



OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK HANDBOOK

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Social Workers

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Summary



Clinical social workers need a master's degree, supervised clinical experience, and a license from the state in which they practice.

[Pay](#)

The median annual wage for social workers was \$61,330 in May 2024.

[Job Outlook](#)

Overall employment of social workers is projected to grow 7 percent from 2023 to 2033, faster than the average for all occupations.

About 67,300 openings for social workers are projected each year, on average, over the decade. Many of those openings are expected to result from the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations or exit the labor force, such as to retire.

[State & Area Data](#)

Explore resources for employment and wages by state and area for social workers.

[Similar Occupations](#)

Compare the job duties, education, job growth, and pay of social workers with similar occupations.

[More Information, Including Links to O*NET](#)

Learn more about social workers by visiting additional resources, including O*NET, a source on key characteristics of workers and occupations.

What They Do ->

What Social Workers Do



Child and family social workers protect vulnerable children and support families in need of assistance.

Social workers help individuals, groups, and families prevent and cope with problems in their everyday lives. Clinical social workers diagnose and treat mental, behavioral, and emotional problems.

Duties

Social workers typically do the following:

- Identify people and communities in need of help
- Assess clients' needs, situations, strengths, and support networks to determine their goals
- Help clients adjust to changes and challenges in their lives, such as illness, divorce, or unemployment
- Research, refer, and advocate for community resources, such as food stamps, childcare, and healthcare, to assist and improve a client's well-being
- Respond to crisis situations such as child abuse and mental health emergencies
- Monitor clients' situations, and follow up to ensure that they have improved
- Maintain case files and records
- Provide psychotherapy services

Social workers help people cope with challenges in their lives. They help with a wide range of situations, such as adopting a child, being diagnosed with a terminal illness, or preventing and treating substance abuse.

Some social workers get involved at a broad level to help community organizations and policymakers develop or improve social programs, services, and conditions. This is sometimes referred to as macro social work.

Advocacy is an important aspect of social work. Social workers advocate or raise awareness with and on behalf of their clients and constituents. Additionally, they may advocate for the social work occupation on local, state, and national levels.

Social workers who are licensed to diagnose and treat mental, behavioral, and emotional disorders are called **clinical social workers (CSW)**, **licensed clinical social workers (LCSW)**, or have a similar title; specific titles vary by state. They provide individual, group, family, and couples therapy; work with clients to develop strategies to change behavior or cope with difficult situations; and refer clients to other resources or services, such as support groups or other mental health workers. Clinical social workers may develop treatment plans with the client, doctors, and other healthcare workers and may adjust the treatment plan if necessary based on their client's progress. They may work in a variety of specialties.

The following are examples of types of social workers:

Child and family social workers protect vulnerable children and help families in need of assistance. They help families find housing or services, such as childcare, or apply for benefits, such as food stamps. They intervene when children are in danger of neglect or abuse. Some help arrange adoptions, locate foster families, or work to reunite families.

School social workers work with teachers, parents, and school administrators to develop plans and strategies to improve students' academic performance and social development. They help students with problems such as aggressive behavior or bullying. Additionally, school social workers meet with families to discuss issues such as access to special education resources or frequent student absences.

Healthcare social workers help clients understand their diagnosis and adjust their lifestyle, housing, or healthcare. For example, they may help people transition from the hospital to their homes and communities. In addition, they may provide information about services, such as home healthcare or support groups, to help clients manage their illness or disease. Social workers help doctors and other healthcare workers understand the effects that diseases and illnesses have on clients' mental and emotional health. Some healthcare social workers specialize in geriatric social work, hospice and palliative care, or medical social work.

Mental health and substance abuse social workers help clients with mental illnesses or addictions. They provide information on services, such as support groups and 12-step programs, to help clients cope with their illness. These workers often are licensed clinical social workers.

<- Summary

Work Environment ->

Work Environment



Although most social workers work in an office, they may spend a lot of time away from the office visiting clients.

Social workers held about 751,900 jobs in 2023. Employment in the detailed occupations that make up social workers was distributed as follows:

Child, family, and school social workers	365,900
Healthcare social workers	193,200
Mental health and substance abuse social workers	123,700
Social workers, all other	69,000

The largest employers of social workers were as follows:

Individual and family services	18%
Local government, excluding education and hospitals	14
State government, excluding education and hospitals	12
Educational services; state, local, and private	10
Community food and housing, emergency and other relief services, and vocational rehabilitation services	3

Most social workers work in an office setting. They may spend time visiting clients and meeting with colleagues and community specialists or other support workers. School social workers may be assigned to multiple schools and travel around the school district to see students. Understaffing and large caseloads may cause the work to be stressful.

Work Schedules

Most social workers are employed full time. They sometimes work evenings, weekends, and holidays to see clients or attend meetings, and they may be on call.

<- What They Do

How to Become One ->

How to Become a Social Worker



Clinical social workers need a master's degree, supervised experience, and a license to provide mental health or counseling services.

Social workers typically need a bachelor's or master's degree in social work from a program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. They also may need a license; specific requirements vary by state.

Clinical social workers need a master's degree, supervised clinical experience, and a license from the state in which they practice.

