

CalSWEC Aging Competencies

Foundation Competencies First Year

I. Age, Diversity, and Disadvantage

All social work students should have the knowledge of self as it relates to ageism as well as racism and sexism. Social work student's practice foundation must incorporate the perspective of the late life impact of inequality based on disadvantage over the life course. A strength-based perspective recognizes the positive benefits of ethnic/ cultural values and social supports for older persons. Culturally sensitive social work practice must lead to the ability to work with and on behalf of diverse groups of older persons.

- 1.1 Identify and assess one's own values and biases regarding aging and, as necessary, take steps to dispel myths about aging.
 - a. Recognize ageism and its impacts on person's late life opportunities to engage in meaningful ways in society.
 - b. Identify the way in which age is socially constructed and the differences in social cohorts.

- 1.2 Recognize inequality in the aging experience as it relates to gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, functional ability and class.
 - a. Understand the impact of race/ethnicity, poverty and class on the aging process.
 - b. Understand challenges and hardships faced by older women particularly older women of color.
 - c. Understand the socio-historical context of individual's sexual orientation.

- 1.3 Address respectfully the diversity of cultural, spiritual, and ethnic values and beliefs of older adults and families.
 - a. Identify and critically evaluate how one's own cultural beliefs may positively or negatively impact one's practice with ethnic elders, as well as the capacity to act according to professional ethics.
 - b. Understand the roles that elders from different cultural backgrounds play in family, community, and society.

- 1.4 Identify how policies, regulations, and programs differentially impact older adults and their caregivers, particularly among historically disadvantaged populations (e.g., women and elders of color).
 - a. Know that policies for the guarantee of a basic standard of living, income security and health care coverage in late life are a foundation for quality of life in old age.
 - b. Understand impact of policies in later life that have occurred over the life course such as civil rights, education, immigration and social welfare policies.

II. Core Foundation Practice with Older Adults

The foundation year focuses on the development of *basic skills* in assessment and intervention. All social workers will work with and/or on behalf of older adults, and therefore, require fundamental practice competence in the assessment of older adults.

2.1 Establish rapport and maintain an effective working relationship with older adults and family members.

2.2 Use empathy and sensitive interviewing skills to engage older persons in identifying their strengths and problems.

2.3 Assess social functioning (e.g., social skills, social activity level) and social support of older adults.

2.4 Adapt interviewing methods to potential sensory, language, and cognitive limitations of the older adult.

2.5 Respect and promote older adult clients' right to dignity and self-determination within the context of the law and safety concerns.

2.6 Perform an assessment for service eligibility for older adults' seeking medical health services, mental health services, and community-based services, including their need for assistance with activities of daily living (ADL).

2.7 Be aware of standardized assessment and diagnostic tools that are appropriate for use with older adults (e.g., depression scale, Mini-Mental Status Exam).

2.8 Develop clear, timely, and appropriate service or care plans with measurable objectives for older adults.

2.9 Adapt approaches (e.g., behavioral) and interventions (counseling and psychotherapy) to enhance older persons' coping capacities and mental health.

2.10 Provide social work case management to link elders and their families to resources and services and to conduct long-term planning.

2.11 Assess and assist caregivers in order to reduce their stress levels and maintain their own mental and physical health.

2.12 Utilize group interventions with older adults and their families (e.g., bereavement groups, reminiscence groups).

2.13 Use educational strategies to provide older persons and their families with information related to wellness and disease management (e.g., Alzheimer's disease, end of life care).

2.14 Understand the social work principles of autonomy and self-determination as applied to decision making with or on behalf of older adult clients, with special attention to those who have limited decisional capacity.

2.15 Support individuals and families dealing with end of life issues related to death, dying, bereavement, and loss.

2.16 Understand the perspective and values of social work in relation to working effectively with other disciplines in geriatric interdisciplinary practice with older adults, their caregivers, and the community.

2.17 Understand how to effectively terminate work with older clients and their families.

2.18 Advocate on behalf of older adults with agencies and other professionals to help them obtain quality services.

III. Aging, Human Behavior and the Social Environment

Knowledge of human behavior and developmental theories must be substantially expanded beyond childhood to encompass adulthood and older adulthood in order to prepare for social work practice with persons of all ages. Understanding the aging experience requires relating human growth and the life-course perspective to the interaction of socio-historical context, opportunity structures, cohort differences and adaptive resources.

3.1 Identify major concepts and theories of normal biological, psychological, and social aging including healthy and positive aging.

3.2 Identify stages, process, milestones of adult human growth and development and understand changes in functional capacity and disability associated with health conditions in old age.

3.3 Understand the connection between aging theories (life course, social exchange, political economy, and social capital) and social work perspectives, which have been related to practice with older adults (e.g., person-in environment, social justice, strengths-based perspective).

3.4 Become knowledgeable about losses, changes, and transitions over the life cycle that impact older people and their families.

3.5 Appreciate the influence of culture on roles, stages, and transitions in the life course.

3.6 Understands the unique mental health needs of people in transition between life stages.

3.7 Identify stages in the family life cycle including the late life family and differentiate generational roles and interaction.

3.8 Identify major theories regarding adaptive and maladaptive behaviors across the life-span, including the impact of these behaviors on the health and mental health of older adults.

IV. Aging Social Welfare Policy and Administration

Social work practice with older persons and their families requires knowledge of the policies that shape and regulate the continuum of care and the services available to older adults. Practice in the aging service network must be grounded in knowledge of program development and sound administrative principles.

4.1 Identify organizational policies, procedures and resources of agencies to facilitate or act as barriers in the provision of services to diverse older adult populations and their family caregivers.

4.2 Identify service gaps, fragmentation, discrimination, and barriers that impact service utilization among older persons.

4.3 Incorporate the needs, values, and perspectives of older adults in planning and designing aging programs.

4.4 Adhere to laws and public policies related to older adults (e.g., elder abuse reporting, legal guardianship, powers of attorney, wills, advance directives, and Do-Not-Resuscitate orders).

4.5 Identify and understand major policies and eligibility that provide funding for aging programs and services including the following:

- a. Income maintenance policies: Social Security and Supplemental Security Income
- b. Health care policies: Medicare and Medicaid
- c. Private and Non-Profit Health and Social Services
- d. Older Americans Act Programs including the National Family Caregiver Program

4.6 Identify ways to outreach to older adults and their families to insure appropriate use of the service continuum (e.g., health promotion, mental health, home and community based care, long term care) that includes understanding the diversity of elders' attitudes toward the acceptance of services

4.7 Advocate and organize service providers, community organizations, policy makers, and the public to meet the needs and issues of a growing older population.

- a. Oppose age discrimination in relations to health, housing, employment and transportation

4.8 Use evaluation and research findings to improve practice and program outcomes for older adults.

Reference

Berkman, B., Dobrof, R., Harry, L., & Damron-Rodriguez, J. (1997). Social work. In S. M. Klein (Ed.), *A national agenda for geriatric education: White papers* (pp. 53-85). New York: Springer Publishing Co.

Damron-Rodriguez, J.A. (in Press). Moving ahead: Developing geriatric social work competencies. In B. Berkman, et al. (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Social Work and Aging*. Oxford University Press.