In schools, hospitals, mental health facilities and clinics. In fact, there are an estimated 682,000 active social workers in the United States. However, their compensation lags.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, social work is one of the fastest-growing professions in the United States, with about 110,000 more social workers expected to enter the profession in just seven years.

Overall, social work employment is projected to grow 16% by 2026, much faster than the average for all occupations.

Although 90 percent of social workers are satisfied with the life-affirming, invaluable work they do, social work salaries lag behind those of other helping professions such as nurses, high school teachers, and police officers.

Median annual wage for registered nurses: $70,000
Median annual wage for police officers and detectives: $62,960
Median annual wage for high school teachers: $59,170
Median annual wage for elementary school teachers: $57,160
Median annual wage for social workers: $47,980

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics; Profile of the Social Work Workforce; The George Washington University and Health Workforce Institute and School of Nursing; New Social Workers: Results of the Nationwide Survey of 2017 Social Work Graduates; The National Social Work Workforce Study
The main educational pathways to working as a social worker are:
A bachelor’s or master’s degree

BSW enrollment: 60,306
MSW enrollment: 63,569
Doctoral enrollment: 1,052

Types of Jobs Taken by New Social Workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Type</th>
<th>BSW</th>
<th>MSW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct work with individuals, families or groups</td>
<td>77.1%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct work with communities</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect social work</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work higher education</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other social work positions</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs outside of traditional social work where a social work degree is important</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where Social Workers Are Employed

- Self-employed or family business: 2.4%
- Private, for-profit companies and businesses: 22.3%
- Private, nonprofit or charitable organizations: 34.3%
- Federal, state and local government social workers combined: 41%

Top Paying Sectors for Social Workers

In May 2017, the median annual wage for social workers in the top industries in which they worked were as follows:

- Hospitals: state, local, and private: $58,490
- Local government, excluding education and hospitals: $52,900
- Ambulatory health care services: $48,340
- State government, excluding education and hospitals: $46,120
- Individual and family services: $40,800

Social Workers’ Incomes

In terms of mean income, those with master’s degrees in social work earn about $13,000 more than those with bachelor’s degrees in social work. Those with doctorate degrees in social work earn some $20,000 to $25,000 more than MSWs. Although MSWs earn most in large cities or urban clusters, BSWs earn more in medium and small cities.