Summary

Social workers help people in every stage of life cope with challenges, such as being diagnosed with depression.

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<th>Quick Facts: Social Workers</th>
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<td><strong>2012 Median Pay</strong></td>
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</table>

**What Social Workers Do**

Social workers help people solve and cope with problems in their everyday lives. One group of social workers, clinical social workers, also diagnose and treat mental, behavioral, and emotional issues.

**Work Environment**

Social workers are employed in a variety of settings, including mental health clinics, schools, child welfare and human service agencies, hospitals, and private practices. They generally work full time and may need to work evenings, weekends, and holidays.

**How to Become a Social Worker**

Although most social workers need a bachelor’s degree in social work, clinical social workers must have a master’s degree and two years of post-master experience in a supervised clinical setting. Clinical social workers must also be licensed in the state in which they practice.

**Pay**

The median annual wage for social workers was $44,200 in May 2012.

**Job Outlook**

Employment of social workers is projected to grow 19 percent from 2012 to 2022, faster than the average for all occupations. Employment growth will be driven by increased demand for health care and social services, but will vary by specialty.

**Similar Occupations**
Compare the job duties, education, job growth, and pay of social workers with similar occupations.

More Information, Including Links to O*NET

Learn more about social workers by visiting additional resources, including O*NET, a source on key characteristics of workers and occupations.

What Social Workers Do

Social workers help people solve and cope with problems in their everyday lives. One group of social workers, clinical social workers, also diagnose and treat mental, behavioral, and emotional issues.

Duties

Social workers typically do the following:

- Identify people who need help
- Assess clients’ needs, situations, strengths, and support networks to determine their goals
- Develop plans to improve their clients’ well-being
- Help clients adjust to changes and challenges in their lives, such as illness, divorce, or unemployment
- Research and refer clients to community resources, such as food stamps, child care, and health care
- Help clients work with government agencies to apply for and receive benefits such as Medicare
- Respond to crisis situations such as child abuse
- Advocate for and help clients get resources that would improve their well-being
- Follow up with clients to ensure that their situations have improved
- Evaluate services provided to ensure that they are effective

Social workers help people cope with challenges in their lives. They help with a wide range of situations, such as adopting a child or being diagnosed with a terminal illness.

Social workers may work with children, people with disabilities, and people with serious illnesses and addictions. Their work varies based on the type of client they are working with.

The following are examples of types of social workers:

![Child and family social workers protect vulnerable children and support families in need of assistance.](image-url)
Child and family social workers  protect vulnerable children and help families in need of assistance. They help parents find services, such as child care, or apply for benefits, such as food stamps. They intervene when children are in danger of neglect or abuse. Some help arrange adoptions, locate foster families, or work to get families back together. Clinical social workers provide mental health care to help children and families cope with changes in their lives, such as divorce or other family problems.

Clinical social workers  also called licensed clinical social workers  diagnose and treat mental, behavioral, and emotional disorders, including anxiety and depression. They provide individual, group, family, and couples therapy; they work with clients to develop strategies to change behavior or cope with difficult situations; and they refer clients to other resources or services, such as support groups or other mental health professionals. Clinical social workers can develop treatment plans with the client, doctors, and other healthcare professionals and may adjust the treatment plan if necessary based on the client's progress.

Many clinical social workers work in private practice. In these settings, clinical social workers have administrative and recordkeeping tasks such as working with insurance companies to receive payment for their services. Some work in a group practice with other social workers or mental health professionals.

School social workers  work with teachers, parents, and school administrators to develop plans and strategies to improve students’ academic performance and social development. Students and their families are often referred to social workers to deal with problems such as aggressive behavior, bullying, or frequent absences from school.

Healthcare social workers  help patients understand their diagnosis and make the necessary adjustments to their lifestyle, housing, or health care. For example, they may help people make the transition from the hospital back to their homes and communities. In addition, they may provide information on services, such as home healthcare or support groups, to help patients manage their illness or disease. Social workers help doctors and other healthcare professionals understand the effects that diseases and illnesses have on patients’ mental and emotional health.

Some healthcare social workers specialize in geriatric social work, hospice and palliative care, or medical social work:

- Geriatric social workers  help senior citizens and their families. They help clients find services, such as programs that provide older adults with meals or with home health care. In some cases, they provide information about assisted living facilities or nursing homes or work with older adults in those settings. They help clients and their families make plans for possible health complications or where clients will live if they can no longer care for themselves.

- Hospice and palliative care social workers  help patients adjust to serious, chronic, or terminal illnesses. Palliative care focuses on relieving or preventing pain and other symptoms associated with serious illness. Hospice is a type of palliative care for people who are dying. Social workers in this setting provide and find services such as support groups or grief counselors to help patients and their families cope with the illness or disease.

- Medical social workers  in hospitals help patients and their families by linking patients with resources in the hospital and in their own community. They may work with medical staff to create discharge plans, make referrals to community agencies, facilitate support groups, or conduct followup visits with patients once they have been discharged.

