



WHAT TYPE OF

**SOCIAL
WORKER**

SHOULD YOU BE?

OUR LADY^{OF THE} LAKE
UNIVERSITY



SOCIAL WORKERS ARE IN HIGH DEMAND AND WORK WITH A VARIETY OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN A WIDE ARRAY OF SETTINGS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

For people who have a passion for helping others, social work can be one of the most exciting and rewarding careers today. As a social worker, you contribute to the greater good, transform communities, and have the opportunity to make a positive impact in the lives of individuals and groups.

Social work is a smart career choice for those interested in a profession with a strong career outlook. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) states the job outlook for social workers is expected to increase 12 percent through 2024, with **more than 74,800 new jobs added in the social work field.**¹

Wherever people are in need, social workers are there to help. Social workers care for those who are vulnerable no matter their stage in life, such as helping children in the foster care or educational system, working with those in hospitals and hospice care, and supporting veterans and their loved ones. Social workers have endless possibilities regarding the populations they work with throughout their careers, and with more experience and education come more opportunities to serve in various capacities. Pursuing a master's degree in social work sets professionals up for higher pay, greater career-growth potential, and more career-path possibilities.



There are many gratifying social work careers to choose from. This guide will explore some of the most prominent social work career paths as you plan for your future in social service.

Child, Family, and School Social Workers



Child, family, and school social workers play an essential role in ensuring children grow up in a stable environment and are given the tools and resources necessary for success in life.

Social workers in this field assist children:

- › Who have a history of mental or physical abuse or illness.
- › Who have been placed in the foster care system or are up for adoption.
- › Who live below the poverty line and may not have access to adequate nutrition, hygiene, and other daily care.

These social workers work in public or private schools to counsel children in need and conduct training for both faculty and students on healthy lifestyles. They may work at one school or multiple schools, or they may be employed by the government to assist larger school systems. They also work in healthcare settings such as hospitals.

While those with a bachelor's degree in social work may begin work as a caseworker or mental health assistant,

working in a healthcare or school setting generally requires a master's degree in social work and may require supervised hours.

Is the Child, Family, and School Social Work Path Right for You?

If you love working with children and want to help families, working in this field may be ideal.

Questions to ask yourself include:

- › How comfortable am I dealing with situations such as abuse and poverty?
- › Can I handle working with children who may have behavioural problems or who exhibit signs of neglect?
- › Will I be able to keep calm and maintain my composure when dealing with parents who are suspected of child abuse?

Being a school, child, and family social worker means you are able to make a substantial impact in children's lives that will affect their developmental path. However, it can also be emotionally challenging to see children in adverse environments and to be constantly exposed to negative events affecting young people.

For those who are interested in impacting family units but want to do so on a larger scale, the community social work path may be of interest.

THE MEAN ANNUAL WAGE FOR THESE TYPES OF SOCIAL WORKERS IS \$46,610.² SOCIAL WORKERS IN THIS FIELD, LIKE OTHERS, TYPICALLY EARN MORE THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE WITH MORE EXPERIENCE AND ADVANCED DEGREES.

Community Social Workers



Communities are made up of many parts: individuals, couples, families, children, elderly, workers, those with special needs, schools, hospitals, etc. In order for a community to thrive, all these pieces must work well together. A community social worker is tasked with identifying areas of improvement for communities, creating and implementing plans to remedy problems, and measuring effectiveness to foster new growth. The ultimate goal is to positively boost the entire community, but sometimes that means working with individuals. Impacting the lives of individuals who make up the larger community can lead to a greater impact on the community itself.

Community social workers work with non-profit organizations or government agencies to design, coordinate, implement, and measure plans that benefit the community. They may work with communities that have deeply rooted causes of stagnant growth or decline, such as poverty or crime, or with communities that have been negatively impacted by an event such as a natural disaster or an act of violence. They provide assistance to help recover in the immediate aftermath as well as long-term plans to sustain a strong community.

Social workers with a related or applicable degree can find a position as a community social worker, but those with a master's degree in social work are more likely to achieve higher positions, such as a director or coordinator. The BLS states job prospects in the community social work field are solid for candidates with a master's degree, with a 4 percent employment growth projected through 2024.³

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS REPORTS THOSE WITH A MASTER'S OF SOCIAL WORK WITH LESS THAN ONE YEAR OF EXPERIENCE CAN EARN \$58,200 AND UP TO \$80,000 OR MORE WITH ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE, EDUCATION, AND TRAINING.⁴

Is the Community Social Work Path Right for You?

