successful movement through the HIV care continuum requires understanding the gaps in services or policy that may be a barrier to connecting people to care and treatment.¹ Social workers have taken an active role in identifying and addressing gaps: approaching HIV prevention, care and treatment from a holistic perspective. Examples of social work practice integrating the psychosocial and health and behavioral health interventions necessary to a comprehensive approach to ending HIV/AIDS are illustrated below (see Figure 1).

Skilled in cross-disciplinary care and treatment, professional social workers are well-prepared to help address the myriad of complex health, mental health, and structural issues associated with HIV/AIDS

DIAGNOSED **KEEP THE** ENGAGED/ **VIRUS UNDER** WITH HIV RETAINED IN CARE **CONTROL START ARV** SUSTAINING **PREVENTION** LINKED **THERAPY HEALTH & OF HIV** Helping youth and TO CARE On-going case/ WELLNESS adults to access Adherence, monitoring care management testing sites, manage side-effects, social (health, mental health, disclosure, and address support, behavior reproductive health), psycho-social issues. change continuum advocating for client Linking to resources and community Working in diverse MH assessment/ Psycho-social **Identifying structural** settings: providing risk parriers and connecting eassessment: linking assessment/interventions assessment, prevention client to services, to services; addressing structural education, testing barriers: advocating for MH assessment; ellness management: wareness, community \*Rased on the HIV client/community case management care planning outreach Care Continuum

FIGURE 1: FACILITATING THE HIV CARE CONTINUUM THROUGH SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

#### FIGURE 2: SOCIAL WORK SKILLS & THE NATIONAL HIV/AIDS STRATEGY

## **HIV INFECTIONS**

- INCREASING ACCESS TO CARE & IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR
- » Engage clients in non-HIV specific public and private service settings.
- » Educate client and allied providers about HIV/AIDS disease, transmission risks and co-factors.
- » Utilize prevention, early intervention and harm reduction strategies.
- » Assist clients with disclosure and education about PrEP.
- PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV
- » Provide care coordination across practice settings (non-HIV specific & HIV programs). Referral and linkage to care.
- » Ensure clients have access to culturally competent resources, including mental health & behavioral health treatment.
- » Work with client/patient around treatment adherence (HIV medications & psychotropic).
- REDUCING HIV-RELATED **DISPARITIES & HEALTH INEQUITIES**
- **ACHIEVING A MORE COORDINATED NATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE HIV PANDEMIC**
- » Promote social justice and civil rights protections for people with HIV/AIDS and the broader community.
- » Develop policy and practice guidance for the profession.
- » Promote equity through advocacy at the local, state, and federal level.
- » Direct practice and advocacy in community based organizations working with marginalized and at-risk communities.
- » Support collaborations across public and private systems to build and sustain client engagement, implement policy, and
- » NASW promotes workforce development as a partner in the National HIV Mental Health Training and Resource Center (SAMHSA).
- » NASW promotes partnerships and programs that facilitate integrated health and behavioral health care and treatment.

prevention and care. Social work practitioners across the nation provide skilled interventions that support the goals of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy: Reducing new HIV infections, increasing access to care and improving health outcomes or people living with HIV/AIDS, reducing HIV-related disparities and health inequities, and achieving a more coordinated national response to the HIV pandemic (see Figure 2).

### RECOMMENDATIONS: MEETING THE NEEDS OF CLIENTS, COMMUNITY AND THE WORKFORCE

The National Association of Social Workers offers the following recommendations for the United States National HIV/AIDS Strategy:

- » Continue to build strong provider capability: to ensure a skills-based workforce knowledgeable about evidence-based behavioral strategies, comprehensive health, and mental health assessments, and culturally relevant interventions to optimize outcomes and reduce health inequities.
- Provide targeted funding for comprehensive, integrated, and accessible mental health and substance abuse services as part of case management services: ensure accessibility to all persons regardless of ability to pay; include referral mechanism through partnerships with health departments, community based organizations, and health and social service providers.
- Support and fund public health approaches to prevent, test and treat HIV: eliminate HIV criminalization laws, establish publicly and privately funded needle exchange programs, and include structural interventions

- » Increase provider and community engagement: build cross-sector collaborations that build provider capacity to provide culturally competent and relevant services and programming.
- » Sustain comprehensive service delivery system based on a quality case management model: to include access to suitable and affordable housing, violence and trauma services, adult and child foster care, home health care, mental health and wellness, legal services, and transportation.
- Create policy that ensures accessible and affordable bio-medical interventions: to include full and equal access to antiretroviral therapy (ARV), hepatitis treatments, and/or psychotropic medications.
- Support research and implementation studies for initiatives that address structural factors: support interventions that can curtail the HIV/AIDS pandemic: equal access to mental health and substance use programs, ending health disparities, interpersonal violence prevention, and poverty reduction.

1 HIV/AIDS Care Continuum. AIDS.gov. www.aids.gov/federal-resources/policies/care-continuum/

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world. NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain standards for the profession, and to advance sound social policies. NASW also contributes to the well-being of individuals, families and communities through its advocacy.

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