

**LICENSED SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE  
UNITED STATES, 2004**

***SUPPLEMENT***

**Chapter 1 of 5**

**Overview**

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## PREFACE

This report is one of several prepared as part of a national study of licensed social workers conducted by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in partnership with the Center for Health Workforce Studies (CHWS) of the School of Public Health at the University at Albany. It summarizes and interprets the responses of licensed social workers obtained to a national sample survey of licensed social workers in the U.S. conducted in 2004.

Existing sources of data on social workers provide important but fragmented information on the profession, preventing the development of an accurate comprehensive picture of the social work workforce. The NASW/CHWS study provides comprehensive, up-to-date information on active licensed social workers. This information includes: demographic characteristics, education and training, employment roles and tasks, work environment, client characteristics, and workplace issues.

This statistical profile of the licensed social work workforce will be a valuable resource for educators, planners, and policy makers making decisions about the future of the social work profession and its related education programs. The information will support the development of effective workforce policies and strategies to assure the availability of adequate numbers of social work professionals prepared to respond to the social work needs of the population in the U.S.

This report was prepared by the Center for Health Workforce Studies at the School of Public Health at the University at Albany and the NASW Center for Workforce Studies. Staff responsible for this report include Paul Wing, Sandra McGinnis, Bonnie Primus Cohen, Tracy Whitaker and Toby Weismiller. The study has also benefited from the insights of a number of other researchers and stakeholders, who helped design the survey instrument, reviewed drafts of this and other reports, and provided valuable insights and context for the analyses. The financial support of the John A. Hartford Foundation, The Atlantic Philanthropies, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is gratefully acknowledged.

The findings and conclusion presented in this report are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the foundations.

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## Chapter 1. Overview

In 2004 the National Association of Social Workers, in collaboration with the Center for Health Workforce Studies at the University at Albany, began a major study of licensed social workers in the U.S. At the heart of the study was a survey of a random sample of 10,000 licensed social workers designed to gather information and insights about several aspects of these professionals, including personal demographics, educational background, employment sectors and settings, roles and tasks performed, career plans, and attitudes about employment.

Several reports were prepared based on the responses to this survey, including a summary report that synthesized the major findings revealed by the survey responses. This report is a supplement to the primary synthesis report. It provides a variety of additional charts, tables, and interpretive notes based on the survey responses, many of which are not included in any of the other study reports.

### **The 2004 Survey of Licensed Social Workers in the U.S.**

The 2004 survey instrument included 75 questions organized into six sections, including Background, Social Work Practice, Services to Clients, and Workplace Issues, plus supplements on Services for Older Adults and Services for Children and Families. The first four sections of the questionnaire, which included 48 questions, were to be completed by all respondents, and the two supplements were to be completed by respondents who served *any* older adults or *any* children and families, respectively.

Responses to the survey were received from more than 4,500 social workers, which after adjusting for bad addresses and other problems with the original mailing lists resulted in a response rate of 49.4%. Additional details about the survey process and response patterns can be found in the report on the 2004 survey process.

### **Remainder of this Report**

The remainder of the report is presented in chapters addressing several themes important for a thorough understanding licensed social workers. The chapters include:

**Who Are Licensed Social Workers?** This chapter presents basic information on licensed social workers in the U.S. with special attention to their demographic characteristics, education, licenses and certifications, age at entry into the profession, and continuing education. This provides a general context for the tabulations that follow.

**Licensed Social Work Practice.** This chapter presents basic information about employment patterns of licensed social workers. It covers such topics as hours worked, numbers of employers, roles, employment sectors and settings, practice areas, wages and benefits, and tasks performed.

**Clients of Licensed Social Workers.** This chapter describes the clients served by licensed social workers. It covers such topics as caseload size, client demographics, and client presenting problems.

**Perspectives on Licensed Social Work Practice.** This chapter covers such topics as changes in social work practice in recent years, changes in the delivery of social work

services, thoughts about skills and efficacy, satisfaction with access to resources and time available to serve clients, agency environment, career plans, changing jobs within social work, and who has left social work.

This report does not have a formal summary. It is meant to serve primarily as a supplement to the other reports, providing additional detail about selected topics for interested readers. An overall summary of the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the entire study can be found in the synthesis report that covers many of the same topics as presented in this report, but with less detailed tabulations and more attention to policy implications.