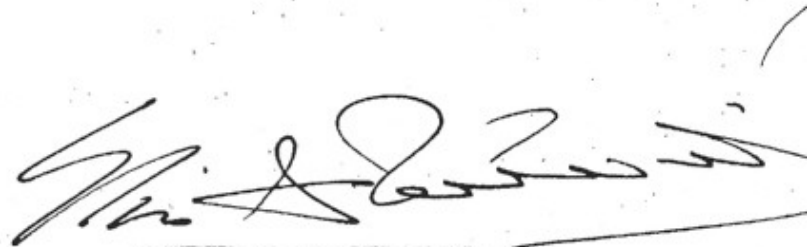


DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

National Institutes of Health

NIH Plan for Social Work Research: Progress Report



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I. Introduction

In April 2003, the National Institutes of Health, in response to a request from the Congressional Appropriations Committee, developed a plan for social work research. The NIH Plan for Social Work Research outlined research priorities across the NIH Institute and Centers (ICs), as well as a research agenda for the agency.

Since the plan's release, the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) has collaborated with NIH ICs in implementing the recommendations in the NIH plan. In Fiscal Year 2007 Congressional Appropriations Committee Reports, the Committee issued the following statement on Social Work Research:

Social Work Research - The Committee commends the NIH for implementing recommendations of the May 2003 NIH Plan for Social Work Research, including the release of program announcements titled 'Research on Social Work Practice and Concepts in Health,' which are designed to encourage social work research related to improving health outcomes for persons with medical and behavioral disorders and conditions. The Committee requests that NIH submit a progress report in June 2007 that covers the 4 years since the plan was released. The report should outline the efforts made by NIH to utilize and support social work research in areas related to aging, health disparities, child and family issues and behavioral health (Senate Report 109-287, page 158).

This report describes the progress that NIH has made to implement the recommendations of the 2003 report.

II. Background

As one of the largest allied health professions in the U.S., social work is a primary provider of psychosocial interventions and services intended to facilitate treatment of medical conditions, improve disease management and prevention, and address related social, psychological or emotional problems in order to improve health and functioning. The underlying theoretical perspective of social work is the biopsychosocial model, derived from systems theory, which posits that physical, psychological, and social environmental conditions influence one another and must be taken into account in order to optimize health outcomes and functioning.

Social work practice often involves intervening in the context of complex interactions that may include not only patients and their families, but other service and treatment providers, service organizations and systems, and communities and community organizations. The profession has, therefore, developed significant clinical expertise in working within and across systems of care and services on a variety of levels, in the context of interdisciplinary teams, and in direct practice with diverse and multi-problem populations. Consequently, social work researchers have contributed significantly to the

NIH mission to fund and conduct research that will result in an improvement in health. NIH has recognized the importance of social work research. This is evidenced in the funding history of social work research across NIH ICs.

The April 2003 NIH Plan for Social Work Research was prepared in response to a mandate from the Congressional Appropriations Committee. It outlined the research priorities, as well as a research agenda, across NIH Institutes and Centers for social work researchers.

III. NIH Accomplishments from Fiscal Year 2004 - 2007

Nine recommendations were made in the 2003 Social Work Research Plan. This section of the progress report delineates the NIH progress on the implementation of these recommendations. Accomplishments are listed by the following 3 categories: (1) social work research, (2) research infrastructure and training, and (3) information dissemination and community outreach and the recommendations that were made within each category.

SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH

- 1. Establish a SWR Committee as a standing internal committee composed of IC representatives that continues to monitor the state of affairs in the field of social work practice and research as it relates to health and the NIH research agenda. The committee would meet regularly to assess and initiate activities aimed at fostering social work research at the NIH.***

A standing trans-NIH Social Work Research Working Group (SWR-WG) that continues to monitor, foster and advocate for social work research as it relates to health and the NIH research agenda has been established. The trans-NIH Working Group meets regularly under the aegis and direction of the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research. The following ICs are currently represented on this body:

- National Cancer Institute
- National Heart Lung and Blood Institute
- National Institute on Child Health and Human Development
- National Institute on Mental Health
- National Institute on Drug Abuse
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
- National Institute for Nursing Research
- National Institute on Aging
- Office of the Director

- 2. Expand outreach activities to encourage the submission of investigator initiated research projects focused on studies of social work practice and concepts relevant to missions of each of the NIH Institutes.***

NIH staff has engaged in numerous outreach activities to encourage the submission of investigator initiated research projects focused on studies of social work practice relevant to IC missions. The SWR-WG in collaboration with the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research, have led grantmanship workshops at the annual meetings of the Society for Social Work Research, the Council of Social Work Education, and the National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work (NADD).