Education and Training

Most social workers need either a bachelor's or a master's degree from a program accredited by the [Council on Social Work Education](#).

A bachelor's degree in social work (BSW) is the most common requirement for entry-level nonclinical social worker positions. BSW programs teach students about diverse populations, human behavior, social welfare policy, and ethics in social work. All programs require students to complete supervised fieldwork or an internship.

Clinical social workers typically need a master's degree in social work (MSW). These programs prepare students for work in their chosen specialty by developing clinical assessment and diagnostic skills. Some nonclinical social workers also may complete master's-level programs. MSW programs generally take 2 years to complete and include a supervised practicum or internship.

A bachelor's degree in social work is not required in order to enter a master's degree program in social work. Although a bachelor's degree in almost any [field](#) is acceptable, common majors include [public policy and social services](#), [psychology](#), or [social science](#). Recommended coursework includes sociology, economics, and political science. Some programs allow graduates with a bachelor's degree in social work to earn their master's degree in under 2 years.

After obtaining an MSW degree, clinical social workers must complete supervised training and experience. The length of clinical training varies by state but

may take several years.

Licenses, Certifications, and Registrations

All states require clinical social workers to be licensed. Some states also require nonclinical social workers to have a license or credential.

Becoming a licensed clinical social worker requires a master's degree in social work from an accredited program and supervised clinical experience after graduation. After completing their supervised experience, clinical social workers must pass a clinical exam to be licensed.

Because licensing requirements vary by state, those interested should contact their state licensure board. For more information about regulatory licensure boards by state, visit the [Association of Social Work Boards](#).

Important Qualities

Communication skills. Clients talk to social workers about challenges in their lives. To provide effective help, social workers must be able to listen to and understand their clients' needs.

Compassion. Social workers often work with people who are in stressful and difficult situations. To develop strong relationships, they must have patience and empathy for their clients.

Interpersonal skills. Social workers must be able to work with different groups of people. They need to foster healthy and productive relationships with their clients, colleagues, and other support specialists.

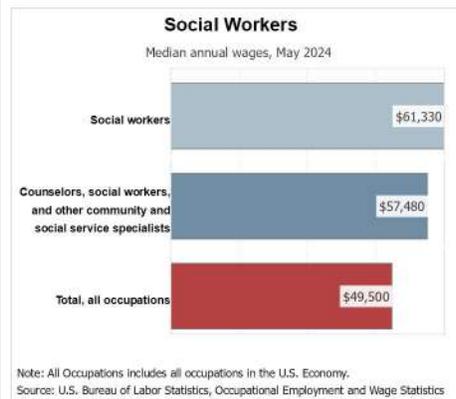
Organizational skills. Social workers must help and manage multiple clients, often assisting with their paperwork or documenting their treatment.

Problem-solving skills. Social workers must analyze their clients' complex situations and develop practical solutions.

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[Pay →](#)

Pay



The median annual wage for social workers was \$61,330 in May 2024. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$41,580, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$99,500.

Median annual wages for social workers in May 2024 were as follows:

Social workers, all other	\$69,480
Healthcare social workers	68,090
Mental health and substance abuse social workers	60,060
Child, family, and school social workers	58,570

In May 2024, the median annual wages for social workers in the top industries in which they worked were as follows:

Educational services; state, local, and private	\$67,620
Local government, excluding education and hospitals	65,920
State government, excluding education and hospitals	59,630
Individual and family services	51,430
Community food and housing, emergency and other relief services, and vocational rehabilitation services	49,980

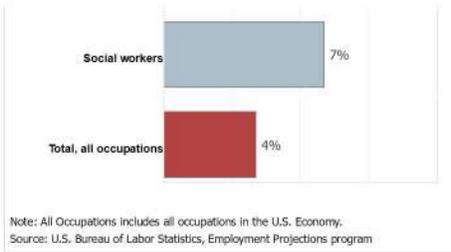
Most social workers are employed full time. They sometimes work evenings, weekends, and holidays to see clients or attend meetings, and they may be on call.

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Job Outlook





Overall employment of social workers is projected to grow 7 percent from 2023 to 2033, faster than the average for all occupations.

About 67,300 openings for social workers are projected each year, on average, over the decade. Many of those openings are expected to result from the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations or exit the labor force, such as to retire.

Employment

Projected employment of social workers varies by occupation (see table).

Child, family, and school social workers will be needed to help strengthen parenting skills, prevent child abuse, and identify alternative homes for children who are unable to live with their biological families. However, employment growth for these social workers may be limited by state and local budget constraints.

Healthcare social workers will continue to be needed to help aging populations and their families adjust to new treatments, medications, and lifestyles.

Employment of mental health and substance abuse social workers will grow as more people seek treatment for mental illness and for substance abuse, especially recovery from opioid use disorder. In addition, drug offenders are increasingly being directed to treatment programs, which are staffed by these social workers, as a supplement or occasionally an alternative to incarceration.

