



Grand Challenges
for Social Work

Social Progress Powered by Science

Progress and Plans for the Grand Challenges

An Impact Report at Year 5 of the 10-Year Initiative



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GRAND CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL WORK: FIVE YEARS OF PROGRESS

Every day for more than a century, social workers have been on the front lines finding innovative ways to address our nation’s toughest social problems. In 2016, the [American Academy of Social Work & Social Welfare](#) launched the [Grand Challenges for Social Work](#) to harness the ingenuity, expertise, dedication, and creativity of individuals and organizations within the field of social work and beyond to champion social progress powered by science.

This ambitious effort actually began several years earlier, with the creation of a strong, evidence-based foundation for the initiative. A founding Executive Committee — which included some of the nation’s leading scientists, educators, and policy experts — reached out across the profession and developed strategic partnerships with social work’s national organizations, interest groups, and academic entities. The committee then issued a broad call for ideas for large-scale challenges to tackle and ultimately distilled a list of more than 80 submitted concepts down to the [12 Grand Challenges for Social Work](#). Their criteria: that a Grand Challenge must be important,

compelling to the broader public, and have a science base connected to interventions that could lead to meaningful and measurable change. These were announced at the 2016 annual Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) [conference](#) — “Grand Challenges for Social Work: Setting a Research Agenda for the Future” — in Washington, DC. Multi-disciplinary networks were formed to support work on each of the Grand Challenges.

In 2020, as the nation and the world’s attention focused on racial injustice and ending systemic violence against and oppression of Black people and people of color, an additional Grand Challenge was announced: the Grand Challenge to Eliminate Racism. Although the initiative had understood racism as inextricably linked to each of the first 12 Grand Challenges, the establishment of the Grand Challenge to Eliminate Racism brought greater attention to promoting culturally-grounded, upstream interventions and prevention efforts designed to eradicate racist policies, bias, and discriminatory practices.

5/10

YEARS COMPLETED

THE 13 GRAND CHALLENGES ARE GROUPED UNDER THREE BROAD CATEGORIES:

INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

- Ensure healthy development for youth
- Close the health gap
- Build healthy relationships to end violence
- Advance long and productive lives

STRONGER SOCIAL FABRIC

- Eradicate social isolation
- End homelessness
- Create social responses to a changing environment
- Harness technology for social good

JUST SOCIETY

- Eliminate racism
- Promote smart decarceration
- Build financial capability and assets for all
- Reduce extreme economic inequality
- Achieve equal opportunity and justice



During the last five years, the GCSW has made significant progress as a whole and on the individual Grand Challenges, particularly in the areas of research, education, policy, and practice.

RESEARCH

Building on the existing, robust bodies of research in each of the Grand Challenge areas is a critical component of the Grand Challenges for Social Work. Scholars from across the country have engaged in myriad research efforts and have published their findings in journals too numerous to list here. Some research highlights:

