

NOTES *from the* FIELD ...

Women's Issues

PROGRAM, POLICY & PRACTICE

OVERVIEW

The social work profession has often taken a leadership role in addressing women's and girls' health and mental health needs and strengths. Central to these successful efforts is the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) commitment to gender equity. For example, the Association has been, and continues to be, involved in work to address violence against women and girls, promote access to reproductive health services, and resolve health and mental health disparities through policy and legislative action.

Social workers are in a unique position to work on these many issues, because of the diversity of their practice settings and expertise in clinical practice, group work, policy development and analysis, and community organizing. Additionally, NASW provides the opportunity for capacity building within the profession and through collaborations with other professional organizations.

The following is a brief overview of how social work and NASW are working to promote gender equity for women across the United States and globally.

ADDRESSING DISCRIMINATION

NASW participates in advocacy efforts to ratify the United National Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Most recently, the Association participated in a letter-writing campaign to the Bush Administration (www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/grassroots/letter/052103.asp).

Comprehensive health services for women and girls include accessible and affordable HIV/AIDS and other STI-related testing and services. Working with

the International Issues Working Group of the National Organizations Responding to AIDS (NORA), NASW joined other providers concerned about women's health, to successfully remove the "Mexico City policy," or the so-called "gag rule," from recently allocated funds for International AIDS work.

Ensuring inclusion of lesbian health in the full range of health and mental health services available to women continues to present a challenge to practitioners across disciplines. At a recent meeting of the National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health Coalition, NASW participated in a plenary session entitled: "How LGBT Health Is Being Addressed By Mainstream Organizations." In addition to outlining the Association's standard for culturally competent practice, NASW was also recognized as the first and only professional association to create policy addressing transgender and gender identity issues, as well as promoting affirmative action in leadership development for lesbian, gay, and bisexual members.

SPEAKING OUT AGAINST VIOLENCE

NASW has been an active supporter of the Family Violence Prevention Act, which would work to centralize the United States Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) response to family violence through facilitating coordination between all programs within HHS relating to the prevention of family violence. It also calls for creating a federal family violence prevention Web site, five new family violence research and education centers, and an advisory board to make recommendations to the Secretary of HHS regarding a research agenda. Partnering with the National Health Initiative on Domestic Violence, NASW has worked to promote

the National Health Care Standards Campaign of the Family Violence Prevention Fund, which involves 14 states nationwide. A number of sites have worked collaboratively with NASW Chapter staff and leadership to promote the Campaign. In 2002, NASW was invited to present on a panel, to address: “Strengthening Professional Health Education on Domestic Violence: Strategies and Opportunities For Collaboration.”

Also in 2002, NASW co-convened the Social Work and Nursing Task Force Meeting, with the HHS Office on Women’s Health. The meeting, addressing “Women on the Fringes,” was convened to specifically identify policy issues focusing on the needs and strengths of women and girls often left out of dialogue: older women, women with disabilities, lesbian and bisexual women, and immigrant women. This meeting was preceded by the Social Work Summit on Violence Against Women, held in 2000.

NASW continues as a member of the Steering Committee for the National Conference on Health Care and Domestic Violence. This program brings together physicians, social workers and other allied mental health care providers, dentists, nurses, nurse practitioners, and advocates who are interested in discussing ways to prevent and respond to domestic violence in health care settings. NASW staff moderated content ranging from barriers to service to expanding the paradigm to include services for lesbians, gay men, bisexual, and transgender persons.

PROVIDER RESOURCES:

The National Centers of Excellence (CoE) in Women’s Health were established in 1996 to unite women’s health research, medical training, clinical care, public health education, community outreach, and the promotion of women in academic medicine. Funded by the Office on Women’s Health in 1996, the goal of CoE is to improve the mental and physical health status of diverse women across the life span. Networking, referrals, and collaborative efforts with National CoE’s will help to meet the goal of creating comprehensive and integrated model healthcare systems across the country.
www.4women.gov/coe/

NASW is a Planning Committee member and co-sponsor for the upcoming Second World Congress on Women’s Mental Health. Planned for March 17 through 20, 2004, in Washington, D.C., this scientific program will bring together health and mental health practitioners, researchers, and administrators from around the globe.
www.womenmentalhealth.com

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