

National Social Work Program VA Care Management & Social Work

Social Work Month Toolkit

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VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
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Introduction

The National Social Work Program Office is pleased to present the 2018 Social Work Month Toolkit. This product is designed to give facilities ideas about ways to celebrate Social Work Month and the outstanding work that we do with our Veterans, their families, and caregivers. This toolkit aligns with the National VHA strategic plan to provide personalized, proactive Veteran-driven health care, achieve measurable improvements in health care outcomes, and align resources to deliver sustained value to Veterans.

Since 1984, March has officially been designated as a month to recognize and acknowledge the contributions to the quality of life made by America's half-million social workers. Social workers are engaged in many diverse administrative and clinical programs, and areas of specialty practice. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is the largest employer of social workers, with over 13,000 masters prepared social workers on staff.

VA social workers have great ideas! VA social workers have always risen to the challenge of presenting relevant and compelling programs to promote Social Work Month. The National Social Work Program Office has received ideas from VA social workers around the nation and compiled these ideas into an easy-to-use toolkit designed to save you time and improve your Social Work Month activities. The ideas are organized into categories: **1) Education, 2) Rewards and Recognition, 3) Publicity, and 4) Community.**

This Toolkit is updated annually with the new and creative ideas sent in throughout the year. Social Work Month is always in March. It is recommended to start your planning at the beginning of January, if not sooner, depending on the depth and breadth your activities.

You can access this Social Work Month Toolkit on the Social Work Matters VA Pulse [page](#) and the referenced examples on the VA National Social Work [SharePoint](#).

VA National Social Work Logo and SharePoint

Connect with Social Workers all over the country through our common logo for National Social Work in VA Central Office. Start using the Social Work Matters VA Pulse page, if you have not done so already, to reference information from our VA social work community throughout the year at:

<https://www.vapulse.net/groups/social-work-matters>



Association of VA Social Workers

Purchase a variety of merchandise through the Association of VA Social Workers website as staff appreciation gifts. Proceeds benefit the cause of social work in the VA. Membership applications and merchandise can be located www.vasocialworkers.org. The Association also has a VA Pulse page, which can be located [here](#).



National Association of Social Workers (NASW)

Start your planning at the NASW website, www.socialworkers.org. A social work theme is provided each year, usually in December. Purchase posters to hang in key areas of your medical center as well as a way to provide great staff appreciation gifts.

The 2018 Social Work Month theme is “Social Workers: Leaders. Advocates. Champions”. Per the NASW website, this theme and logo were selected to inform the public about the past and present role of social workers in helping the most vulnerable people in society. Read more [here](#).

**“Social Workers: Leaders. Advocates.
Champions”**



SOCIALWORKERS
leaders. advocates. champions.

Part 1: Education

Advance Directive Day

Create an event in which social work staff provides education and assistance to employees, volunteers, and family members with regard to completing their respective Advance Directive forms. This can be an addition to a social work resource fair or a solo event in a prominent area of the VA. Announce the event through posters and all employee email.

Education about Social Work – The History and the Profession

Provide your colleagues and other disciplines information or exhibits about social work history and/or about the profession with the goal to increase understanding. Examples of materials on the history of Social Work can be found on the [VA National Social Work SharePoint](#) and on VA Pulse [here](#).

Lunch and Learn Series/Brown Bag

Show videos to the staff during lunch for one week or throughout the month. Videos can be selected from a library created by VA Social Workers for the 90th Anniversary video project. Over 100 submissions were created. Find more information [here](#).

Self-Care Cart

Partner with Voluntary Services, Canteen Services, and/or Employee Health to create a self-care cart. The cart can include items such as fresh fruit, healthy snacks, essential oils and/or lotions, as well as other items that promote brief 'on the spot' self-care for employees and/or Veterans. Deploy the cart by arranging times/dates to visit the various units, clinics, and other areas of the facility. While making self-care 'rounds', offer a moment for each staff member and/or Veteran to indulge in a treat or self-care.

Social Work Job Swap

Organize a Social Work "Job Swap", allowing a social worker to be partnered with another social work colleague to shadow their job responsibilities for a few hours or days. This can lead to a whole new appreciation of "walking in someone else's shoes".

Graduate Education: The Next Generation

VA Social Workers are committed to training graduate level Masters of Social Work students. The passion and commitment we share with students in the field is generative, building a cadre of highly trained clinical social workers. Those who complete their VA field placement are often VA social workers of the future. Consider providing an event or training for social work interns for opportunities to collaborate with experienced social workers or to find out more about VA Social Work. Invite the Director of Field Education for your affiliate Social Work School to present a lecture or round table discussion on "Current Issues and Trends in Graduate Social Work Education".