Mental health and substance abuse social workers  help clients with mental illnesses or addictions. They provide information on services, such as support groups or 12-step programs, to help clients cope with their illness. Many clinical social workers function in these roles as well.

Work Environment

Although most social workers work in an office, they may spend a lot of time away from the office visiting clients.
Social workers held about 607,300 jobs in 2012. They work in the following settings:

- Hospitals, primary care settings, and clinics, including veterans clinics
- Nursing homes
- Community mental health clinics
- Private practices
- State and local governments
- Schools
- Colleges and universities
- Substance abuse clinics
- Military bases and hospitals
- Correctional facilities
- Child welfare agencies

Although most social workers work in an office, they may spend time visiting clients. School social workers may be assigned to multiple schools and travel around the school district to see students. Understaffing and large caseloads may cause the work to be stressful.

The industries that employed the most child, family, and school social workers in 2012 were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State and local government, excluding education and hospitals</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care and social assistance</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational services; state, local, and private</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious, grantmaking, civic, professional, and similar organizations</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The industries that employed the most healthcare social workers in 2012 were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospitals; state, local, and private</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambulatory health care services</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing and residential care facilities</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social assistance</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The industries that employed the most mental health substance abuse social workers in 2012 were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambulatory health care services</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social assistance</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing and residential care facilities</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitals; state, local, and private</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Work Schedules**

Social workers generally work full time. They sometimes work evenings, weekends, and holidays to see clients or attend meetings.

**How to Become a Social Worker**
Social Workers help people to cope with challenges in their lives, by listening to and understanding their clients' needs.

Although most social workers need a bachelor's degree in social work, clinical social workers must have a master's degree and two years of post-master experience in a supervised clinical setting. Clinical social workers must also be licensed in the state in which they practice.

Education

A bachelor's degree in social work (BSW) is the most common requirement for entry-level positions. However, some employers may hire workers who have a bachelor's degree in a related field, such as psychology or sociology.

A bachelor's degree in social work programs prepare students for direct-service positions such as caseworker or mental health assistant. These programs teach students about diverse populations, human behavior, and social welfare policy. All programs require students to complete supervised fieldwork or an internship.

Some positions, including those in schools and in health care, frequently require a master's degree in social work (MSW). For example, clinical social workers must have a master's degree in social work and two years of post-master experience in a supervised clinical setting.

A master's degree in social work generally takes 2 years to complete. However, some programs allow those with a bachelor's degree in social work to earn their master's degree in 1 year. Master's degree programs in social work prepare students for work in their chosen specialty by developing the skills to do clinical assessments, and take on supervisory duties. All programs require students to complete supervised practicum or an internship.

A bachelor's degree in social work is not required to enter a master's degree program in social work. A degree in almost any major is acceptable. However, courses in psychology, sociology, economics, and political science are recommended.

The Council on Social Work Education offers a Directory of Accredited Programs that lists all accredited bachelor's and master's degree programs.

Licenses, Certifications, and Registrations

All states have some type of licensure or certification requirement, which varies by state. All states require clinical social workers to be licensed. However, some states provide exemptions for clinical social workers who work in government agencies.

Becoming a licensed clinical social worker usually requires a master's degree in social work and a minimum of 2 years or 3,000 hours of supervised clinical experience after graduation. After completing their supervised experience, clinical social workers must pass a clinical exam to be licensed.

Because licensing requirements vary by state, those interested should contact their state board. Most states also have licenses for nonclinical social workers. For more information about regulatory licensure board by state, contact the Association of Social Work Boards.

Important Qualities

Compassion. Social workers often work with people who are in stressful and difficult situations. To develop strong relationships, they must have compassion and empathy for their clients.

Interpersonal skills. Being able to work with different groups of people is essential for social workers. They need strong people
skills to foster healthy and productive relationships with their clients and colleagues.

**Listening skills.** Clients talk to social workers about challenges in their lives. To effectively help, social workers must be able to listen to and understand their clients’ needs.

**Organizational skills.** Helping and managing multiple clients, often assisting with their paperwork or documenting their treatment, requires good organizational skills.

**Problem-solving skills.** Social workers need to develop practical and innovative solutions to their clients’ problems.

**Time-management skills.** Social workers often have many clients. They must effectively manage their time to provide adequate service to all of their clients.

**Pay**

The median annual wage for social workers was $44,200 in May 2012. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $27,450, and the top 10 percent earned more than $72,980.

