
Social and Human Service Assistants

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Significant Points

- A bachelor's degree usually is not required for these jobs, but employers increasingly seek individuals with relevant work experience or education beyond high school.
- Employment is projected to grow much faster than average for all occupations.
- Job opportunities should be excellent, particularly for applicants with appropriate postsecondary education, but wages remain low.

Nature of the Work

Social and human service assistants help social workers, health care workers, and other professionals to provide services to people. Social and human service assistant is a generic term for workers with a wide array of job titles, including human service worker, case management aide, social work assistant, community support worker, mental health aide, community outreach worker, life skills counselor, or gerontology aide. They usually work under the direction of workers from a variety of fields, such as nursing, psychiatry, psychology, rehabilitative or physical therapy, or social work. The amount of responsibility and supervision they are given varies a great deal. Some have little direct supervision—they may run a group home, for example. Others work under close direction.

Social and human service assistants provide services to clients to help them improve their quality of life. They assess clients' needs, investigate their eligibility for benefits and services such as food stamps, Medicaid, or welfare, and help to obtain them. They also arrange for transportation and escorts, if necessary, and provide emotional support. Social and human service assistants monitor and keep case records on clients and report progress to supervisors and case managers.

Social and human service assistants play a variety of roles in a community. They may organize and lead group activities, assist clients in need of counseling or crisis intervention, or administer food banks or emergency fuel programs, for example. In halfway houses, group homes, and government-supported housing programs, they assist adults who need supervision with personal hygiene and daily living skills. They review clients' records, ensure that they take their medication, talk with family members, and confer with medical personnel and other caregivers to provide insight into clients' needs. Social and human service assistants also give emotional support and help clients become involved in community recreation programs and other activities.

In psychiatric hospitals, rehabilitation programs, and outpatient clinics, social and human service assistants work with psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and others to help clients master everyday living skills, communicate more effectively, and live well with others. They support the client's participation in a treatment plan, such as individual or group counseling or occupational therapy.



Social and human service assistants help clients apply for benefits and services, like food stamps or welfare.

The work, while satisfying, can be emotionally draining. Understaffing and relatively low pay may add to the pressure.

Work environment. Working conditions of social and human service assistants vary. Some work in offices, clinics, and hospitals, while others work in group homes, shelters, sheltered workshops, and day programs. Traveling to see clients is also required for some jobs. Sometimes working with clients can be dangerous even though most agencies do everything they can to ensure their workers' safety. Most assistants work 40 hours a week; some work in the evening and on weekends.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

A bachelor's degree is not required for most jobs in this occupation, but employers increasingly seek individuals with relevant work experience or education beyond high school.

Education and training. Many employers prefer to hire people with some education beyond high school. Certificates or associate degrees in subjects such as human services, gerontology or one of the social or behavioral sciences meet many employers' requirements. Some jobs may require a bachelor's or master's degree in human services or a related field, such as counseling, rehabilitation, or social work.

Human services degree programs have a core curriculum that trains students to observe patients and record information, conduct patient interviews, implement treatment plans, employ problem-solving techniques, handle crisis intervention matters, and use proper case management and referral procedures. Many programs utilize field work to give students hands-on experience. General education courses in liberal arts, sciences, and the humanities also are part of most curriculums. Most programs also offer specialized courses related to addictions, gerontology, child protection, and other areas. Many degree programs require completion of a supervised internship.

The level of education workers have often influenced the kind of work they are assigned and the degree of responsibility that is given to them. For example, workers with no more than a high school education are likely to receive extensive on-the-job training to work in direct-care services, helping clients to fill out paperwork, for example. Workers with a college degree, however, might do supportive counseling, coordinate program activities, or manage a group home. Social and human service assistants with proven leadership ability, especially from paid or volunteer experience in social services, often have greater

autonomy in their work. Regardless of the academic or work background of employees, most employers provide some form of in-service training to their employees such as seminars and workshops.

Other qualifications. These workers should have a strong desire to help others, effective communication skills, a sense of responsibility, and the ability to manage time effectively. Many human services jobs involve direct contact with people who are vulnerable to exploitation or mistreatment; so patience and understanding are also highly valued characteristics.

