



Comparative Effectiveness Research (CER) and Social Work: Strengthening the Connection

The Social Work Policy Institute (SWPI) is pleased to release the report, *Comparative Effectiveness Research (CER) and Social Work: Strengthening the Connection*, which is the result of SWPI's inaugural symposium. Bringing together federal research and service agencies, national organizations, health care delivery organizations, foundations, and academic institutions, the symposium, focused on:

- Implications for social work based on federal definitions, agenda, and priorities for CER
- Outcomes of social work effectiveness research and identification of gaps and challenges in strengthening practice relevant research
- Methods for conducting effectiveness research in complex systems with special populations and people with multiple needs including undertaking economic evaluation of psychosocial interventions
- Social work researcher training and capacity building for CER
- Generating recommendations for an action plan to increase social work's capacity to engage in CER.

What is Comparative Effectiveness Research?

The intent of CER is to determine which health and health care delivery interventions work best for whom and under what conditions. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 provided \$1.1 billion for CER to be divided among the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Office of the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). These funds will be used to conduct and synthesize research that assesses the comparative effectiveness of health care treatments and strategies of health care delivery, and to stimulate the development and use of clinical registries, data networks, and other forms of electronic health data that can be used for research on intervention outcomes (ARRA, 2009).

Key priorities center on identifying and addressing health disparities for diverse populations and persons with

complex conditions, identifying gaps in the existing knowledge of healthcare, and expanding dissemination of CER outcomes. The federal agenda lays out several strategies to support CER through developing information infrastructure; conducting more robust CER; promoting CER training and collaboration; ensuring research and findings are relevant to consumers and practitioners; and enhancing dissemination and translation of CER findings (DHHS, 2009; IOM, 2009).

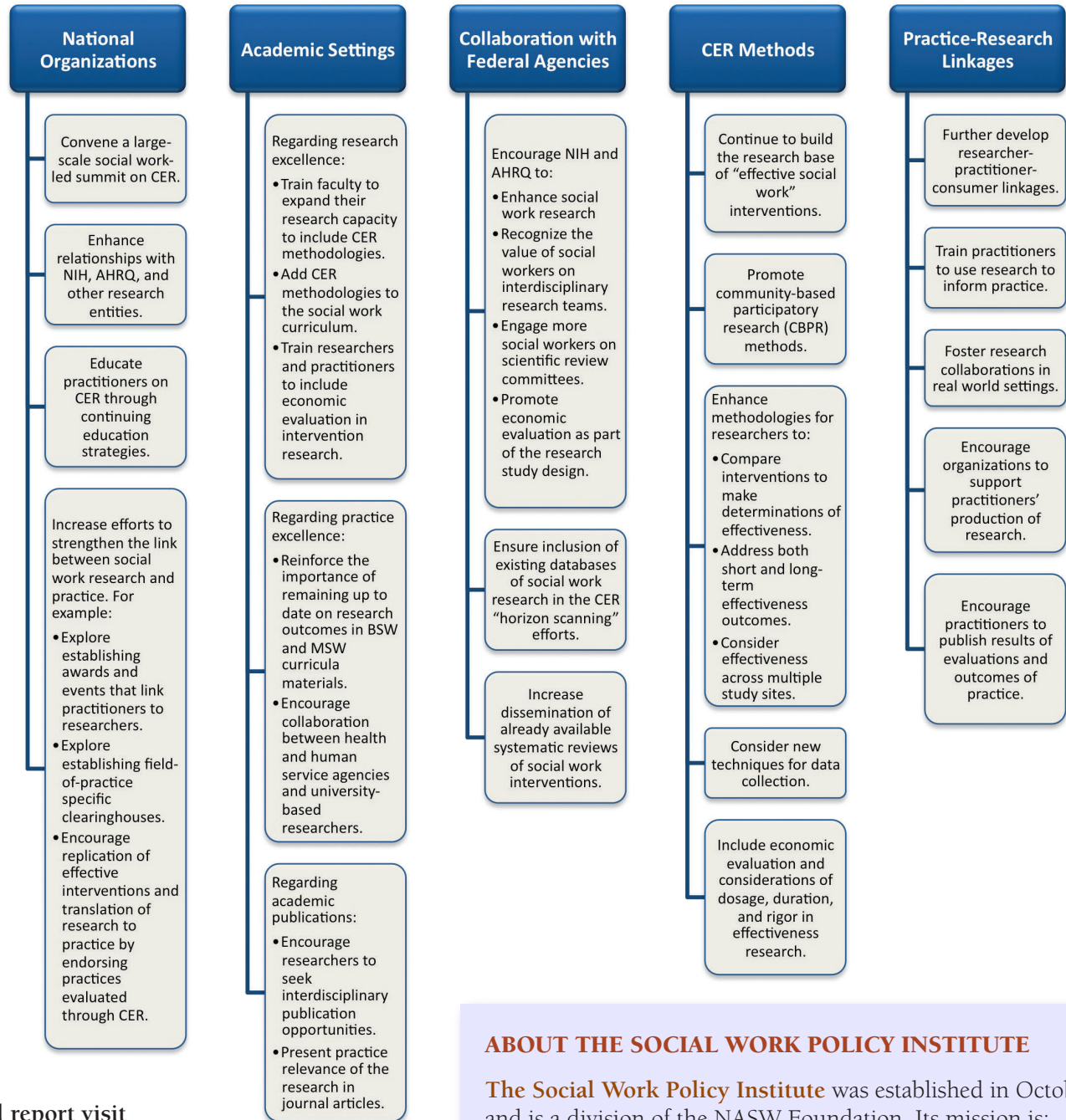
Social Work's Role in CER

Leadership by the social work profession is critical to ensure that social workers are stakeholders in CER efforts. The usefulness and relevance of CER will depend upon researchers, practitioners, policy makers, academics and consumers working together. The federal CER priorities call for increased efforts to develop and understand intervention outcomes specifically for diverse populations, for individuals with co-occurring diagnoses, and for those with an array of psychosocial needs. This has great relevance for social work research, since it deals with complex person-in-environment contexts, and studies how to address psychosocial needs from an individual, family, community, organization, and systems perspective. Furthermore, social workers' ethical commitment to social justice can be translated into addressing issues of diversity and cultural competence in designing and implementing research.

Social work research engagement in CER may have two distinct or potentially overlapping pathways:

- PATHWAY ONE relates to the expertise and perspective on clients, systems, ethics, cultural competence, and communities that a social work researcher brings to the inter-disciplinary research team.
- PATHWAY TWO relates more specifically to research on the development and implementation and comparative effectiveness of specific interventions used by social workers.

Recommended Social Work Actions to Enhance CER



For the full report visit www.SocialWorkPolicy.org.

References:

- American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Pub. L. No. 111-5 § 804, 123 Stat. 188 (2009).
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ABOUT THE SOCIAL WORK POLICY INSTITUTE

The Social Work Policy Institute was established in October 2009 and is a division of the NASW Foundation. Its mission is:

- To strengthen social work's voice in public policy deliberations.
- To inform policy-makers through the collection and dissemination of information on social work effectiveness.
- To create a forum to examine current and future issues in health care and social service delivery.

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