The median annual wages for social workers in May 2012 were as follows:

- $54,560 for all other social workers
- $49,830 for healthcare social workers
- $41,530 for child, family, and school social workers
- $39,980 for mental health and substance abuse social workers

In May 2012, the median annual wages for child, family, and school social workers in the top four industries in which these professionals worked were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry and Subindustry</th>
<th>Median annual wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational services; state, local, and private</td>
<td>$54,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State and local government, excluding education and hospitals</td>
<td>$44,370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care and social assistance</td>
<td>$36,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious, grantmaking, civic, professional, and similar organizations</td>
<td>$35,910</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In May 2012, the median annual wages for healthcare social workers in the top four industries in which these professionals worked were as follows:

- Educational services; state, local, and private: $54,590
- State and local government, excluding education and hospitals: $44,370
- Health care and social assistance: $36,130
- Religious, grantmaking, civic, professional, and similar organizations: $35,910

In May 2012, the median annual wages for mental health and substance abuse social workers in the top four industries in which these professionals worked were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Median Annual Wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospitals; state, local, and private</td>
<td>$56,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambulatory health care services</td>
<td>51,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing and residential care facilities</td>
<td>43,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social assistance</td>
<td>38,920</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social workers generally work full time. They sometimes work evenings, weekends, and holidays to see clients or attend meetings.

**Job Outlook**

Overall employment of social workers is projected to grow 19 percent from 2012 to 2022, faster than the average for all occupations. Employment growth will be driven by increased demand for health care and social services, but will vary by specialty.

Employment of child, family, and school social workers is projected to grow 15 percent from 2012 to 2022, faster than the average for all occupations. Child and family social workers will be needed to work with families to strengthen parenting skills, prevent child abuse, and identify alternative homes for children who are unable to live with their biological families. In schools, more social workers will be needed due to rising student enrollments.

However, growth of this specialty may be limited by budget constraints at all levels of government. Specifically, the availability of federal, state, and local funding will be a major factor in determining the employment growth in schools.

Employment of healthcare social workers is projected to grow 27 percent from 2012 to 2022, much faster than the average for all occupations. As baby boomers age, they and their families will require help from social workers to find care, increasing the need for healthcare social workers.

Employment of mental health and substance abuse social workers is projected to grow 23 percent from 2012 to 2022, much faster than the average for all occupations. Employment will grow as more people seek treatment for mental illness and substance use disorders. In addition, drug offenders are increasingly being sent to treatment programs rather than to jail. As a result, use of substance abuse...
treatment programs is expected to grow, increasing demand for these specialists.

**Employment projections data for Social Workers, 2012-22**

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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social workers</td>
<td>21-1020</td>
<td>607,300</td>
<td>721,500</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>114,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child, family, and school social workers</td>
<td>21-1021</td>
<td>285,700</td>
<td>328,800</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>43,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare social workers</td>
<td>21-1022</td>
<td>146,200</td>
<td>185,500</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>39,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health and substance abuse social workers</td>
<td>21-1023</td>
<td>114,200</td>
<td>140,200</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social workers, all other</td>
<td>21-1029</td>
<td>61,200</td>
<td>67,000</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Similar Occupations**

This table shows a list of occupations with job duties that are similar to those of social workers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>JOB DUTIES</th>
<th>ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATION</th>
<th>2012 MEDIAN PAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Educators and Community Health Workers</td>
<td>Health educators teach people about behaviors that promote wellness. They develop and implement strategies to improve the health of individuals and communities. Community health workers collect data and discuss health concerns with members of specific populations or communities.</td>
<td>See How to Become One</td>
<td>$41,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Counselors and Marriage and Family Therapists</td>
<td>Mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists help people manage and overcome mental and emotional disorders and problems with their family and relationships. They listen to clients and ask questions, to help the clients understand their problems and develop strategies to improve their lives.</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>$41,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists</td>
<td>Probation officers and correctional treatment specialists work with and monitor offenders to prevent them from committing new crimes.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$48,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychologists</td>
<td>Psychologists study cognitive, emotional, and social processes and human behavior by observing, interpreting, and recording how people relate to one another and their environments.</td>
<td>See How to Become One</td>
<td>$69,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation Counselors</td>
<td>Rehabilitation counselors help people with emotional and physical disabilities live independently. They work with clients to overcome or manage the personal, social,</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>$33,880</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and professional effects of disabilities on employment or independent living.

School counselors help students develop social skills and succeed in school. Career counselors assist people with the process of making career decisions, by helping them choose a career or educational program.

Master’s degree $53,610

Social and community service managers coordinate and supervise social service programs and community organizations. They direct and lead staff who provide social services to the public.

Bachelor’s degree $59,970

Social and human service assistants help people get through difficult times or get additional support. They assist other workers, such as social workers, and they help clients find benefits or community services.

High school diploma or equivalent $28,850

Substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors advise people who suffer from alcoholism, drug addiction, eating disorders, or other behavioral problems. They provide treatment and support to help the client recover from addiction or modify problem behaviors.

High school diploma or equivalent $38,520

Contacts for More Information

For more information about social workers and clinical social workers, visit
American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work
National Association of Social Workers

For more information about accredited baccalaureate and master’s levels social work degree programs, visit
Council on Social Work Education

For more information about licensure requirements, visit
Association of Social Work Boards

O*NET

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers
Healthcare Social Workers
Social Workers, All Other
Child, Family, and School Social Workers

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