

Community and Social Services

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers work with people who are abusing alcohol or other substances, in recovery, or have other mental problems. They may provide individual and group therapy or crisis intervention, teach life skills, engage in outreach, and help with treatment plans after release from in-patient substance abuse or mental health treatment. They often work with the families or loved ones of people who are dealing with addiction or mental illness. The work may take place in private practice, in outpatient treatment facilities, or in inpatient treatment programs, where clients reside at the facility. Additionally, some mental health and substance abuse social workers may work in employee-assistance programs at a particular company, with a focus on job-related pressures.

Although work in this area can be very rewarding, it also can be very emotionally draining. Social workers in this area need to plan for and develop supports for their own stress management and emotional well-being. Working conditions vary from clean, well lit and comfortable offices to state sponsored clinics. Their work week is generally 40 hours although longer hours may be required if there is a shortage of social workers in their organization.

Education/Training

How to Obtain:

A bachelor's degree is the minimum requirement for entry into the occupation, but some positions require an advanced degree, typically a Master's in Social Work (MSW).

New York and all other states also have licensing boards. Licenses are not necessarily required for all positions, or for entry and training, but are typically required for advancement. License requirements in most states commonly include: written examination, continuing education, or 1-3 years of experience. The requirements for a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) in New York include:

- A statement of moral character
- 21 years of age,
- A Masters in Social Work
- 12 hours of clinical coursework
- 3 years of supervised experience
- A written examination.

In addition to licensinig or instead of (depending on the position), social workers in the area of substance abuse may pursue certification as an Alcohol or Other Drug Abuse Counselor (AODAC) through the International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium (ICRC). Requirements include:

- Prior hours of supervised experience (numbers vary based on educational degree),
- at least 270 hours of education,
- signing a code of ethics, and
- a written examination.

In New York State, the AODAC examination is offered through the Office of Alcoholism & Substance Abuse Services (OASAS).

Some counselors working in Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Centers also pursue voluntary certification through the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC), which requires a Masters Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling through an accredited program, internship or supervised work hours, and passage of a written examination.

More specialized credentials, involving continuing education, though not mandatory, may be helpful for advancement after initial licensing, and are available through the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).

More Information on Licensing and Certification:

- Directory of state licensing boards:
<https://www.datapathdesign.com/ASWB/Laws/Prod/cgi-bin/LawBoardWebsitedll.dll/EXEC/0/0ygtpd30za0u3g1eyif1b115x868>
- New York State licensing information: <http://www.op.nysed.gov/prof/sw/>
- International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium (ICRC):
<http://www.icrcaoda.org/AODASTandards.asp>
- Office of Alcoholism & Substance Abuse Services (OASAS):
<http://www.oasas.state.ny.us/sqa/credentialing/index.cfm>
- Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC):
http://www.crcrcertification.com/pages/about_crc_certification/46.php
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW):
<http://www.socialworkers.org/credentials/default.asp>

Average Costs:

Tuition and fees for a master's degree in the social and behavioral sciences, such as a Master's in Social Work (MSW), costs an average of \$10,900* per year. Completion time is generally two years.

Licensure and certification occurs at the state level: Costs vary by state, ranging from \$40-\$500. The cost in New York state is approximately \$300, plus the cost of any exam study aids.

For the Alcohol & Other Drug Abuse Counselor examination in New York, the cost is approximately \$300, plus the cost of any exam study aids.

For the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification examination, the cost is \$385, plus the cost of any exam study aids.

Costs of continuing education vary.

*Note: This figure does not include federal, state, or university financial aid resources such as grants, fellowships, scholarships or work study. It also does not include vocational rehabilitation or other state resources available specifically to people with disabilities. The out-of-pocket expense may be significantly less.