



## CSWE Marks Four Years of Public Policy Action for Social Work Education

*In January 2008, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) launched its Public Policy Initiative. Lewis-Burke Associates LLC ([www.Lewis-Burke.com](http://www.Lewis-Burke.com))—a Washington, DC government relations firm—was retained to assist CSWE in the development and implementation of the Initiative. In this role, Lewis-Burke has served as the Washington voice for social work education, advocating for its unique interests with Congress, the White House and Federal agencies. Lewis-Burke has raised awareness and visibility for social work education and has facilitated a seat at the table for CSWE in critical federal discussions dealing with educational policy and laws addressing the needs of vulnerable populations. Furthermore, recognizing that engagement of the CSWE membership is at the heart of the Initiative, CSWE and Lewis-Burke developed a Web page, monthly newsletters, action alerts, advocacy handbooks, and other tools aimed at keeping members informed and active.*

**A Look Back.** Prior to the launch of the Public Policy Initiative, CSWE's advocacy efforts centered primarily on participation in coalitions. While coalitions show solidarity, they rarely feature the specific interests of members or explain the complexity of issues. CSWE recognized that social work education required added attention in order to address the deep needs facing programs of professional social work, students, faculty, and those working in the field. At the start of the initiative, interest in health care, education, poverty and urban revitalization were just starting to take shape in Congress. The political context was ripe for major public policy successes for social work education.

**Addressing the Needs of Social Work Education.** The Initiative is guided by four principles: *Debt Load and Loan Forgiveness, Higher Education and Accreditation Policy, Fostering a Diverse Workforce*, and *Ally Building*. These guiding principles are the foundation on which all CSWE government relations actions are based; however, the Public Policy Initiative continually adjusts to address new opportunities and shifts priorities as needed.

From the outset of the Public Policy Initiative, high educational debt coupled with low starting salaries was identified as a major issue for the social work profession and continues to pose major challenges for recruitment and retention. CSWE has worked to alleviate the debt load burden through federal actions that make social workers eligible for loan forgiveness and repayment programs. These successes have included programs that provide grants to institutions of higher education for distribution to students via scholarships, loan forgiveness for public servants, and funds for specialty training.

The Public Policy Initiative also ensures that federal higher education and accreditation policy remain conducive to a productive social work education enterprise by closely monitoring and informing the implementation and future reauthorizations of the *Higher Education Act*. As the sole accreditor of social work education in the U.S., CSWE must ensure that policies governing accreditation continue to demand excellence in higher education while also allowing for flexibility for professional accreditors to set standards that address the unique needs of the profession.

With respect to diversity, the Initiative looks at ways to continually promote a diverse and culturally competent social work workforce through programs like CSWE's Minority Fellowship Program. CSWE also engages with groups representing diverse communities—such as veterans, older adults, tribal communities, immigrants, people with disabilities, etc.—to advocate for policies of mutual interest that impact social work education.

Lastly, CSWE works with its partners and allies throughout the higher education and health professions communities to enhance and leverage its public policy efforts.

**The Path Forward.** The time is ripe to think outside the box and develop ideas to carry social work education into the future. The social challenges facing the country will continue to mount as economic recovery remains slow and as the nation continues to demand measurable outcomes for communities in need. The charge is tall, but the opportunities are endless. These last four years have illustrated CSWE's ability to move the dial for students, faculty, practitioners, and communities served by social workers. Together, we can achieve even greater success in the years and decades ahead.



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# Snapshot of CSWE Public Policy Achievements and Milestones

Additional Public Policy Achievements and Activities can be found at [www.cswe.org](http://www.cswe.org)

