

***Medicare Changes for Clinical Social Workers***  
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The Clinical Social Work Association suggests changes to the way that clinical social workers are included as mental health providers in Medicare. The 234,000 Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) in the United States (CSWA, 2014) provide approximately 40-60% of all mental health care treatment in the country for the past 20 years (SAMHSA, 2001, NASW, 2003, CSWA, 2014).

Along with psychologists and psychiatrists, LCSWs are the only group of mental health clinicians covered to provide psychotherapy to Medicare beneficiaries. LCSWs have had extensive training in diagnosing mental health disorders and providing psychotherapy; this is included in almost every state clinical social work licensure law's scope of practice.

Here are the changes that would be needed to allow Medicare beneficiaries full access to the mental health and psychosocial skills of LCSWs:

*Medicare Part A* – LCSWs are not independently covered as mental health clinicians in Medicare Part A, i.e., while beneficiaries are in a skilled nursing facility or a hospital. LCSWs should be removed from the SNF consolidated billing system so that they can bill Patients who need time in a skilled nursing facility who are in ongoing mental health treatment need to maintain their established treatment relationships with LCSWs.

*Medicare Part A and B* - LCSWs would also need to be included under billing codes which are used for SNFs and hospitals under Medicare Parts A and B. Unless LCSWs are covered by these codes, they will not be able to bill for services.

*Reimbursement for LCSWs* - Though LCSWs use the *same psychotherapy CPT codes* as other Medicare-covered clinicians, since 1974 LCSWs have been reimbursed at a rate that is 25% less for psychotherapy services. To pay LCSWs at a rate that is so much lower than other clinicians for the same services is demeaning to the work provided by LCSWs. This disparity needs to be corrected.

LCSWs are the backbone of the mental health treatment system. It is time for Medicare to include them in Medicare Part A as well as Part B and reimburse them at rates that are the equivalent of other clinicians providing the mental health services provided by LCSWs.

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