

Human Rights **Update**

# PREPARING THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION THROUGH CONTINUING PROVIDER EDUCATION: NASW'S RESPONSE TO THE HIV/AIDS PANDEMIC

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## NASW HIV/AIDS SPECTRUM PROJECT

Globally, social workers are proactively providing critical services to individuals, families, and communities affected by HIV/AIDS. Social workers are employed in a wide range of community settings, including public, non-profit, and for-profit organizations.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, working with a diverse and changing population in supportive, clinical, and administrative roles requires that social workers be capable of providing up to date expertise on research, policy, and evidence-based clinical approaches. Even social workers not directly serving persons living with and/or affected by HIV/AIDS should have an understanding of their complex and unique challenges, as HIV is correlated with both substance use and other mental health concerns.<sup>2</sup>

The National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS) calls upon our nation to “take deliberate steps to increase the number and diversity of available providers of clinical care and related services for people living with HIV,”<sup>3</sup> to “expand evidence-based mental health and substance abuse services” and to “link individuals to mental health services.” Additionally, the NHAS stresses that those persons living with HIV should be “linked to high-quality care that promotes adherence to HIV antiretroviral therapy.”

In line with the NHAS and ensuring a comprehensive professional response to this public health pandemic, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) provides social workers and allied health and mental health professionals with continuing education

opportunities through the federally-funded NASW *HIV/AIDS Spectrum: Mental Health Training and Education of Social Workers Project*. The goal of the NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum Project is to provide the necessary HIV and mental health practice skills for enhancing and promoting culturally informed practice with individuals, families and communities affected by HIV/AIDS. To achieve this goal, four trainings have been implemented and evaluated across a range of national and international settings:

- *Substance Use, Mental Health, and HIV/AIDS: An Integrated Response*
- *Addressing ethical dilemmas in an era of complex practice issues: HIV/AIDS as a Case Study*
- *Providing services in complex times: working with clients living with HIV/AIDS and co-occurring mental health disorders*
- *The Role of the Mental Health Provider in Medication Treatment Adherence: the ADHERE Model*

Since the program's inception in 1996, provider education has been offered through on-site workshops, Web-based education, distance learning (such as audio-conferencing and televideo conferencing), and technical assistance. The NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum Project has reached more than 10,000 social workers and allied health and mental health care professionals through on-site workshops, conference plenary sessions, and lectures. Further, in 2006 NASW introduced a web-based curriculum focusing on HIV/AIDS and mental

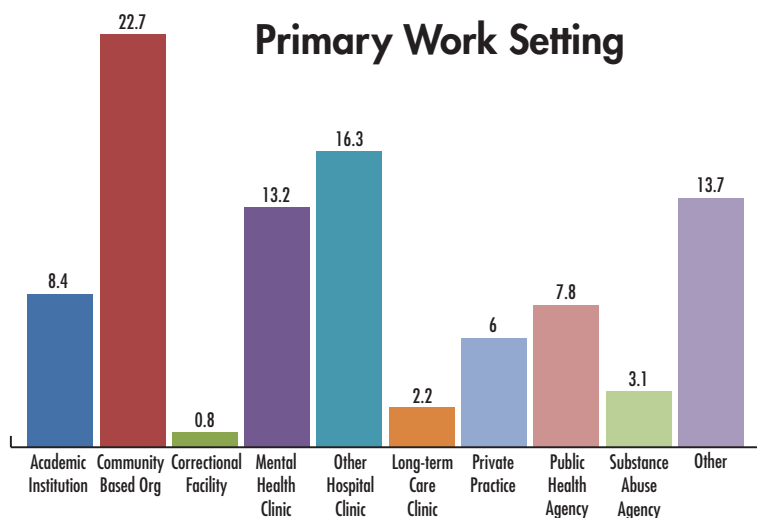
health social work. Over 22,000 providers representing 38 diverse countries have completed this course.

This brief is based on evaluation outcome data collected from on-site workshop participants during 2002 through 2010, with a sample size of 4,981 participants.

### Who are the providers accessing the NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum Project for continuing education and technical assistance?

Of the 10,000 providers reached since 2002, 4,981 participants have completed the Participant Feedback Forms utilized by the NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum Project.<sup>4</sup> The majority (79%) of participants are female. Approximately two-thirds (66.6%) of participants are Caucasian, followed by African American (23.1%), Hispanic (10.5%), Asian (2.9%) and American Indian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (2.7%). The majority (69%) hold a Masters degree.

Professional development continuing education programming is promoted in collaboration with NASW Chapters, community based organizations, schools of social work, health departments and hospital clinics, and other privately and publically funded non-government organizations and agencies. A significant portion (22.7%) of participants work in community-based organizations, as seen in the table below.