It is becoming more common for employers to require a criminal background check, and in some settings, workers may be required to have a valid driver’s license.

Advancement. Formal education is almost always necessary for advancement. In general, advancement to case management, rehabilitation, or social work jobs requires a bachelor’s or master’s degree in human services, counseling, rehabilitation, social work, or a related field.

Employment

Social and human service assistants held about 339,000 jobs in 2006. Over 60 percent were employed in the health care and social assistance industries. Nearly 3 in 10 were employed by State and local governments, primarily in public welfare agencies and facilities for mentally disabled and developmentally challenged individuals.

Job Outlook

Employment of social and human service assistants is expected to grow by nearly 34 percent through 2016. Job prospects are expected to be excellent, particularly for applicants with appropriate postsecondary education.

Employment change. The number of social and human service assistants is projected to grow by nearly 34 percent between 2006 and 2016, which is much faster than the average for all occupations. This occupation will have a very large number of new jobs arise, about 114,000 over the projections decade. Faced with rapid growth in the demand for social and human services, many employers increasingly rely on social and human service assistants.

Demand for social services will expand with the growing elderly population, who are more likely to need adult day care, meal delivery programs, support during medical crises, and other services. In addition, more social and human service assistants will be needed to provide services to pregnant teenagers, people who are homeless, people who are mentally disabled or developmentally challenged, and people who are substance abusers.

Job training programs are also expected to require additional social and human service assistants. As social welfare policies shift focus from benefit-based programs to work-based initia-

tives, there will be more demand for people to teach job skills to the people who are new to, or returning to, the workforce.

Residential care establishments should face increased pressures to respond to the needs of the mentally and physically disabled. The number of people who are disabled is increasing, and many need help to care for themselves. More community-based programs and supportive independent-living sites are expected to be established to house and assist the homeless and the mentally and physically disabled. Furthermore, as substance abusers are increasingly being sent to treatment programs instead of prison, employment of social and human service assistants in substance abuse treatment programs also will grow.

Opportunities are expected to be good in private social service agencies. Employment in private agencies will grow as State and local governments continue to contract out services to the private sector in an effort to cut costs. Also, some private agencies have been employing more social and human service assistants in place of social workers, who are more educated and more highly paid.

The number of jobs for social and human service assistants in local governments will grow but not as fast as employment for social and human service assistants in other industries. Employment in the public sector may fluctuate with the level of funding provided by State and local governments and with the number of services contracted out to private organizations.

Job prospects. Job prospects for social and human service assistants are expected to be excellent, particularly for individuals with appropriate education after high school. Job openings will come from job growth, but also from the need to replace workers who advance into new positions, retire, or leave the workforce for other reasons. There will be more competition for jobs in urban areas than in rural ones, but qualified applicants should have little difficulty finding employment.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of social and human service assistants were \$25,580 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$20,350 and \$32,440. The top 10 percent earned more than \$40,780, while the lowest 10 percent earned less than \$16,180.

Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of social and human service assistants in May 2006 were:

Local government	\$30,510
State government.....	29,810
Individual and family services	24,490
Vocational rehabilitation services	22,530
Residential mental retardation, mental health and substance abuse facilities.....	22,380

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-2016	
				Number	Percent
Social and human service assistants	21-1093	339,000	453,000	114,000	34

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

Related Occupations

Workers in other occupations that require skills similar to those of social and human service assistants include social workers, clergy, counselors, child care workers; occupational therapist assistants and aides, physical therapist assistants and aides, and nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides.

Sources of Additional Information

For information on programs and careers in human services, contact:

➤ Council for Standards in Human Services Education, PMB 703, 1050 Larrabee Avenue, Suite 104, Bellingham, WA 98225-7367. Internet: <http://www.cshse.org>

➤ National Organization for Human Services, 90 Madison Street, Suite 206, Denver, CO 80206.

Internet: <http://www.nationalhumanservices.org>

Information on job openings may be available from State employment service offices or directly from city, county, or State departments of health, mental health and mental retardation, and human resources.