Following are presentations made to various segments of the social work research community as part of the NIH effort to maintain strong ties with social work researchers:

- Research on Social Work Practice and Concepts in Health: Funding Opportunities from the National Institutes of Health. Presented at the Pre-Conference Institute sponsored by the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research. The Annual Conference of the Society for Social Work and Research. San Francisco, CA. January 11-14, 2007.
- Addressing Health Disparities through Community-Based Participatory Research. Presented at the Pre-Conference Institute sponsored by the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research. The Annual Conference of the Society for Social Work and Research. San Francisco, CA. January 11-14, 2007.
- Strategies in Obtaining Research Support from the National Institutes of Health. Presented at the Pre-Conference Institute sponsored by the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research. The Annual Conference of the Society for Social Work and Research. Miami, FL. January 12-15, 2006.
- Health Disparities, the NIH, and Community Based Participatory Research. Presented to junior and senior researchers at the Annual Conference of the Society for Social Work and Research. Hyatt Regency River Walk. San Antonio, TX. January 15, 2006.
- Transdisciplinary Issues in Behavioral Health Research at the National Institutes of Health. Presented to the faculty of the Center for Addiction and Behavioral Health Research and the University of Wisconsin's Helen Bader School of Social Welfare, the College of Health Sciences and the College of Nursing. University of Wisconsin. Milwaukee, WI. April 22, 2005.
- Overview of Federal Funding Opportunities for Social Work Research. Presented at the Pre-Conference Institute sponsored by the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research. The Annual Conference of the Society for Social Work and Research. January 13-16, 2005.
- Strategies for Building a Supportive Research Environment. Presented to the National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work. National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work—Fall Conference.

San Diego, CA. October 7, 2004.

- Social Work Research Initiatives at the National Institutes of Health. Presented to the Greater Washington DC Metropolitan Area Schools of Social Work. Catholic University of America. Washington DC. June 21, 2004.
- NIH's Psychosocial and Behavioral Research Agenda in Aging. Presented at the Hartford Geriatric Social Work Faculty Scholars and Doctoral Fellows Retreat. Gerontological Society of America. The Doris Arrowood Conference Center, Rye, NY. April 1-4, 2004.
- The National Institutes of Health Plan for Social Work Research. Presented to the Advisory Committee of the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research. The Annual Conference of the Society for Social Work and Research. New Orleans, LA. January 15, 2004.

Members of the SWR-WG have also led workshops at the Research Society on Alcoholism, the Association of Health Services Research, Joint Meeting of Adolescent Treatment Effectiveness, the American Association of Aging, and the International Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect.

3. ***Propose a new Program Announcement (PA) entitled Developmental Research on Social Work Practice and Concepts in Health. The goal of this PA will be to provide the impetus and resources to fully incorporate social work's unique concepts and perspectives (e.g., person-in-environment across levels, client-centeredness, etc.) into the NIH research portfolio and to build the scientific base to be used by allied health professionals.***

To address this recommendation, the SWR-WG developed three funding opportunity announcements (FOAs) entitled *Research on Social Work Practice and Concepts in Health*, in December 2005. There are three FOAs under the same title, but under different program announcement numbers to take advantage of three types of funding mechanisms: (1) a small "pilot-sample" grant mechanism (R03), a developmental and/or exploratory grant mechanism (R21), and a traditional large sample, qualitative or quantitative experimental grant (R01). The ultimate goal of these FOAs is to encourage the development of empirical research on social work practice, concepts and theory as these relate to the NIH public health goal of improving health outcomes for persons with medical and behavioral disorders and conditions.

- PA-06-081 – Research on Social Work Practice and Concepts in Health (R01)
<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-06-081.html>
- PA-06-082 – Research on Social Work Practice and Concepts in Health (R03)
<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-06-082.html>
- PA-06-083 – Research on Social Work Practice and Concepts in Health (R21)

<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-06-083.html>

The following ICs and OD Offices participated fully in this NIH initiative:

- National Cancer Institute (NCI)
- National Heart, Lung, Blood Institute (NHLBI)
- National Institute on Aging (NIA)
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)
- National Institute on Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)
- National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)
- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
- National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR)
- Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR)
- Office of Disease Prevention (ODP)
- Office of Research on Women's Health (ORWH)

Fifteen separate applications were submitted to the NIH in response to the above FOAs since December 2005: three R03 or exploratory small grant applications (two received scores, but were not strong enough to be funded); two R21 or developmental grant applications (all were unscored); and ten R01 or full large experimental grant applications (two received scores, but not strong enough to be funded).

