WHAT IS A LICENSED CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKER (LCSW)?

- There are approximately 3000 Licensed Clinical Social Workers in PA.
- An LCSW is a provider of mental health services licensed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to provide comprehensive mental health treatment (LCSWs are governed by the Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists and Professional Counselors Act and licensed by the State Board of Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists, and Professional Counselors).

- Each LCSW, at a minimum, has met the following standards for licensure:
  - Master’s degree in social work from an accredited program with at least 48 credit hours with a specialty in direct practice social work. This includes a minimum of 900 hours of supervised practice experience;
  - Post-graduate supervision of clinical practice, a minimum of 3600 hours (approximately an additional two years beyond graduate school); and
  - Passed the Clinical Exam administered by the American Social Work Board (ASWB). This exam includes specific questioning on various topics, including assessment, diagnosis and intervention planning. (The ASWB exam is utilized for licensure by all states except for California).

- In the past, clinical social workers have been referred to as psychiatric social workers.
- Clinical social work practice is the professional application of social work theory and methods to the treatment and prevention of psychosocial dysfunction, disability, or impairment, including emotional and mental disorders. The goal of clinical social work is to enhance the psychosocial functioning of individuals and families. It is based on knowledge of theories of human development within a psychosocial context. Clinical social work services consist of assessment; diagnosis; treatment, including psychotherapy and counseling; client-centered advocacy; consultation; and evaluation.

DIAGNOSIS

- Currently in PA, unnecessary confusion exists among providers and consumers of mental health services because the Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists and Professional Counselors Act (Act) is silent about LCSWs’ right to diagnose emotional disorders although LCSWs are clearly trained and educated to do so.

- In order to provide clarity and consistency for consumers, regulators, insurers and licensed professionals, the PA Social Work Coalition supports amending the Act to include a specific authorization for diagnosis. In addition we support defining “diagnosis” to insure that the public knows what LCSWs are trained and authorized to do.

- 35 states + D.C. explicitly authorize Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) to “diagnose” in their statutes. AK, AZ, CO, CT, DC, DE, FL, HI, IA, ID, KS, KY, LA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MS, MO, MT, NC, NV, NM, NY, OH, OK, OR, RI, SC, SD, TX, VT, WA, WI, WV, and WY

- Diagnosis is a critical component for determining comprehensive mental health treatment. LCSWs are valued mental health providers and are trained to provide diagnosis of emotional disorders in addition to the treatment that follows a diagnostic understanding of the individual's problem. This current standard of practice should be clarified in statute.

- By including diagnosis in the Act, LCSWs are clarifying in statute the services they currently provide which are often reimbursed by insurance companies. They are not enlarging their scope of practice nor their boundaries of professional competence.

Prepared by the Pennsylvania Social Work Coalition:
- National Association of Social Workers, Pennsylvania Chapter
- Pennsylvania Catholic Conference
- Pennsylvania Society for Clinical Social Work
- Clinical Social Work Guild 49, Office and Professional Employees International Union, AFL-CIO