OVERVIEW

In April 2017 the NASW Social Work Policy Institute hosted a policy practice summit, sponsored by the Coalition for Policy Education and Practice in Social Work (CPEP). The goals were to strengthen attention to the role of social workers as policy practitioners, to highlight opportunities for partnerships between advocacy organizations and social work education programs, and to identify action steps for sustaining greater attention to policy and policy practice into the future. The summit highlighted initiatives implemented by CPEP and supported by the Fund for Social Policy Education and Practice. It also explored resources and strategies for advocacy in the wake of the results of the 2016 national election, recognizing that there are growing concerns for populations served by social workers including immigrants, persons needing access to high quality health and behavioral health care, and persons experiencing economic insecurity.

Representatives from local, state and national advocacy organizations and think tanks, social work education programs and NASW chapters joined with leaders of social work organizations to pursue the summit goals through presentations and small group discussions. Ellen Buchman of the Leadership Council for Civil and Human Rights (LCCHR) kicked off the summit with a call to action. She was followed by staff from Families USA, the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and the Economic Policy...
Institute (EPI) who highlighted initiatives put in place since the 2016 elections as well as resources that could be useful to social work educators. A second panel focused on field education, preparation for policy practice and macro careers, included field directors, an NASW chapter executive director and an MSW student. The panel highlighted explicit and implicit ways that macro practice careers, including policy practice, are perceived to be undervalued by the profession, and provided strategies for strengthening policy practice expertise and expanded university/community partnerships. A third panel focused on how the NASW Code of Ethics can be applied to current dilemmas facing the profession and how the resources of Bolder Advocacy can be used to help non-profit entities assess and strengthen their advocacy and community organizing efforts.

**FINDINGS**

Although the social work profession is more than 100 years old, there continues to be bifurcation between micro and macro practice.

**Common concerns articulated include:**

> Students are discouraged from policy placements because they are not perceived to fit with the generalist curriculum, or because a clinical license is promoted as the “golden ticket” to a successful social work career.

> Students are told that they will have difficulty getting policy jobs and will be paid less in such jobs, even though these might be more myth than reality.

> Schools may not offer policy placements, nor do they actively do outreach to identify them.

However, **social workers are well-positioned to impact policy** and many social workers pursue policy careers. The need for social workers to impact policy was reinforced by response to the 2016 election results. While the immediate reaction for many was to feel despondent, in fact, it has provided an opportunity for social workers to refocus on impacting policy.

The values and ethics and systems perspectives of social workers can make them well-positioned to connect real world stories with data and advocacy. Social workers also understand that racism and inequities are systemic and that only systemic approaches will address these issues. While people with public policy degrees are often hired in advocacy organizations and think tanks, the value base that a social worker brings, their understanding of systems and their person-in-environment perspective can be extremely beneficial to policy work.

**ACTION AGENDA**

The participants worked together to develop an action agenda targeting social work organizations, social work education, and advocacy organizations and think tanks.

**NASW, CSWE and other social work organizations can:**

> Make the connections to policy explicit in all of their communications and promote the prominence of policy practice as an important element of social work practice.

> Offer policy-related CEUs and include policy content in professional development offerings.

> Offer awards for social work policy practitioners and policy organization exemplars.
Highlight social workers efforts as “policy change agents.”

Encourage connections between social work education programs and policy entities and government agencies.

Expand methods by which social work research reaches policy makers.

Identify and disseminate the policy-related efforts of practitioners, educators and students.

 Advocate for strengthened attention to policy in social work doctoral education programs.

Continue to address the pros and cons of social work licensing for macro practitioners.

Continue to educate practitioners about the differences between lobbying and advocacy.

Advocacy organizations and think tanks can:

Work with social work organizations as intermediaries to disseminate information and resources to social work education programs.

Encourage social work academics and researchers to engage with other disciplines to address pressing social issues and disseminate findings to advocacy organizations and policy-makers.

Promote the value of hiring social workers.

Encourage social workers employed in them to stay engaged with social work education programs as advisors and field instructors.

Social work education leaders can:

Connect and engage with alumni who are policy practitioners.

Reach out to policy organizations and identify ways to partner.

Help faculty and students implement ethical imperatives for effective advocacy.

Increase expectations that policy activity be part of all field placements.

Leverage resources to strengthen policy/practice and advocacy connections.

Support engagement of faculty with community-based organizations.

Communicate to students that all social workers have the obligation to advance justice through policy practice.

Develop assignments to have students follow legislation, reach out to advocacy organizations and learn about the multiple roles in shaping policy.

Social work students can:

Effectively advocate for the importance of macro practice and policy practice content as part of the curricula.

Understand the complementary use of micro, mezzo and macro strategies in becoming an effective change agent.

Pursue mentorship opportunities with macro practitioners and encourage networking with alumni with policy practice interests.

Promote the value of understanding the policies that impact field practica.

Participate in Get Out the Vote (GOTV) efforts and other civic engagement activities.

Find out how their field agencies engage in policy advocacy and policy change efforts.

The outcomes of these actions will result in more strategic involvement of social workers in policy advocacy; increased understanding that policy and practice are intertwined and both clinical practice and policy practice are essential and important social work roles; increased field placement opportunities and activities related to policy and policy advocacy; new and expanded partnerships and collaborations between non-profits and social work education programs and between social work organizations and think tanks and advocacy organizations; and expanded social work engagement in promoting policies that address social justice including poverty and inequality.
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To access the full summit report and a copy of the graphic recording and video recording, visit www.socialworkpolicy.org. For more information about CPEP, visit www.cswe.org/Centers-Initiatives/Initiatives/The-Coalition-for-Policy-Education-and-Practice-in.

ABOUT THE SOCIAL WORK POLICY INSTITUTE

The Social Work Policy Institute was established in 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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