

Q&A for Social Work Leaders at Opening Plenary for National
Association of Social Workers BiAnnual Conference
Washington, DC
June 22, 2016

1. What initiative, currently led by each of your organizations, has the greatest potential to shape the future of the profession? Why?

The Grand Challenges for Social Work is the Academy's signature effort to power social progress through social work science. The 12 Grand Challenges for Social Work offer enormous opportunity for the profession to align efforts with critical problems that address the implications of the basic principle that "the social is fundamental" and that the social aspects of life have the greatest impact on life—more than genetics or clinical care or any other single dimension. Further, social work has the opportunity to apply what it knows, and extend its knowledge, to apply our skills to solve major problems like preventing mental health problems, smart decarceration, ending family violence, achieving equal opportunity and justice, building financial capability, closing the health gap, and harnessing technology for social good. The Grand Challenges can broaden what we can do and broaden the public's understanding of social work's accomplishments, aspirations, and abilities. Please read more about the *Grand Accomplishments of Social Work* and how the *Social is Fundamental* at AASWSW.org

2. What critical professional challenges must be addressed to position social work for greater growth and impact?

Social workers intervene in many ways—from political advocacy to palliative care. This is a great part of our strength. A significant part of our workforce engages in delivering psychosocial interventions. Social work must become more comfortable with, and expert in, a limited set of evidence-based practices that are known to have a high return on investment for our clients. This means that social workers who want to do clinical work should graduate from MSW programs with familiarity with the basics of cognitive behavior therapy and motivational interviewing, to start. The Institute on Medicine recently called for greater expertise in delivering evidence-based interventions and we must more completely adopt, teach, and practice such EBPs as cognitive behavior therapy and motivational interviewing.

Social work also needs to understand the robustness of these interventions which are, generally, quite effective in helping clients from a broad array of backgrounds (if clients are successfully engaged to use these approaches). Expertise in engagement of those who are unfamiliar with the benefits of behavioral health treatment and ways to integrate our community practices with behavioral health interventions are other parts of this set of activities that are a challenge for us.

3. What is your hope for the social work profession in 20 years?

That social work has become more research-informed and that we have made significant progress on our Grand Challenges. Toward that end I hope that each of you will go to the AASWSW website and look at the grand challenges and think about which Grand Challenge network you might want to join. More generally, I hope that we, as a profession, become much more comfortable with the concept of public health and become more skilled and aligned with preventive services AND at the same time continue to be expert as first responders to address suicide, family violence, crisis mental health response, and remediate the social determinants of ill-health. I hope that there is greater gender balance in the profession—more similar to what there was 40 years ago when I came into social work. I also hope that the profession's great diversity is equally distributed across all social work roles—from entry level positions, to management, and in all academic positions. I look forward to working with all of you for at least a substantial portion of those 20 years to see this all come true.