In addition, OBSSR and SWR-WG members have been active in the development of other cross—NIH research initiatives and conferences that are central to the social work professional community. To name a few, in the area of health disparities, OBSSR in collaboration with NIH ICs issued in December 2004 a program on *Community Participation in Research (R01 and R21)*, OBSSR also led a conference on *Understanding and Reducing Disparities in Health: Behavioral and Social Sciences Research Contributions* (October 23-24, 2006), and will issue FOAs entitled *Behavioral and Social Science Research on Understanding and Reducing Health Disparities* (R01 and R21) in the summer of 2007. The NIMH also issued in October 2006 a program on *Community-Based Participatory Research at NIMH (R21)*. Further, OBSSR and the SWR-WG are actively participating in the NIH-wide Child Neglect Research Work Group, the FOA entitled *Research on Child Neglect* and the related annual Child Neglect Research Findings Meeting.

4. ***Implement a competitive supplement for current R01 grantees patterned after the minority supplement mechanism. Social work researchers would be added to existing research projects to increase mentoring, advanced research training, and improve competitiveness for NIH funding. This program would also increase interdisciplinary approaches to alcohol research studies, adding the unique perspective of social work.***

The SWR-WG is considering the feasibility of implementing this program. NIH has nothing more to report at this time on this recommendation.

RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE/TRAINING

5. *Develop and implement an NIH Summer Institute on Social Work Research offering new researchers intensive exposure to issues and challenges in the field of social work research. New researchers are defined as those who have received a doctoral level degree, and are at the beginning stages of a research career, and demonstrate a capacity or potential for highly productive independent research. The doctoral degree may be from Schools of Social Work or in other behavioral or social sciences. The program of the Summer Institute would include lectures, seminars, and small group discussions in research design relative to social work as it relates to health. Discussion sessions will focus on methodological approaches and interventions. The program would also include consultation on the development of research interests and advice on preparing and submitting research grant applications to the NIH.*

In response to this recommendation, the NIH designed and implemented the NIH Summer Institute on Social Work Research. This program has focused on various methodological approaches and interventions involved in the successful design and conduct of social work research. OBSSR, in collaboration with NIH ICs, has offered Summer Institutes in 2004, 2005, and 2006, with the next one scheduled for July 2007. Following are specific information on each of the Summer Institutes:

(A) NIH Summer Institute: The Design and Conduct of Qualitative and Mixed-Method Research in Social Work and Other Health Professions (August 4 -8, 2004)— Washington, DC

This 2004 Summer Institute provided junior and mid-career faculty members with a thorough grounding in the design and conduct of qualitative and mixed method research. It was developed for social work researchers and other health professionals interested in developing competence in the planning, design, and execution of these techniques and become more successful in the NIH extramural research program.

The course enabled participants to understand the strengths of qualitative and mixed methods and their application to practice- and policy-relevant research. Specifically, the curriculum covered the following:

- The role of theories and conceptual schemas in carrying out qualitative research
- Skills in design, sampling, interviewing and field observation
- Skills in coding and interpretation of qualitative data
- Strategies for rigor in qualitative design and analysis
- Mixed methods designs and their applications
- Skills in evaluation research using 'focused' qualitative methods
- The process of submission and review of NIH grant proposals using qualitative and mixed methods approaches

NIH received 133 applications to this program and 57 awards were made

(B) NIH Summer Institute on Behavioral and Social Intervention Research (July 18-22, 2005)—Washington DC

The 2005 Summer Institute addressed essential conceptual, methodological and practical issues involved in planning and carrying out research on psychosocial interventions. The Institute was intended for junior investigators who planned to develop NIH grant applications for research in this area. Faculty members included established investigators from social work and other fields. Participants were expected to design a pilot study that would eventually lead to an NIH grant application for behavioral and social intervention research. The major topics covered included:

- Applying social and behavioral theories to intervention development and testing
- Conceptualizing, developing, standardizing and piloting an intervention model to address various health conditions, social problems, and risk behaviors
- Experimental designs and alternatives
- Identifying relevant measures for assessing intervention process and outcomes
- Critical issues in managing an intervention study
- Analytic methods appropriate for testing causal hypotheses
- Human subjects issues relevant to intervention research
- Developing and revising an NIH grant application

