



February 4, 2019

Legislative

New Congress, New Social Work Leaders: The 116th Congress convened on January 3, with Democrats now having the majority in the House and Republicans maintaining the majority in the Senate. Ninety-nine new lawmakers were elected, including an unprecedented number of women and people of color. NASW-PACE, the NASW political action committee (PAC), endorsed 181 candidates who won re-election or are new members of Congress. Three MSWs won re-election to the House: Reps. Karen Bass (D-CA-37), Susan Davis (D-CA-53) and Barbara Lee (D-CA-13). Rep. Sylvia Garcia (D-TX-29) has her BSW and just started her first term in Congress. Two MSWs were elected to the Senate (one new and one returning): Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) and Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI).

Government Shutdown: The partial federal government shutdown, the longest in history at 35 days, ended on January 25. NASW released a [statement](#) urging Congress and the White House to fully reopen the government. The federal government is now fully opened until February 15. If Congress and the White House do not resolve the issues giving rise to the shutdown by that date, another shutdown is possible. NASW will continue to closely monitor this situation and potential negative impacts on our members and the clients they serve.

Social Work Workforce Legislation: NASW staff are working with our Congressional champions to reintroduce and build support for several bills:

- *Improving Access to Mental Health Act* [Rep. Lee, Sen. Stabenow and Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY); original sponsors], to:

1. Increase the reimbursement rate for clinical social workers (CSWs) who work with Medicare beneficiaries from 75% to 85% of the physician fee schedule,
 2. Ensure Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) residents' access to CSWs by excluding clinical social work services from SNF consolidated billing, and
 3. Ensure Medicare beneficiaries' access to Health and Behavior Assessment and Intervention services provided by CSWs.
- *Social Worker Safety Act* (Sen. Sinema, original sponsor), to establish a Social Worker Safety Grant Program within the Department of Health and Human Services to fund States' efforts to improve safety measures for social workers. It would allow these grants to be used to purchase safety equipment, make facility improvements, facilitate safety training programs, provide support services for social workers who have been victims of violence, or track incident data to mitigate future offenses against social workers.
 - *Social Work Reinvestment Act* (Rep. Lee, original sponsor), to establish a commission to make recommendations around workforce recruitment/retention, promoting research and other improvements to the profession.

For the People Act: Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA-12) introduced this bill which calls for reforms in the nation's election system and includes provisions to increase voter participation. The bill also includes provisions around campaign finance reform and integrity. NASW supports this legislation and is working in coalition to get it enacted.

Bipartisan Background Checks Act: NASW is partnering with the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence and many other national organizations to advocate for passage of this gun control legislation.

Alzheimer's Act: The NASW-supported [Building Our Largest Dementia \(BOLD\) Infrastructure for Alzheimer's Act](#) passed in the prior Congress and was signed into law (P.L. 115-406) at the end of December. The law establishes Alzheimer's centers of excellence to enhance practice, funds tribes and public health departments to promote cognitive health, address cognitive impairment, and support family caregivers, and increases collection, analysis, and timely reporting of data on cognitive decline, family caregiving, and health disparities.

Get Involved! We encourage you to join [NASW's Advocacy Listserv](#) to stay up-to-date on Congressional activity. We also have a variety of valuable [resources](#) on our web page to guide members in connecting with their lawmakers.

Regulatory

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): The partial shutdown of the federal government delayed publication of the proposed rule notice by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to make changes to SNAP. The [proposed rule](#) was released on February 1. Currently, states can request waivers from USDA time limits for certain adults who are unable

to document sufficient hours of work each month. These waivers are available in areas with 10 percent or higher unemployment and for areas with few jobs. The proposed rule would limit states' ability to have waivers granted to extend the time limit on SNAP for this population. NASW is working in coalition with organizations such as the Food Research and Action Center and Feeding America and will provide guidance soon to members in submitting comments on the proposed rule.

HIPAA Request for Information: The Office of Civil Rights has issued a [Request for Information](#) regarding changes to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). The RFI relates to major changes under consideration for the Health Privacy Act for purposes of enhancing coordination of care, promoting caretaker involvement in mental health and addiction services, and reducing of the regulatory burden on providers. Revisions include potential changes to patient access to information and easing requirements for accounting for disclosures, among others. The deadline for response is February 12. The RFI is an opportunity for stakeholders to weigh in on proposed revisions to the regulations before any changes are included in a proposed rule. NASW will be providing comments for the RFI and will also provide comments once there is a proposed rule.

Healthy People 2030: NASW is submitting comments to the Department of Health and Human Services on these proposed objectives. Comments will be posted on the NASW website. For more details, please click [here](#).

Loan Repayment: The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Program is a new opportunity and the first application cycle is open through February 21. For more information and upcoming virtual information sessions, see the [NHSC website](#).

Medicare Part B and D: [NASW has submitted comments urging the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to protect beneficiary access to drugs covered by Medicare Part B and Part D.](#)

Judicial

Affordable Care Act Challenge: In December 2018, a judgement was issued in the Northern District of Texas in the case of *Texas v. Azar* challenging the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and determined the ACA to be invalid. This ruling threatens health insurance access and consumer protections for millions of people. The decision is being challenged on appeal and the ACA remains in effect as the case moves through the courts. Social workers should encourage consumers to maintain health insurance coverage for 2019.

Other

US Attorney General Nomination: NASW joins the Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights (LCCR) in opposing the appointment of William Barr to become the next Attorney

General of the United States. NASW is concerned about the nominee's previous support for rollbacks on voter rights, lack of support for LGBTQ rights, weak positions on criminal justice reforms (especially his denial of racial disparities in sentencing and arrests), and anti-immigration rights positions.

Collaboration

Primary Care Organizations Consortium

NASW staff participated in a Primary Care Organizations Consortium meeting, held at the American Psychological Association. The meeting included representatives from the Society of General Internal Medicine, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians and other groups. The focus of the gathering was advancing interprofessional training for health professions and promotion of integrated care initiatives.

Families USA Protect Our Care Coalition

NASW participates in regular calls and meetings with the Protect Our Care Coalition. The coalition works to protect the Affordable Care Act, health care access and consumer protections.

Integrative Pain Care Policy Congress

NASW staff continue to participate in interdisciplinary workgroups with the Academy of Integrative Medicine to advance appropriate access to pain care and comprehensive treatment options.

National Navigation Roundtable- American Cancer Society

NASW staff continue to participate in workgroups to enhance the field of navigation in cancer care, which includes social work patient navigators.

Medical Society Consortium on Climate & Health

NASW has been an affiliate of The Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health since its launch in early 2017. Planning has started for the 2019 annual meeting, Education for Policy Change which will take place April 28-29, 2019 in Arlington, Virginia. Social workers are encouraged to attend and can follow updates on The Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health website at <https://medsocietiesforclimatehealth.org/>

NASW has been named a Steering Committee member for the **Opportunity Starts at Home campaign**. The campaign is a national initiative to bring awareness to the need to address the affordable housing crisis in the United States.