Social Work Resource Fair

Take a two to four hour time period one day during March to organize a VA/community resource fair. Exhibit a variety of booths from areas within your medical center where social work services are provided, and invite various community resource agencies to participate. Highlight what VA social workers do, where VA social work services are provided, the contributions we make, and who we are.

Social Work Speaker

Invite facility leadership, and/or social workers from the VA or the community to participate in a presentation. Lectures can be presented to include a number of criteria. The following should be considered when planning a lecture/presentation/retreat or workshop:

- Provide CEUs.
- Combine the presentation with a luncheon, brown bag lunch, pizza party, or ice cream social.
- Invite a special VA speaker, social work speaker from within the VA or community, or a speaker from another profession.
- Collaborate with community agencies or the community as a whole.
- Combine social work recognition, appreciation, and awards to the day's presentation/lecture/workshop.
- Consider conducting the event on-site or off VA grounds (restaurant, agency, church, community center, local college).

The following are lecture themes that were suggested by VAs across the nation.

- Adult Day Health Care
- Adult Protective Services
- Advocacy & Activism
- Aging Myths
- Affordable Care Act
- Assisted Living
- Assisted Living Issues
- Caregiver Support
- Case Management
- Complementary Therapies
- Crisis Intervention
- Discharge Planning
- Elderly/Geriatrics
- End of Life Care
- Family Therapy
- Four Sages of Burnout
- HIV Update
- Hospice
- Marketing the Social Work Profession
- Medicaid/Medicare
- NASW Representative
- OEF/OIF/OND-Seamless Transition
- Pain Management
- Personality Disorders
- Psychotherapy
- Rehabilitation Placement
- Respite Care
- Seamless Transition
- Self-Care
- Social Work Ethics/Integrated Ethics
- Social Work Licensure

- Social Work Oncology
- Stress Management
- Sub-Acute/Long Term Care
- Talking a Detailed Military History
- Team Building
- Traumatic Loss
- VA Regional Office Counsel
- Visual Impairments in Veterans
- Working with LGBTQ Veterans

Please note: This is not an exhaustive list.

Synergy+

Read and distribute the National Care Management and Social Work Newsletter to all VA Social Work staff, other VA employees and those in the community. Write up an article about your local facility Social Work Month events and share them with other VA social workers. Partner with your local Public Affairs officer and/or Webmaster to post Synergy+ to your local VA website or social media.

Social Work Videoconference/Webinar

Hold a videoconference or Webinar for the Veterans Health System and/or VISN. This can be a CEU educational opportunity, and can also include an address to all social work staff by the Director of Social Work Service, Central Office and/or the VISN Director or facility leadership.

Part 2: Rewards and Recognition

Friends of Social Work

Have each social worker nominate a co-worker who is not a social worker as a "Friend of Social Work" and write a short summary explaining why. This can include doctors, nurses, ward clerks, physical therapists, occupational therapists, pharmacists, recreation therapists, or any other co-worker. Produce a certificate of appreciation designating them as a "Friend of Social Work", invite them to a luncheon or cake and punch celebration, read the nomination summary, and present them with the certificate. Variations can include anonymous nominations (so they truly come from the whole service); sending names daily on all employee email; recognizing a different Friend every day on a banner, culminating in a "Friends of Social Work" reception at the end of the month with certificates for the recipients and cake/punch.

Helping Hands of Social Work Drawing

Have social work staff and partners create and decorate an outline of their hands to be collected and placed together on a large poster illustrating the unified effort for ensuring that Veterans receive the care and attention they need. A prize can be given for the best decorated helping hands drawing. This is a fun opportunity for staff or partners to win a dozen donuts for breakfast on a designated morning in March.

Hospital Wide Comedy Program with Music or Film Clips

Create a program using a comedy talk show format such as Johnny Carson. Use the show characters and make a comedy routine with the guest speaking about VA social work. Use applause and laughter signs to stimulate interaction with the audience. Use film clips showing social workers to provide an opening to talk about the history of social work and the involvement of social work in VA medical centers.

Jane Awards

In honor of Jane Addams ("the mother of Social Work"), present **Jane** awards to VA staff and community partners in honor of their advocacy and compassion for the underprivileged. Keep the awards simple by providing them with a yellow carnation and a certificate of your appreciation.

OSCAR Awards

Present Oscars to employees in other services who were exceptionally supportive to the service throughout the year. OSCAR stands for Outstanding Support and Care Appreciation Recognition Award. A certificate of appreciation and an OSCAR trophy plaque can be presented to the recipients at a social work luncheon by two social workers dressed for the role in a tuxedo and a formal gown.

Social Work Certificates of Recognition/Awards

Present deserving social workers with certificates and awards signed by the Director. Create certificates for all staff based on special achievements during the year.