NIH received 57 applications to this program and 41 awards were made

(C) NIH Summer Institute on Design and Development of Quantitative Research on Social Work Intervention in Health (July 23-38, 2006)—University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

The 2006 Summer Institute also addressed essential conceptual, methodological, and practical issues involved in planning and carrying out research on the impact of social work interventions on outcomes, health behavior, and treatment. The relevance of such interventions to the NIH public health goal of improving health outcomes for persons with medical and behavioral disorders and conditions have been outlined in PA-06-082 (R03) and PA-06-083 (R21): *Research on Social Work Practice and Concepts in Health*.

The Institute was intended for investigators who have completed their doctorate and who planned to develop NIH R03 or R21 grant applications for research in this area. Faculty members included established investigators from social work and other fields. The goal of the institute was for every participant to develop an NIH R03 or R21 proposal by the end of the training that would eventually lead to a grant submission under PA-06-082 or PA-06-083: *Research on Social Work Practice and Concepts in Health*. The major topics covered included:

- Overview of conceptualizing, designing, and testing social work interventions
- Developing and submitting an NIH R03 or R21 proposal

- Measurement—selecting measures, assessing validity and reliability; measurement models and conceptual models
- Research design—importance of random assignment; sampling; group randomized designs; cluster effect multipliers; effect sizes; power
- Analysis—latent variable models, 2- and 3-level Hierarchical Linear Models, cross-classified designs; small sample issues

Participation also included writing draft sections on measures, methods, and analysis for an R03 or R21 application. These drafts were evaluated by the class and critiqued in a mock study section review by social work researchers on the final day.

NIH received 97 applications to this program and 26 awards were made

(D) NIH Summer Institute on the Design and Development of Community-Based Participatory Research in Health (July 9-13, 2007)—University of Chicago, IL

The 2007 NIH Summer Institute will address essential conceptual, methodological, and practical issues inherent in planning and conducting Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) to improve health and reduce disparities. The relevance of such CBPR interventions to the NIH public health goal of improving health outcomes is described in PA-06-233 (R03), PA-06-234 (R21), and PA-07-292, *Research on Social Work Practice and Concepts in Health*; PAR-07-283 (R01), and PAR-06-247 (R21), *Community Participation in Research*; and PAR-07-004 (R21) *Community-Based Participatory Research at NIMH* (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PAR-07-133.html>).

The Institute is intended for investigators who wish to develop NIH grant applications for research in the area. Faculty will include established investigators from social work and other fields and who will provide instruction based on their expertise and own successful CBPR projects. The goal is for each participant to develop an NIH R01, R03, or R21 grant application under the above FOA.

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is a collaborative approach to research that begins with a research topic of importance to the community and combines community and academic knowledge toward a goal of promoting social change to improve community health and reduce disparities. Neither a research method itself nor a theory, CBPR instead is an orientation to research that (at its best) represents a balance between research and community empowerment. As such, it is highly congruent with social work values. Topics to be addressed include:

- Defining “community” in CBPR
- Engaging community stakeholders (here defined as individuals, groups, agencies, and institutions) in CBPR
- Negotiating “collaborative, equitable partnerships” in CBPR and get all to agree on its meaning
- Balancing community and academic concerns and interests (e.g., practical versus statistical significance)

- Applying the CBPR orientation to a variety of research designs and data collection methods (e.g., randomized clinical trials, qualitative studies, mixed methods).
- Applying the CBPR orientation to a variety of substantive areas of inquiry (e.g., serious mental illness, geriatrics, maternal and child health) and outcomes (e.g., health promotion, harm reduction, and public policy change)
- Evaluating the effectiveness of CBPR
- Disseminating results so that all involved are privy to research findings

NIH received 137 applications to this program, 25-30 awards are to be made

Additionally, for the past 4 years OBSSR and the National Institute on Aging have supported an Annual Summer Institute on Aging and Social Work. Following is a brief summary of this program.

The Annual Institute on Aging and Social Work – Duluth, MN
<http://www.css.edu/x3192.xml>
 2004 – 2007

This Institute offers an excellent opportunity for top-level training with nationally recognized experts in research methodology related to aging. Specifically designed for college and university social work faculty, the program aims to strengthen participants' knowledge and skills essential for developing an active research agenda and integrating research in aging with teaching.

