Request for Information (RFI): NIMH Request for Brief Perspectives on the State of Mental Illness Research

Notice Number: NOT-MH-16-015

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) provides comments on the National Institute of Mental Health's Request for Information: NIMH Request for Brief Perspectives on the State of Mental Illness Research.

The NASW represents more than 130,000 social workers across the United States. Clinical social workers are one of the largest group of providers of mental health services and are licensed to diagnose and treat mental illness in all states.

NASW supports the strategic agenda of the NIMH to advance mental illness research and enhance evidence based interventions from a population health perspective. Though precision medicine is a future goal, today basic access to mental health and substance use disorder services for those who need them is essential. Clinical social workers often interact with communities that experience barriers to accessing appropriate mental health care services. Barriers include geographic inaccessibility to health care, shortage of mental health providers, lack of health insurance coverage, affordability of services, and knowledge of appropriate resources.

Research clarifying the relationship between the social determinants of health and disease progression is an area that the NASW encourages the NIMH to prioritize. To engage in prevention efforts, best practices to mitigate risk factors associated with mental illness need to be identified so that parents, communities and services providers can be proactive in supporting youth and other populations who may be at risk of developing mental health conditions.

The current health care environment necessitates additional models of integrative health care and new means of accessing health services. NASW anticipates that NIMH will provide guidance on effective integrative models of care, leveraging coordination of care between the behavioral health and medical providers. NIMH should also consider recommendations around appropriate and effective use of telehealth and technological resources to prevent, diagnose, monitor, and treat mental illnesses.