

## Trends in Social Work Employment In Maine

In January 2007 the Division of Labor Market Information Services of the Maine Department of Labor released the *2006 Healthcare Occupations Report*, which is the result of a collaborative effort between the Maine Department of Labor and the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Data, Research and Vital Statistics. This report looks at health professions in Maine, describing the occupation, educational requirements, Maine schools and graduation rates, projected employment between 2002 and 2012, job vacancies, wages compared to national averages and also presents an analysis of the supply and demand for each profession and a future outlook for the profession. This article is a summary of the information presented in that report regarding social workers. This information may help guide discussions in Maine as we consider the Social Work Reinvestment Initiative Goals and how best to move forward in our state. The full report can be found at: <http://www.maine.gov/labor/lmis/pdf/HealthcareReport.pdf>

The report states that a bachelor's degree is the most common minimum requirement to qualify for a job as a social worker, and that for more than an entry level position, typically a master's degree is required. A master's degree is necessary for positions in health and mental health settings and is generally required for certification for clinical work; supervisory, administrative and staff training positions. Research and college level teaching positions usually require a DSW or PhD. In the 2003/04 school year, Maine schools graduated 72 bachelor degree students and 124 students with masters' degrees.

Generally speaking, Maine expects a growth in social work positions greater than the average growth for all Maine occupations. Looking at the different social work specialties, in the area of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, the number of social work positions is expected to increase from 1,375 in 2002 to 1,918 in 2012. In Child, Family and School the increase is expected to be from 2,089 in 2002 to 2582 in 2012. In medical and public health that increase is expected to be 240, up from 671 in 2002 to 911 in 2012. Comparing these figures to national averages, Maine sees greater growth in the Mental Health and Substance Abuse area than nationally (3.4% average annual change compared to 3.0 nationally); figures consistent with the national rate in the area of Child, Family and School at 2.1%; and a higher rate than the national average for Medical and Public Health with Maine at 3.1% compared to 2.6% nationally. In addition to growth in these areas, of the average annual openings each year, roughly two-thirds will be the result of opening due to replacement.

The report summarizes the outlook for social worker jobs as being competitive in the cities but good opportunities in rural areas. It also predicts that with Maine's rapidly growing elderly population, there will be a higher demand for social workers with a specialty in gerontology. The demand for social workers in hospitals will be slower as patient days become more limited, but that there will be increased opportunities in home healthcare services, assisted-living, senior living communities, nursing homes, long-term care facilities and hospices.

The report also predicts rapid growth for substance abuse social workers as treatment programs become more of an alternative to prison for substance abusers. Private social service agencies will see an increase in the number of social workers employed, but may tend to hire more lower-paid assistant type workers rather than social workers. For social workers in private practice there may be some growth, but managed care policy restrictions on mental health services may limit those opportunities.

Written by Sally Sutton, MA, MSSW, Senior Policy Analyst, Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine; NASW Maine Chapter Vice President