Social Work Proclamation

Ask facility leadership to read a social work proclamation at the start of the month or during your monthly social work staff meeting. This can also be an opportunity for facility leadership to thank social workers for their hard work and contributions. If time is limited, designate one day in March as Social Work Day, (you may have to ask the Director to declare this day). Use this day to have a display table or have leadership address social work staff at a luncheon or staff meeting.

Social Worker of the Year

Have social work staff nominate and select a local Social Worker of the Year. Have the Social Work Executive, Chief of Social Work Service, Chief of Staff, or Medical Center Director presents the award.

Sweeten Someone's Day

Purchase flat chocolate bars and wrap them in a Social Work Month-themed wrapper. Pass out or send as surprises to staff or as favors at a larger event. Examples of wrappers can be found on the [National Social Work SharePoint](#), under Toolkits, Social Work Month, and Candy Bar Wrappers.

Video and Discussion

Organize a social work meeting or luncheon and watch a VA recommended video such as "The Price of Freedom" and have a discussion on the various aspects of the video.

Weekly Social Work Month Activity Themes

Designate weekly themes promoting social work. For example, during the first week, have a luncheon and distribute "Human Touch pins". During the second week post stars on each social worker's door with their picture and title, and give NASW theme buttons to the social workers. During the third week distribute "goody bags" wrapped in patriotic ribbon. During the last week distribute teddy bears with bags of lifesavers and show one of the "Star Thrower" video series.

Part 3: Publicity

Social Media Content

Example Social Work Month VHA Facebook Posts

- March is National Professional Social Work Month. VA Social Workers help #Veterans achieve their goals. Click here to read about VA Social Workers in action:
<http://www.va.gov/HEALTH/NewsFeatures/2014/October/With-A-Little-Help-A-Veterans-Life-Transformed.asp>.
- March is National Professional Social Work Month. VA Social Workers reach out to #Veterans. Click here to read about the difference a VA Social Worker made in Joe's life:
<http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/14842/in-mobile-ala-homeless-veterans-have-a-guardian-angel/>
- VA Social Workers offer #Veterans hope and support. Click here to read the impact a VA Social Worker made for James:
<http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/14818/once-homeless-veteran-now-works-for-va/>
- March is National Professional Social Work Month. VA Social Workers connect #Veterans to services. Click here to read about how a VA Social Worker helped coordinate care:
<http://www.blogs.va.gov/vacareers/1228/laurens-story-part-3/>
- During March, VA celebrates National Professional Social Work Month as a time to thank, support, educate, and empower #Veterans. During our celebration, VA raises awareness to the unique needs of #Veterans and acknowledges the challenges that often accompany transitioning to civilian life after the military.
- VA Social Workers work with community partners in ensuring the very best care for #Veterans. VA Social Workers can advise #Veterans, their family members, and Caregivers about getting help from the VA or from community agencies. Please visit www.socialwork.va.gov/links.asp for more information.
- March is National Professional Social Work Month. VA employs over 13,000 master's degree prepared social workers and trains over 1,000

Master of Social Work (MSW) interns annually. To find out how VA Social Workers are supporting #Veterans go to www.socialwork.va.gov.

Social Work Month VA Careers Facebook Posts

- March is National Professional Social Work Month. Are you interested in becoming a VA Social Worker? Check out MyCareer@VA – a program from the [VA Learning University](http://www.socialwork.va.gov) that helps you build your career at VA. You can use MyCareer@VA to create your career path at VA or explore job options. View the Social Work career group page in the MyCareer@VA VA Career Guides [here](#).
- March is National Professional Social Work Month. VA employs over 13,000 master's degree prepared social workers and trains over 1,000 Master of Social Work (MSW) students annually. To find out how #VASocialWorkers support #Veterans go to www.socialwork.va.gov.

Twitter Messages

- Did you know that March is National Professional #SocialWork Month? Visit www.socialwork.va.gov for more information.
- Find out how a #VASocialWorker helped #Veteran Joe here: <http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/14842/in-mobile-ala-homeless-veterans-have-a-guardian-angel/>
- Are you a #SocialWorker who provides care to #Veterans? Thanks for all you do!
- #SocialWorkers of #Veterans – VA is celebrating you and all you do! Find out more @ www.socialwork.va.gov

All Employee Announcements and Press Releases

Publicize Social Work in your local paper or VA publication. Send an in-house VA link for Social Work Month to all employees. Send weekly emails to all employees with VA social work facts, to advertise any special events or displays, or spotlight links to websites and resources related to social work. Post information on the all employee bulletin throughout the month.

