



## Putting an End to COVID-19: How Social Workers Can Empower People with Chronic Illnesses

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As COVID-19 continues to affect the global population, it remains especially critical for social workers to support individuals with chronic illnesses. These individuals are particularly vulnerable to severe outcomes from COVID-19 and need informed guidance to navigate the pandemic safely. By leveraging resources, addressing misinformation, and fostering vaccine confidence, social workers can play a pivotal role in protecting these at-risk populations.

### The Role of Social Workers in COVID-19 Awareness and Support

Social workers have always been at the forefront of advocating for marginalized and vulnerable communities. Amid the ongoing pandemic, their role has expanded to include combating vaccine hesitancy and misinformation, particularly among those with chronic illnesses. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the University of Texas/Austin School of Social Work's "Connect to End COVID-19" initiative exemplifies this effort, providing comprehensive resources to help social workers guide their clients toward informed vaccine decisions.

### Four Ways Social Workers Can Build COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence

1. **Become a Vaccine Champion:** Social workers who are already vaccinated can share their experiences and reasons for getting vaccinated. By becoming a vaccine champion, they can encourage their clients and peers to follow suit. Personal stories and testimonials can significantly influence others to consider vaccination.
2. **Engage in Empathetic Conversations:** Using resources from the CDC, social workers can engage in empathetic dialogues with their clients about COVID-19 vaccines. By listening to their concerns and providing accurate information, social workers can help alleviate fears and answer questions regarding vaccination.
3. **Address Misinformation:** Social workers can combat misinformation by cross-checking vaccine information with reliable sources like the CDC. Educating clients about how to identify credible information and debunking myths are critical steps in fostering a well-informed community.
4. **Share Your Story:** Social workers can use social media platforms to share their vaccination stories, employing COVID-19 vaccination stickers and frames available on CDC.gov. By publicly supporting vaccination, they can influence their networks and promote vaccine uptake.

## Current Vaccination Landscape and Ongoing Efforts

As of the latest data, only 17% of eligible people nationwide have received an updated booster dose, despite the overall downward trend in COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths according to the CDC. This statistic highlights the ongoing need for awareness and education about the benefits of booster shots, particularly among those with chronic illnesses who may have waning immunity.

The FDA's recent approval of new vaccines, including Novavax, and updated recommendations for additional doses for adults 65 and older, underscore the importance of staying informed about evolving COVID-19 treatments and vaccines. For immunocompromised individuals, new medications like Pempgarda offer additional layers of protection, showcasing advancements in pre-exposure prophylaxis.

## Continued Efforts to End the Pandemic

Social workers must remain vigilant in their efforts to educate and support their clients. Despite significant strides in vaccination and treatment, COVID-19 still poses a threat, particularly to those with chronic illnesses. The CDC's updated isolation guidelines and the availability of new vaccines tailored to current variants are essential updates that social workers should communicate to their clients.

The collaboration between NASW, the NASW Foundation, and the Health Behavior Research and Training Institute at The University of Texas at Austin, funded by a \$3.3 million CDC initiative, exemplifies the structured support available to social workers. This partnership aims to enhance informed vaccine decision-making and move individuals from vaccine hesitancy to vaccine confidence.

## Conclusion

The fight against COVID-19 is far from over, and social workers play a crucial role in this ongoing battle. By championing vaccination, addressing misinformation, engaging in empathetic conversations, and leveraging new resources and guidelines, social workers can empower those with chronic illnesses to make informed decisions. This work is vital in ensuring that the most vulnerable populations are protected and that the collective effort to end COVID-19 continues effectively.

For more information on how to Connect to End COVID-19, please visit [Connect to End COVID-19 Toolkits](#).

