

Social Worker

You sit with people on the worst day of their lives and find them a way through. Licensed, underpaid and badly needed.

TYPICAL PAY

\$63,770

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$40k to \$105k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

4 to 6 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Hospitals, schools, county agencies, clinics, shelters, home v...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Volunteer somewhere real: a shelter, a crisis line, a youth program. Admissions committees and employers both look for it.
- 2 Bachelor of Social Work** 4 years
A four-year degree from a program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education, including a supervised field placement. A related degree also works if you plan to do a master's.
- 3 Master of Social Work** 1 to 2 years
Two years, or about one year with advanced standing if your bachelor's was in social work. Required for clinical practice and for most hospital jobs.
- 4 Pass the licensing exam** After graduation
The exams written by the Association of Social Work Boards are used by state boards across the country. They run 122 questions in four hours.
- 5 Supervised clinical hours** 2 to 3 years
To become a licensed clinical social worker, roughly two years of supervised practice after the master's degree, with the exact hours set by your state board.

Pros and cons

- + Work that plainly matters, with results you can see in one person's life
- + Licensed profession with a clear ladder into clinical practice
- + Employable everywhere: every county, hospital and school district needs this
- Starting pay is low for the education it takes
- Caseloads are often far beyond what is reasonable
- You absorb other people's trauma, and burnout rates are high

Optional boosts

Clinical practice. Medical and hospital social work. School social work. Child welfare.

Good to know

The title is protected, the work is not

In most states you cannot legally call yourself a social worker without a license, but plenty of people do similar work under other titles: case manager, family advocate, outreach worker. The license is what lets y...

The federal government is a huge employer

The Department of Veterans Affairs employs social workers across its hospitals and clinics in numbers that rival any private system, on federal pay scales with federal benefits. It is one of the best-paid pla...

Where these numbers come from

O*NET OnLine: Social Workers, All Other (21-1029.00)

My Next Move: Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers (21-1023.00)

Association of Social Work Boards: the licensing exams

Council on Social Work Education: accreditation

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/social-worker>



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