Develop a Calendar for Year Round Publicity

Celebrate social workers every day of the month and/or year by putting out a calendar filled with events and/or pictures. Highlight a particular section or program each month with pictures of the team and information on the role(s) of the social worker(s).

Develop your own Social Work Staff Poster for Display

Display your Social Work staff proudly throughout the hospital during Social Work month and all year long.

Director's Staff Meeting PowerPoint

Reiterate the importance of social work staff at your facility by developing a presentation and sharing at a March staff meeting. This idea can be incorporated all year long to promote social work services. Examples of power point presentations can be found on the [National Social Work SharePoint](#), under Toolkits, Social Work Month Publicity Materials.

Medical Center Handouts

Provide handouts to Veterans and staff during Social Work Month regarding VA social work services. The handouts can be educational on a variety of topics (see Education section), or introducing social work staff with pictures and biographies, and/or brochures on the many programs social workers are involved in.

Newsletter Development or Submission

Test your creativity by creating a Social Work newsletter in appreciation of social work month at your facility and distribute widely. If your facility has an existing newsletter, ask to have an article for social work month included.

Put up a Banner in the lobby of your VAMC or clinic

Put up a Social Work Display — Billboards, Marquees, Bulletin Boards, Poster Presentations — “March is Social Work Month.” Place a display table in a prominent spot for a day, week, or month with a poster display illustrating what social workers do and who the facility social workers are. Medical Media can assist with making a staff picture poster. Put decorated baskets on the table with candy and brochures. Social work fact sheets can also be displayed or given as handouts (samples are attached in Section II of this toolkit). These displays can also be used for educational information on Advance Directives and community resources. If the medical center is large, move the display table periodically to other main areas for more exposure or use the medical center’s main outside billboard or other prominent billboards or marquees.

Social Work Link Publicity on Local Cable Channel

Approach the local cable channel free advertising. Perhaps a Social Work Month logo and a link to a social work webpage/website could be published on the main page of the cable channel during the month of March.

Poster/Banner/Flyer Phrase Examples

- VA social workers are positive, compassionate professionals who take a holistic, psychosocial approach to working with people in hospitals or clinic settings. As helping professionals, VA social workers are trained to work with Veterans from a broad view including social, environmental, psychological and economic perspectives.

- VA social workers provide a variety of services to returning Veterans and service members. Social workers provide guidance to individuals, families and communities dealing with complex issues and choices and connect families and individuals with available resources.
- Social workers are dedicated to improving others ability to function. Social workers assist Veterans to help themselves wherever they need it most. VA social workers will assist Veterans acquiring benefits from the VA, Social Security and other government and community agencies.
- VA social workers provide counseling for marital and/or family problems. Social workers make referrals for help with finances or housing. Social workers assist Veterans in the reduction of stress caused by medical conditions which interfere with daily activities.
- Social workers engage Veterans in discussions about end of life care, including completing advance directives. Social workers provide assistance with hospital discharges and follow-up care.
- Social workers assist in the resolution of social problems that may contribute to unnecessary hospital readmissions. Social workers are here to help you.

Social Work or Social Work Month-Themed Salutation on Your Email

Use the NASW annual theme slogan, the VA SW Association logo, or a social work quote under your electronic signature during Social Work Month or all year long. Please check with your local facility policy on logo utilization.

Web Links to Stories of Social Workers

Share stories of other social workers with staff and other disciplines, especially those which made a positive outcome for a Veteran/Veteran's family.

Part 4: Community

Clothing Drive

Partner with your VA Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV), Domiciliary or local homeless shelter and organize a clothing drive. Ask employees to bring gently used clothing or new socks/underclothes.

Food Drive

Organize a food drive and donate the canned goods to a local charity. Since March is also Nutrition Month, pair up with Nutrition and Food Service to have a joint food drive. Ask employee to bring canned goods to the local area homeless shelter or VA Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) or Domiciliary.

Local March

Have a local march to raise funds for a specific Veteran group, such as the local Senior Council on Aging or Fisher House. Organize a march through the VA, perhaps visiting each unit or area.

“Social Workers: Leaders. Advocates. Champions”

Distribute “Social Workers: Leaders. Advocates. Champions” buttons to all social work staff and key members of the Directors Office. Ask recipients to wear them for the month of March in support of social work. Buttons may be purchased from NASW.

If you have other ideas regarding how to celebrate Social Work Month, please enter your suggestions for consideration on [VA Pulse](#).

Published By

This toolkit was published by the National Social Work Program Office.

In 2007, the National Social Work Public Relations Committee originally created this document. The document has been updated by the committee each year through 2014 when the committee was merged into a larger Care Management and Social Work Service Public Relations Committee. In 2016, when Care Management and Social Work integrated Leadership Councils, the National Social Work Program Office assumed responsibility for updating the document.