

Social Work Intern Practicum Stipend (SWIPS) Program

The Social Work Intern Practicum Stipend (SWIPS) program delivers stipends to undergraduate and graduate-level social work students as compensation for their 400-500 hour field practicum. Eligible students must be enrolled in a social work program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) to ensure students complete the required professional competencies. This initiative, to be overseen and implemented by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), seeks to address the statewide social work workforce shortage through increased accessibility to social work degrees and careers.

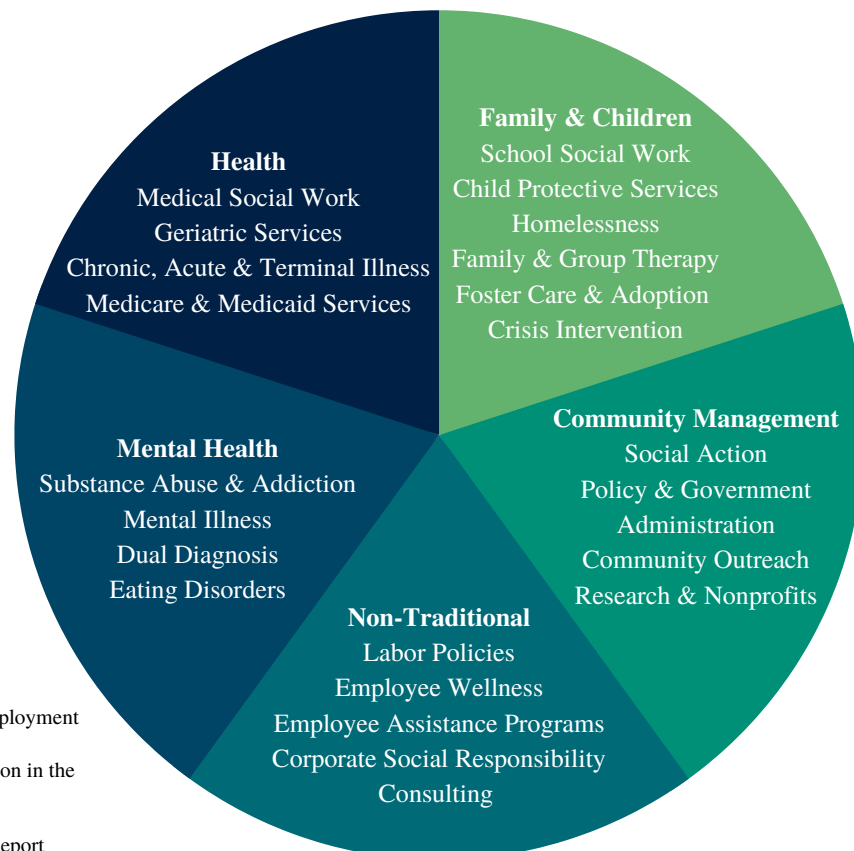
Background

Social work student practicums are uniquely intense 400–500-hour internships that are required to graduate and are widely uncompensated. Practicums are a critical component of social work education as they allow students to uncover their passions, apply classroom skills in the field, and build their own career paths while in school. These students have completed coursework and received training to deliver necessary community services across a variety of areas including healthcare, education, criminal justice, immigration, and child welfare. However, these spaces within the public service sector are already chronically underfunded and, as a result, field sites are unable to provide compensation and are generally reliant on the valuable contributions of unpaid practicum students. For those who work to support themselves while in school or who have other major responsibilities such as child rearing, this comes at a great economic and personal cost. Social work students are often forced to take on additional debt and risk compromising their employment stability, academic achievement, family responsibilities, and mental or even physical health. The culmination of this issue results in stunted workforce development for social work in our state. There is a measurable shortage of professional social workers and mental health providers nationwide. However, some states have created practicum compensation programs in an effort to combat this workforce crisis.

Quick Facts

- In a 2018 study, **83% of social work student participants were employed alongside their practicum** and **45% worked over 30 hours per week as a full-time employee.**¹
- A 2020 survey on Social Work Programs found that **70% of baccalaureate social work graduates and 73% of master's graduates have educational debt.**²
- **Texas ranks in the top five states with the most severe social work shortages projected for 2030,** with an anticipated **deficit of 33,825 professionals,** approximately.³

Social Work Career Paths by Field Area



[1] Benner, K., & Curl, A.L. (2018). Exhausted, Stressed, and Disengaged: Does Employment Create Burnout for Social Work Students? Journal of Social Work Education, 54.