Changing a community for the better is challenging and takes dedicated individuals with the ability to meld big-picture ideas with meaningful, detailed actions. If affecting entire communities sounds appealing to you, ask yourself:

- › Can I work on the small details that are required to achieve larger goals?
- › Am I able to cope with disastrous situations and focus on the potential of positive outcomes?
- › Do I feel comfortable working with communities that may be disadvantaged, impoverished, outraged, or upset?
- › Can I stay calm amid chaotic situations?
- › Does watching a community grow and transform for the better provide a sense of fulfillment and joy?

Community Social Workers

As a social worker in this field, you may encounter communities that are different from the one you grew up in. You might encounter difficult situations and sometimes even difficult people, but as a professional, your job is to do what is best for the community you serve and those who are a part of it. As a community social worker, you have the power to make communities safer and more prosperous by empowering the individuals that make communities thrive.

Similar to community social workers, professionals in the medical or health care fields have a unique focus that can significantly impact larger populations.

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Medical, Health, and Hospice/Palliative Care Social Workers



People are living longer than ever, a phenomenon known as “population aging.” The United States Census Bureau’s latest international population report states growth of the world’s older population, those ages 65 and older, will continue to outpace that of the younger population over the next 35 years.⁵ With an increase in an aging population comes an increased need for professionals in the healthcare sector, including medical, health, and hospice/palliative care social workers who address the unique needs of older adults. These social workers also work with younger people who experience chronic or traumatic medical and health issues.

Medical, healthcare, and palliative social workers work with those who experience medical conditions causing a variety of physical, mental, emotional, and financial changes that are difficult to face, including those caused by terminal illness. Social workers who are employed in the hospice settings work with those who are considered terminal in either end-of-life care facilities or in a person’s actual home.

These types of social workers also work in hospital settings and outpatient health centers. They work with individuals and families and collaborate with other medical staff to provide well-rounded care to those in need. These social workers also help individuals and families make difficult end-of-life arrangements.

Because of the dramatic and ongoing increase in the aging population, social workers in the healthcare field are some of the most in-demand types of social workers—with a projected 19 percent increase in employment through 2024—much faster than the average for all occupations.⁶

In most healthcare settings, a master’s degree is required to work as a social worker.

HEALTHCARE SOCIAL WORKERS EMPLOYED IN MEDICAL OR SURGICAL HOSPITALS EARN AN ANNUAL MEAN WAGE OF \$61,080, ACCORDING TO THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, WHILE THOSE WITH ADVANCED EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE CAN EARN MORE THAN \$71,880 A YEAR.⁷

Is the Medical, Health, and Hospice/Palliative Care Social Work Path Right for You?

Illness and medical issues at any point in life can deeply affect a person on individual and social levels, and go beyond the pain of the physical ailment. Friends and family of medical patients can also be deeply impacted by the circumstances, especially when it comes to navigating the healthcare system or making difficult end-of-life arrangements. A social worker in the healthcare field may work with the patient’s friends and family members to ensure quality care of the patient, as well as

Medical, Health, and Hospice/Palliative Care Social Workers

support that extends beyond patient care and instead focuses on self-care for the patient's loved ones.

If the medical, health and hospice/palliative care path is intriguing to you, consider these questions:

- How comfortable am I with illness and death, and how relaxed am I in healthcare settings?
- Am I confident I can be a source of strength to people and instill comfort in difficult situations?
- Am I familiar with the healthcare system, or am I willing to learn how the system works to help patients and their loved ones?

Illnesses, injuries, and hospital settings can make some people uncomfortable. Death, loss of limbs, and physical trauma caused by illness are challenging situations medical social workers often face. For those who believe in providing dignity to individuals and families in need during such significant life events, health and hospice/palliative social workers can help provide peace and comfort to those in need and their families.

While they're not always in healthcare settings, another population that greatly benefits from the services of social workers is military veterans. Like social workers who work in the medical field, social workers for veterans work to improve the well-being of those who have experienced unique and challenging life situations.



