March 26, 2020--The National Association of Social Workers – Texas Chapter (NASW/TX) Board would like to thank all of its members for their work in their communities as we all adjust to the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic. We understand just how turbulent and uncertain the situation is, and we want to offer our support and guidance as we all join together to take the steps necessary to stop the spread of the virus.

Social workers are on the front lines in so many areas: schools, hospitals, the child welfare and criminal justice systems, clinics and more. But with social distancing in effect, and shelter in place looking like the next steps for most of us, it may be a challenge for us to feel like we can’t engage with our clients in ways that we are accustomed to. And while telehealth may be an option for some, we know that not all of us will have that opportunity based on our work.

We encourage you to stay involved any way you can, and we would like to share a variety of recommendations on how to maintain an effective presence under local travel restrictions.

- Get involved at the branch level – With branch meetings moving to virtual, you can engage with your branch chair and see about scheduling speakers or presenting on a topic of your own. It’s more important than ever that we stay connected as a chapter during this time, and a great way to keep in touch with your social work peers is by developing presentations that continue to grow our social work knowledge, even if we’re not actively working like we were before.
- Develop a virtual support group – The Houston Branch hosts a weekly virtual meeting as a place where members can connect. Half of the meeting is dedicated to resource sharing, and half is set up as a place to process the situation in a supportive environment. You can bring members together to share updates and info, but also to offer feedback and ensure that social distancing doesn’t mean a lack of social connections.
- Volunteer – This one may not be advisable to all, and we recommend that you consider the well-being of yourself, family and close group first, but there are many organizations that need help at this critical time. Meals on Wheels is looking for food deliverers in many communities across Texas, as there are older Texans unable or unadvised to leave their homes. The nation is currently facing a shortage of blood, and now may be a vital time to give at a local blood bank. Can you sew? Many hospitals, clinics and organizations that utilize healthcare workers have put out a call for masks, as there is a short supply now. Google your city or community to see where they are needed most, then use this set of templates to help fill that need.
- Now may be a great time to consider those who will be most hit by the lack of work: hourly wage earners. You can tip for two when you order a meal for delivery from a local business, buy gift cards from local stores and restaurants to use later, give to food banks, or even just conduct a wellness check on older or other neighbors in your community by stopping by to see if they are doing okay or need anything, all while remaining a good six feet apart.

We know many of you work critical jobs and will still be seeing clients, so please take precautions to keep yourself and others as safe as possible. But for others it may feel debilitating being forced to remain indoors and
apart. You may even be accessing mental health or other services yourself, as we all need various supports in these stressful times. We want you to know that your board is actively working on ways that we can offer our input and guidance to the staff at NASW/TX, and find ways to ensure that they have the tools they need to connect social workers and social work resources to our communities across the state. We encourage you to reach out to Will Francis, the Executive Director, with any specific needs or ideas for how the association can more effectively respond as the situation develops. Be on the lookout for advocacy alerts from the state and national level as well, as there are numerous budgetary and legislative solutions in the works that will need our collective advocacy.

And lastly, remember that it is social work month, a time to celebrate and elevate all that we do as professionals and a profession. We’d like to end on a quote by Bernice Johnson Reagon, a founding member of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee’s Freedom Singers in the Albany Movement in Georgia: *Life’s challenges are not supposed to paralyze you; they're supposed to help you discover who you are.* We encourage everyone to take this time to process who you are as a person and social worker, to remember that you have so much value to yourself and others, and that there are people and communities that need you. Activism begins with that first action, and whether it’s through engaging online or safely in the world, as a social worker you are ready for this, and we have your back.