[2] Council on Social Work Education. (2021). 2020 statistics on social work education in the United States. <https://www.cswe.org/Research-Statistics/Research-Briefs-and-Publications/2020-Annual-Statistics-on-Social-Work-Education>

[3] Lin, V. W., Lin, J., & Xiaoming Zhang. (2016). U.S. Social Worker Workforce Report Card: Forecasting Nationwide Shortages. Social Work, 61(1), 7–15. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swv047>

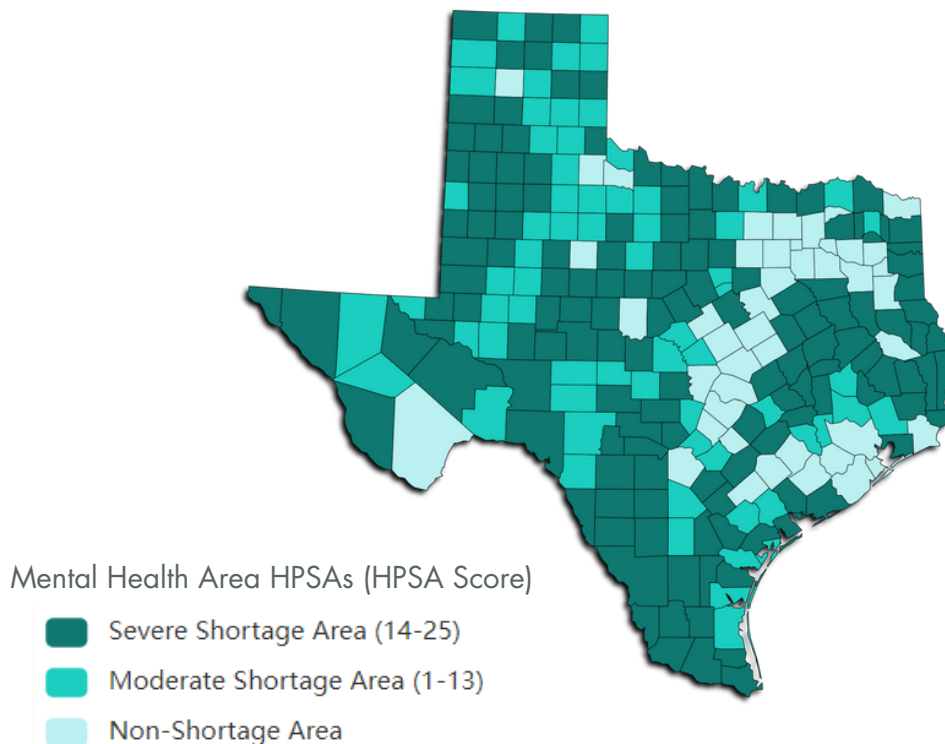
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Relevance

This initiative is connected to several priorities that have been outlined for the 88th Legislature. The Senate Special Committee to Support All Texans, formed in acknowledgement of the tragedy at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, confirmed the shortage of social workers and other mental health professionals in its Interim Report. Multiple subject matter experts in mental health expressed the need to create paid internship opportunities for social work students to build a sustainable workforce. Notably, the committee provided the following recommendation:

*“Paid Fellowship and Internship Opportunities: The Legislature should support mental health professionals in their career by offering paid-internships and fellowships for licensed professional counselors and social workers. Increasing the number of mental health providers will require an increase of providers across the spectrum - not just psychiatrists but also psychologists, social workers and counselors. Texas has a compelling interest in assisting providers to reach their pinnacle of their ability to practice independently by offsetting the cost of supervision.”*⁴

Federally Designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas⁵



[4] SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO PROTECT ALL TEXANS INTERIM REPORT TO THE 88TH LEGISLATURE. (2022). https://senate.texas.gov/cmtes/87/c639/c639_InterimReport_2022.pdf

[5] Map generated from HRSA data: Health Resources & Services Administration (2022). HPSA Finder. <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/hpsa-find>