Military and Veterans Social Workers



According to the latest veteran data from the United States Census Bureau, there are more than 19 million veterans in the United States, whose mental-health needs are critical. The National Institute of Mental Health reports the rate of major depression among soldiers is five times higher than that of civilians, according to The Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience, released in 2014. Post-traumatic stress disorder prevalence is nearly 15 times higher.⁸ In 2012, the Department of Veterans Affairs concluded that 22 veterans commit suicide every day.⁹

The number of veterans who need support is on the rise. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the number of veterans who received disability benefits increased from 3.9 million to 4.5 million between 2014 and 2015.¹⁰ Social workers with the VA help veterans:

- Mitigate the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder
- Cope with chronic or life-changing injury or pain
- Relate to family members and friends
- Find housing or obtain financial assistance

Social work in this field can be a challenging but rewarding career. According to the job review site

Glassdoor, the average social worker with the Department of Veterans Affairs earns \$62,689 annually.¹¹ Social workers may work with federal agencies or with other health organizations that serve veterans.

JOB SEEKERS CAN ALSO FIND SOCIAL WORKER POSITIONS WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS POSTED ON THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S JOB BOARD WITH SALARIES IN EXCESS OF \$100,000.¹²

Social workers who have a bachelor's degree can work with service members, veterans, and their families, while those who have a master's degree in social work are more likely to work in supervisory roles.

Is the Military and Veterans Social Work Path Right for You?

Veterans have contributed a great service to our nation's safety and well-being, yet they are often in need of social worker support when they return from service. Maybe you're a veteran yourself who wants to help others like you, or perhaps the military holds special meaning in your life. If you're considering working with veterans as a social worker, ask yourself:

- How comfortable am I working with potentially volatile emotions or situations?
- How confident am I in helping someone who has had a significant injury, witnessed death, or experienced other traumatic experiences?
- Will I treat my clients unbiasedly and empathetically, no matter what they have done in combat or what cause they've contributed to?
- Can I work with multiple parties affected by a veteran's service to create solutions that work for an entire family?

Military and Veterans Social Workers

Veterans may return from service different than when they entered, and it's often the extreme stressors of combat and military life that have caused the changes. When working with those who have disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder, emotions may go from highs to lows in an instant, and a social worker may have to work with someone who feels angry or depressed. Social workers can help veterans reintegrate into civilian life with a smooth transition.

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HOW TO BECOME THE SOCIAL WORKER YOU WANT TO BE

As you can see, a career in social work **isn't limited to one type of population, or to one specific type of work environment**. The possibilities as a social worker are vast. Each career provides meaningful opportunities to help individuals live happier and healthier lives and to help groups, communities, and larger populations thrive.

If any of the social work positions mentioned in this guide sound appealing, a master's degree in social work will give you the practical knowledge and skills needed to embark on a rewarding career path.

People who have a passion for helping others, those who want to dedicate themselves to shape the health and happiness of individuals and communities in need, find social work to be a very meaningful career. Social workers help disadvantaged, abused, and neglected children heal and realize their full potential. They help families work better together as a unit and in their communities. They help veterans reintegrate into civilian life and deal with the stresses of their former combat lives.

Social workers also help entire communities by identifying ways to improve how groups work together and make plans for initiatives that help disadvantaged populations.

Wherever there are social needs, social workers can help.

Your peers and professors in a master's program for social work can assist you in determining the best career path for your strengths and interests. At Our Lady of the Lake University, faculty act as mentors, and give students their individual attention to help them create a meaningful career path, bring out their fullest potential and achieve their career goals.

A [Master of Social Work](#) degree from Our Lady of the Lake University is beneficial for those interested in a career in social work. Offered through the acclaimed Worden School of Social Service, OLLU's online MSW will prepare you to make a difference in the world. The Worden School is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education and is the recipient of the prestigious Presidential Award for Excellence from the CSWE.

OLLU's MSW degree program provides students a flexible and comprehensive approach to coursework, preparing them for successful careers.

Request additional information or call 855-275-1082 to speak with an admissions advisor.

Learn More Now

Resources

¹<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/social-workers.htm>

²[http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes211021.htm#\(3\)](http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes211021.htm#(3))

³<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/social-workers.htm#tab-6>

⁴<http://workforce.socialworkers.org/studies/2012/SalaryGuidelines.pdf>

⁵<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p95-16-1.pdf>

⁶<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/social-workers.htm#tab-6>

⁷<http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes211022.htm>

⁸<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/science-news/2014/suicide-in-the-military-army-nih-funded-study-points-to-risk-and-protective-factors.shtml>

⁹<http://www.va.gov/opa/docs/suicide-data-report-2012-final.pdf>

¹⁰<http://www.va.gov/vetdata/>

¹¹https://www.glassdoor.com/Salary/US-Department-of-Veterans-Affairs-Social-Worker-Salaries-E41429_D_K034,47.htm

¹²<https://www.usajobs.gov/Search?d=VA&k=%22social%20worker%22&p=1>