THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH’S AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN SOCIAL WORK

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Notice announces that nominations are being solicited for the two annual Under Secretary for Health’s Awards for Excellence in Social Work; one for “Excellence in Social Work Practice” (see Appendix A), and one for “Excellence in Social Work Leadership” (see Appendix B).

2. BACKGROUND: Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) social workers provide services that have a significant impact on the comprehensiveness and quality of patient care. Social workers typically work collaboratively with interdisciplinary treatment team members to ensure psychosocial issues and needs of Veterans served are addressed and do not become obstacles to effective treatment. The purpose of this award is to recognize respective VA social workers whose work has had a significant impact on the provision of patient care services, leadership and oversight of social work practice.

NOTE: Generally, a VA social worker receives this award only once.

3. SELECTION COMMITTEE: A selection committee, appointed by the Under Secretary for Health, selects award recipients. The selection committee comprises representatives from the Offices of Care Management and Social Work Services, Patient Care Services, Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management, and a facility Director selected by the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management. This committee is responsible for:
   a. Reviewing all nominations received and making a final recommendation to the Under Secretary for Health; and
   b. Recommending, at its discretion, appropriate recognition for finalists who were not chosen as the award recipient, such as letters congratulating them on their nominations.

4. AWARD PRESENTATION: The Under Secretary for Health, or designee, presents a plaque to each award recipient through their respective Medical Center Director. There will be no monetary award at the VA Central Office level, though facilities may choose to give special contribution awards at the local level.

5. NOMINATION PROCEDURES: See Attachment C.


7. RESCISSION: The VHA Notice will expire on September 30, 2017. However, the information will remain in effect.
DISTRIBUTION: Emailed to the VHA Publications Distribution List September 9, 2016
CRITERIA FOR THE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The recipient of this award must have demonstrated excellence in at least five of the eight criteria, which are based on the High Performance Development Model's Eight Core Competencies.

1. **Personal Mastery.** The recipient must have assumed responsibility for personal development and career goals; taken the initiative for continuous learning; and improved behavior, skills, and knowledge as a result of evaluation and feedback.

2. **Interpersonal Effectiveness.** The recipient must be a team player and readily collaborate with interdisciplinary treatment team members on care plans, discharge plans, and problem resolution. The recipient must work effectively to build a sense of community within the organization.

3. **Customer Service.** The recipient must have demonstrated a thorough understanding of the needs of internal and external customers. The recipient must have modeled exemplary commitment to customer service, and must have effectively utilized customer feedback to identify systems barriers and areas for improvement.

4. **Flexibility and Adaptability.** The recipient must have demonstrated flexibility and resiliency in an ever-changing work environment; and must have demonstrated a commitment to lifelong learning as a tool for change.

5. **Creative Thinking.** The recipient must have demonstrated an ability to generate new and innovative ideas for improving the quality and processes of social work practice. The recipient must have encouraged and supported innovation from co-workers. The recipient must have demonstrated appropriate risk-taking.

6. **Systems Thinking.** The recipient must have demonstrated awareness of the impact of the provision of social work services on interdisciplinary practice. The recipient must have worked to remove barriers within the system that prevent or impede the successful provision of social work services. The recipient must have developed strategies for improving service delivery.

7. **Organizational Stewardship.** The recipient must have promoted a positive image of social work and the profession within the facility and the community. The recipient must have demonstrated how the mission, vision, and values of the organization allow for effective delivery of social work services.

8. **Technical Skills.** The recipient must have demonstrated expertise in social work practice. The recipient must have sought out and integrated outcome-based interventions into daily practice.
CRITERIA FOR THE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN SOCIAL WORK LEADERSHIP

The recipient of this award must have demonstrated excellence in at least five of the eight criteria, which are based on the High Performance Development Model's Eight Core Competencies.

1. **Personal Mastery.** The recipient must have encouraged personal and professional development of staff. The recipient must have taken advantage of opportunities to expand the recipient’s knowledge of management principles and inspired and demonstrated a passion for excellence in every aspect of work.

2. **Interpersonal Effectiveness.** The recipient must have provided effective leadership and vision for subordinates. The recipient must have collaborated across disciplines, departments, and care lines to ensure the psychosocial needs of Veterans are served.

3. **Customer Service.** The recipient must have initiated policies that reflect commitment to providing the highest-quality social work services possible. The recipient must have solicited and utilized feedback from internal and external customers to improve service delivery and responsiveness to needs.

4. **Flexibility and Adaptability.** The recipient must have responded to changing priorities and the availability of resources with optimism, encouraging staff to respond positively and proactively. The recipient must readily and regularly assess workload and allocate staffing resources to best meet patient needs.

5. **Creative Thinking.** The recipient must recognize and reward creative thinking among staff and support appropriate risk-taking. The recipient must have served as a role model for innovation and creative thinking.

6. **Systems Thinking.** The recipient must have helped staff understand how their functions relate to, and complement, the organization’s mission. The recipient must have been involved in projects at the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) or national level.

7. **Organizational Stewardship.** The recipient must have provided a clear vision of the future and led staff toward accomplishment of goals. The recipient must use resources wisely and assist facilities in reducing costs and increasing revenue.

8. **Technical Skills.** The recipient must have been involved in community projects and with professional organizations. The recipient must provide technical expertise and knowledge of social work interventions as part of patient care. The recipient must oversee the practice of social workers at the facility, ensuring the highest standards of practice. The recipient must provide clinical supervision and technical guidance to staff.
NOMINATION PROCEDURES

1. Nominations may be made by the facility senior management, VISN staff, an individual social worker, or a group of social workers employed in the same facility.

2. The nomination must not exceed three single-spaced pages, and must include narrative statements responding to the applicable criteria. It must be specific in describing the nominee’s accomplishments. Acronyms must be defined the first time they are used, i.e., Chief, Social Work Service (SWS); Associate Director, Patient Care Services (AD for PCS), etc. Each nomination package must include VA Form 0235 (dated Apr 2014). Form must contain information in all blocks above For Security Office Use Only. The VHA Awards Team has the responsibility in processing completed forms via the Security & Investigations Center (SIC).

3. Local facility social work nominations should be endorsed by the Social Work Chief/Social Work Executive. Nominations must be endorsed and sent through the facility Director, endorsed by the respective VISN Director, and electronically sent by Outlook to Joe.Wilson2@va.gov; Program Analyst in the Office of Care Management and Social Work Services (10P4C), Office of Patient Care Services, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Central Office, by October 14, 2016.