Employment projections data for social workers, 2023–33

Social workers

SOC Code:

21-1020

Employment, 2023:

751,900

Projected Employment, 2033:

806,600

Change, 2023–33 (Percent):

7

Change, 2023–33 (Numeric):

54,700

Employment By Industry:

[Get data](#)

Child, family, and school social workers

SOC Code:

21-1021

Employment, 2023:

365,900

Projected Employment, 2033:

383,800

Change, 2023–33 (Percent):

5

Change, 2023–33 (Numeric):

17,900

Employment By Industry:

[Get data](#)

Healthcare social workers

SOC Code:

21-1022

Employment, 2023:

193,200

Projected Employment, 2033:

211,900

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

Change, 2023–33 (Percent):

10

Change, 2023–33 (Numeric):

18,700

Employment By Industry:[Get data](#)**Mental health and substance abuse social workers****SOC Code:**

21-1023

Employment, 2023:

123,700

Projected Employment, 2033:

138,100

Change, 2023–33 (Percent):

12

Change, 2023–33 (Numeric):

14,400

Employment By Industry:[Get data](#)**Social workers, all other****SOC Code:**

21-1029

Employment, 2023:

69,000

Projected Employment, 2033:

72,800

Change, 2023–33 (Percent):

5

Change, 2023–33 (Numeric):

3,800

Employment By Industry:[Get data](#)

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

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State & Area Data

Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS)

The [Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics](#) (OEWS) program produces employment and wage estimates annually for over 800 occupations. These estimates are available for the nation as a whole, for individual states, and for metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. The link below goes to OEWS data maps for employment and wages by state and area. Use the dropdown boxes to select an occupation.

- [Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics \(OEWS\) Profiles Projections Central](#)

Occupational employment projections are developed for all states by Labor Market Information (LMI) or individual state Employment Projections offices. All state projections data are available at www.projectionscentral.org. Information on this site allows projected employment growth for an occupation to be compared among states or to be compared within one state. In addition, states may produce projections for areas; there are links to each state's websites where these data may be retrieved.

CareerOneStop

CareerOneStop includes hundreds of [occupational profiles](#) with data available by state and metro area. There are links in the left-hand side menu to compare occupational employment by state and occupational wages by local area or metro area. There is also a [salary info tool](#) to search for wages by zip code.

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Similar Occupations

This table shows a list of occupations with job duties that are similar to those of social workers.

[Health Education Specialists](#)**Job Duties:**

Health education specialists develop programs to teach people about conditions affecting well-being.

Entry-Level Education:

Bachelor's degree

2024 Median Pay:

\$63,000

Marriage and Family Therapists

Job Duties:

Marriage and family therapists diagnose and treat cognitive, behavioral, or similar disorders in the context of couples and other relationships.

Entry-Level Education:

Master's degree

2024 Median Pay:

\$63,780

Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists

Job Duties:

Probation officers and correctional treatment specialists assist in rehabilitating law offenders in custody or on probation or parole.

Entry-Level Education:

Bachelor's degree

2024 Median Pay:

\$64,520

Psychologists

Job Duties:

Psychologists study cognitive, emotional, and social processes and behavior by observing, interpreting, and recording how people relate to one another and to their environments.

Entry-Level Education:

[See How to Become One](#)

2024 Median Pay:

\$94,310

Rehabilitation Counselors

Job Duties:

Rehabilitation counselors work with clients to overcome or manage the personal, social, or psychological effects of disabilities on employment or independent living.

Entry-Level Education:

Master's degree

2024 Median Pay:

\$46,110

School and Career Counselors and Advisors

Job Duties:

School counselors help students develop academic and social skills. Career counselors and advisors help people choose a path to employment.

Entry-Level Education:

Master's degree

2024 Median Pay:

\$65,140

Social and Community Service Managers

Job Duties:

Social and community service managers coordinate and supervise programs and organizations that support public well-being.

Entry-Level Education:

Bachelor's degree

2024 Median Pay:

\$78,240

Social and Human Service Assistants

Job Duties:

Social and human service assistants provide client services in a variety of fields, such as psychology, rehabilitation, and social work.

Entry-Level Education:

High school diploma or equivalent

2024 Median Pay:

\$45,120

Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors

Job Duties:

Substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors advise people on a range of issues, such as those relating to alcoholism, addictions, or depression.

Entry-Level Education:

Master's degree

2024 Median Pay:

\$59,190

For more information about social workers and clinical social workers, visit

[Association for Community Organization and Social Action](#)

[National Association of Social Workers](#)

[School Social Work Association of America](#)

For more information about accredited social work degree programs, visit

[Council on Social Work Education](#)

For more information about licensure requirements, visit

[Association of Social Work Boards](#)

Occupational Requirements Survey

For a profile highlighting selected BLS data on occupational requirements, see

[Mental health and substance abuse social workers](#) (PDF)

CareerOneStop

For career videos on social workers, visit

[Child, family, and school workers](#)

[Medical and public health social workers](#)

[Mental health and substance abuse social workers](#)

O*NET

[Child, Family, and School Social Workers](#)

[Healthcare Social Workers](#)

[Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers](#)

[Social Workers, All Other](#)

[← Similar Occupations](#)

SUGGESTED CITATION:

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Social Workers, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/social-workers.htm> (visited August 04, 2025).

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