Program design includes an initial 8-day institute in Summer I, proposal development and consultation during the intervening year, a mid-year meeting in February, and a follow-up institute in Summer II.

Past participants have given outstanding ratings to the Institute. They have indicated that the Institute gave them an opportunity to get to know distinguished professionals, allowed them to interact intensively with colleagues from other schools and NIA staff, and facilitated learning from each other. In addition, participation in the training program improved their knowledge and skills related to research methodology, made them aware of new developments in key areas of aging research, increased their awareness of grant support available at NIA, and improved their knowledge of how to prepare a grant application.

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- 6. Plan a meeting at NIH, involving all interested ICs and an invited group of Deans from Schools of Social Work with Doctoral Programs. There are 67 such programs in the U.S. The purpose would be to explore the needs of the social work research community and share information about the NIH grant process, highlight areas of research appropriate for social work researchers, and identify the kind of support faculty would need from school administrations in order to be successful in applying for and conducting NIH funded research.*

The SWR-WG decided it would be more effective to address this recommendation by taking these issues directly to the deans and directors of schools of social work. Consequently a meeting was scheduled with the deans and directors during their annual meeting in San Diego, CA on October 7, 2004. The purpose was to explore the needs of the social work research community and share information about the NIH grant process. We also provided information on the areas of research appropriate for social work researchers and identified the kind of support faculty would need from school administrations in order to be successful in applying for and conducting NIH funded research. This session was entitled: *Strategies for Building a Supportive Research Environment*. Follow-up meetings have been held annually with these Deans and Directors.

- 7. Explore the possibility of a joint effort between NIH and social work research organizations to host a conference on the topic of advancing the social work research agenda. This effort would help train social work leaders who would work to build the knowledge base in regard to effective psychosocial interventions to best optimize the well being of individuals and their families.*

The SWR-WG is in dialogue with representatives of the Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work (GADE) and the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research (IASWR). GADE and IASWR are exploring the needs of the social work research community, highlighting areas of research appropriate for social work researchers, and identifying the kind of support faculty would need from school administrations in order to be successful in applying for and conducting NIH funded research. SWR-WG members have been featured speakers at their annual programs.

The SWR-WG has also met annually with the board of directors of GADE, the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE), the National Association of Social Work (NASW), and the IASWR to maintain a continuing dialogue on ways to advance the social work research agenda.

- 8. Plan a trans-NIH conference showcasing social work research results relevant to health.*

The SWR-WG in collaboration with the social work research organizations have been exploring the possibility of holding a trans-NIH conference to showcase results from the

best of NIH funded social work research. This conference is planned for Fiscal Year 2008 in the Washington, DC Metro Area.

- 9. Develop and implement coordinated outreach efforts to universities that would include training on writing grants and provide information about research opportunities. This activity could include regional seminars to bring NIH staff to universities and assure that social work researchers are aware and knowledgeable about relevant research training opportunities sponsored by NIH Institutes, Centers and Offices. Further, these efforts could establish a trans-NIH means of regularly communicating relevant research activities and opportunities to the social work research community and ensuring that social work organizations and community agencies relevant to NIH's mission, in addition to those mentioned above, remained informed. The NIH and social work research organizations could jointly sponsor this proposed activity.*

The NIH has supported a series of summer research training institutes since 2004 through 2007 as indicated above. These institutes have been held in various regions of the U.S. to bring NIH staff to universities and assure that social work researchers are aware and knowledgeable about relevant research training opportunities by NIH ICs.

See the response under recommendation 2, for specific NIH outreach initiatives undertaken during the past 4 years to address this recommendation.

V. Conclusion

This report responds to a mandate from the Congressional Appropriations Committee outlined in Senate Report 109-287. Specifically, the Committee requested that NIH submit a progress report in June 2007 that covers the 4 years since the plan was released.

The progress report outlined for each of the following categories: (1) social work research, (2) research infrastructure and training, and (3) information dissemination and community outreach the projects that were initiated beginning in FY 2004 in response to the NIH Plan for Social Work Research. These projects and the ongoing activities of the trans-NIH SWR-WG contribute significantly to the development of junior faculty members in the field of health-related social practice and research. Further, the funding opportunity announcements discussed above encourage the development of empirical research on social work practice, concepts and theory as these relate to the NIH public health goal of improving health outcomes for persons with medical and behavioral disorders and conditions.