



get on the behavioral health path

Is this the job for me?

Take this quick quiz to find out if social worker is a good direction for you:

- 1 Do you like to teach and assist people in finding solutions?
 YES NO
- 2 Do you enjoy planning events or programs?
 YES NO
- 3 Are you able to deal with conflict?
 YES NO
- 4 Are you a good communicator?
 YES NO
- 5 Do you like to figure out problems?
 YES NO
- 6 Do you consider yourself independent?
 YES NO
- 7 Do you want to get into a career in about four years?
 YES NO

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you may be on the right track!

What's it all about?

Social work is often called the "helping profession." Social workers interact with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities to help them meet their basic needs, deal with emotional, financial, social and health problems, and improve their overall quality of life.

Many times, social workers specialize in working with certain types of clients, such as families, patients, children, the elderly, people with mental illness, or people dealing with drug and alcohol abuse problems.

Social workers can fill a wide variety of roles, such as counselor, child protection worker, case manager, advocate, policy analyst, probation officer or street outreach coordinator. Social workers are found in a wide variety of settings, including schools, hospitals, child welfare agencies, public agencies, clinics, private practice, substance abuse centers, prisons, juvenile correctional homes and mental health clinics.

What do social workers do?

Depending on their area of specialty, social workers have a great variety of tasks and responsibilities. For example, social workers who work with families may teach parenting skills; medical social workers may lead support groups; child welfare social workers may investigate reports of child abuse; and school social workers may help students with problems like misbehavior and teen pregnancy. While there are a variety of tasks, here are some common

responsibilities of a social worker:

- Interview clients and family members to determine needs.
- Collect information from school records, medical tests or employment records.
- Arrange for medical or psychiatric tests.
- Prepare treatment plans for clients.
- Counsel clients and family members.
- Monitor progress toward the goals set in the treatment plans.
- Modify treatment plans, if necessary.
- Refer clients or family members to community services.
- Maintain case records and write reports.
- Lead support groups for clients and family members.
- Manage programs in the community.
- Consult with other health professionals.
- Supervise social and human services assistants.
- Conduct social research.

How much money can I make?

In Alaska, social workers earn an average hourly wage of \$17.53, and have an average annual salary of \$36,460.

How do I become a social worker? How long does it take?

To become a social worker, you need to:

- Have a high school diploma or GED.
- Graduate with at least a bachelor's of social work degree.
- Obtain a license.
- Pass an exam.

A typical bachelor's degree program takes four years to complete. Many social workers go on to earn a master's degree in social work; graduate programs usually take one to three years after you finish your bachelor's degree. It's important to note that your bachelor's degree doesn't need to be in social work to pursue a master's degree in social work. Social workers who want to take their education even further may pursue a doctorate in social work; this allows you to teach at the college level.

Learn more about social work education programs in Alaska by reviewing the "training providers" section later in this publication.

Attention high school students!

If you think you might want to become a social worker, the time to start planning is now. In general, you should take four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies, two years of science and possibly two years of a second language. You should also consider taking college preparatory or advanced placement (AP) courses. Other recommended classes and electives include:

- Anthropology
- Computer applications
- Ethnic and gender studies
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Advanced English composition
- Political science
- Economics

You should also discuss your plans with a teacher, counselor or parent, and check to see what work-based learning opportunities, such as field trips, job shadowing and internships, are available in your community.

Are there jobs available?

In Alaska, there are job opportunities for social workers – approximately 65 openings a year – and this occupation is expected to continue to grow (26.8 percent growth compared to 14.8 percent for all occupations).

Where are the jobs?

About 40 percent of social workers work for public agencies. In Alaska, social workers find employment at state and local government agencies, social service agencies, schools, colleges, universities, outpatient care centers, child welfare agencies, mental health clinics, family agencies, youth programs, health services agencies and Native corporations.

What else is on this pathway?

Want to learn about other possible opportunities in the behavioral health career pathway? Be sure to read about human services workers and case managers/care coordinators – other behavioral health "hot jobs" in Alaska!