### What motivates providers to complete continuing education programming?

The NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum Project participants are motivated predominately by professional development. More than half of participants attend training sessions to build their skills and knowledge (52%), followed by a desire for continuing education units (CEU's; 35.7%). Only 9.3% of participants attend because of a job requirement.

### How do participants assess their preparation to address issues related to HIV/AIDS after attending a skill-building workshop?

Overall, the trainings provided by the NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum Project are successful in meeting the stated intended goals, with almost all participants (84%) indicating that they are both satisfied with the training and will be recommending it to a colleague. Below is a brief description of the workshop, followed by self-assessment data obtained through participant feedback forms completed at the end of the following workshops:

#### “SUBSTANCE USE, MENTAL HEALTH, AND HIV/AIDS: AN INTEGRATED RESPONSE”

Participants overwhelmingly (90%) stated that the information they learned was useful, and most (65.7%) reported that they are “more comfortable, or extremely more comfortable treating their clients.” Two-thirds (63%) of participants feel “more willing to treat clients with HIV after attending,” while almost three-quarters (72%) report “increased capability in providing services to their clients.” Most participants increased their “compassionate practice knowledge” (81%) and “new HIV treatments knowledge” (62%).

#### “ADDRESSING ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN AN ERA OF COMPLEX PRACTICE ISSUES: HIV/AIDS AS A CASE STUDY”

Nearly all participants in the trainings (91%) found it useful, and overwhelmingly (90%) agreed that they “developed a better awareness of ethical issues facing practitioners who treat HIV positive clients,” with most (81%) reported a significant increase “in competence about legal issues.”

### PROVIDING SERVICES IN COMPLEX TIMES: WORKING WITH CLIENTS LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS AND CO-OCCURRING MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Attendees reported the information was useful (84%) and that they are “more comfortable” (84.7%), “willing” (83.3%) and “capable” of providing services to their clients’ (100%) after attending the training. Most (88%) felt “their knowledge of psychosocial interventions and mental health approaches was increased.”

### THE ROLE OF MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER IN MEDICATION TREATMENT ADHERENCE: THE ADHERE MODEL

The ADHERE training is well received, with the majority (62.9%) of participants reporting they are now “more comfortable treating their clients.” Most (89%) felt “more willing to treat HIV positive clients” after attending the workshop, and almost all (91%) felt “more capable in providing that care.” Creating a stronger understanding of the challenges HIV-positive clients face daily is a primary goal of this training, and nearly all participants (94%) reported that the training achieved this outcome.

### Summary

In line with the NHAS goal of providing “specialized training [to] alleviate HIV workforce shortages,” the Project seeks to expand the ability for social workers and allied health and behavioral health professionals to meet the emerging needs of HIV in the 21st century. To date, NASW has held 6 training of trainers (ToT), resulting in a total of 27 trainers across the United States and US Territories.

The *NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum Project* continues to lead the effort in preparing social workers and allied professionals to provide care and treatment that promotes ethical practice utilizing research-driven intervention addressing mental health, substance use and medication adherence. To learn more about the Project, including the Training of Trainer model or to schedule a workshop, visit [www.socialworkers.org/practice/hiv\\_aids/default.asp](http://www.socialworkers.org/practice/hiv_aids/default.asp)

### TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HIV/AIDS, GO TO:

Understanding HIV/AIDS: The Social Work Role. (Comprendiendo el VIH/SIDA: El Rol del Trabajador Social). NASW WebED Course (FREE)  
[www.naswwebed.org/Welcome/tabid/56/Default.aspx](http://www.naswwebed.org/Welcome/tabid/56/Default.aspx)

NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum: Mental Health Training and Education of Social Workers Project  
[www.socialworkers.org/practice/hiv\\_aids/default.asp](http://www.socialworkers.org/practice/hiv_aids/default.asp)

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1 Whitaker, T., Weismiller, T., & Clark, E. (2006). *Assuring the sufficiency of a frontline workforce: A national study of licensed social workers. Executive summary*. National Association of Social Workers: Washington, DC. Online at [http://workforce.socialworkers.org/studies/nasw\\_06\\_execsummary.pdf](http://workforce.socialworkers.org/studies/nasw_06_execsummary.pdf)

2 Bing, et al., (2000). Health-related quality of life among people with HIV disease: Results from the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study. *Quality of Life*, 9(1), 55-63

3 National HIV/AIDS Strategy for the United States (2010). Retrieved from <http://aids.gov/federal-resources/policies/national-hiv-aids-strategy/>

4 Drawn from data analysis by Jeremy Goldbach, LMSW.

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