- From the Grand Challenge to **Advance Long and Productive Lives**, network co-lead Ernest Gonzales, PhD, is conducting a study of best practices for intergenerational programs. He was also invited to present his [work to help shape a research agenda on work, aging, and health](#) at the National Academies of Sciences funded by the National Institute on Aging. Nancy Morrow-Howell, PhD, network co-lead, is leading a research project to assess the effects of tutoring on older adults' wellbeing.
- Related to the Grand Challenge to **Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment**, two studies provided insights and practical recommendations for the local communities of [Flint, MI](#), (Amy Krings, PhD, Dana Kornberg, PhD(c), and Shawna Lee, PhD) and [North St. Louis, MO](#) (Joonmo Kang, PhD, Vanessa D. Fabbre, PhD, and Christine C. Ekenga, PhD, MPH). Also, Praveen Kumar, PhD, Assistant Professor at Boston College, is conducting [intervention research](#) on the use of solar lamps to improve study time for children, reduce air pollution, and provide access to electricity in rural India.
- Special issues have been developed on many of the Grand Challenge topics including social isolation, productive aging, smart decarceration, and mainstreaming gender.
- Rocío Calvo, PhD, co-lead of the Grand Challenge to **Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice**, received a [grant](#) from the Russell Sage Foundation to conduct a study on how older Latinx immigrants navigate community resources. The findings and implications of the study, "How Social Protection Policies and Institutions Contribute to Older Immigrants' Wellbeing and Sense of Belonging in America" will be especially critical in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- University of Washington (UW) School of Social Work Associate Professor Megan Moore, PhD, and a university team received more than \$1M from the National Institute of Justice to study intimate partner violence among youth.
- The University of Maryland and the University of Washington have created competitive research awards for PhD students. One recipient of the University of Maryland award went on to receive the *2021 Society for Social Work and Research Outstanding Social Work Doctoral Dissertation Award*.
- **End Homelessness** network co-lead Benjamin F. Henwood, PhD, and his colleagues at the University of Southern California have been awarded a large scale Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) [grant](#) on homelessness and COVID.
- [Research](#) from the Grand Challenge to **Ensure Healthy Development for Youth** and the Social Development Research Group at the University of Washington School of Social Work evaluated elementary-school interventions that helped children form healthy attachments to family and school, which lead to positive relationships and responsible decision-making in adulthood.
- The study "[Family Centered Treatment, Juvenile Justice, and the Grand Challenge of Smart Decarceration](#)" by a team at the University of Maryland School of Social Work, found that Family Centered Treatment shows more favorable adult criminal justice outcomes than group care, making it a potentially effective community-based service to support smart decarceration for court-involved youth.

EDUCATION

The engagement of universities and colleges, as well as professional organizations, has been central to the success of the Grand Challenges for Social Work efforts to educate the next generation of social workers to develop evidence-based interventions and policy proposals. Organizations and schools of social work across the country are weaving the Grand Challenges into their programs in a number of significant ways, from curriculum enhancements to core programming. For example:

- An entire DSW program at the University of Southern California, a post-masters fellowship at Florida State University, and a dual degree program at Colorado State University School of Social Work and the Colorado School of Public Health — all have been organized around the Grand Challenges.
- New York University Silver School of Social Work conducted [#NYUSilverUp4theChallenge](#), a student competition grounded in the principles of the Grand Challenges, reflecting the unique and powerful ways that social workers are positioned to address the Grand Challenges. Topics ranged from the development of programs to eradicate social isolation, to examining food insecurity and instability in a changing environment, to ending homelessness by taking an anti-racist stance in efforts toward eviction prevention.
- The University of Denver featured the Grand Challenges in their [Science for Action series](#), and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Social Work held a Harness Technology for Social Good yearlong [lecture series](#).
- Many of the Grand Challenges, including **Ensure Healthy Development for Youth**, **Reduce Extreme Economic Inequality**, **Build Financial Capability and Assets for All**, and **Harness Technology for Social Good**, have developed textbooks, education modules, and webinars to train students, professionals and the public.
- Faculty around the country — including Azusa Pacific University and Fresno State University — have incorporated aspects of the Grand Challenges into their curricula. The University of South Alabama uses a course in problem-based learning to examine the Grand Challenges. New courses have been developed to address the Grand Challenges, including courses on Smart Decarceration at the University of Chicago and University of Maryland School of Social Work.
- Countless books, book chapters, journal articles, and other publications have been written by network members and leadership team members about individual Grand Challenges and the initiative as a whole.
- More than 60 departments and schools of social work have formed the [Western Consortium for the Grand Challenges](#) to identify, spotlight, and implement initiatives such as teaching innovations, new practices in field education, learning networks for scholarly professionals, and fresh concepts of community service.
- The GCSW has shared access to a variety of educational events, ranging from our own webinar [Covid-19: Learning from History about Disaster and Economic Inequality](#) to [The Art of Policy Practice: Navigating the Legislative Process](#), co-branded with [Influencing Social Policy](#) (ISP), a nonprofit organization for social work educators, students, and practitioners, and the [National Association of Social Workers](#) (NASW).
- The GCSW has partnered with [Prof2Prof](#) to serve as an intellectual hub for connecting network members and their contributions to the Grand Challenges. Prof2Prof is a platform that allows scholars, higher education faculty, doctoral students, and academic staff to share their best teaching, research, and management materials across disciplines, and on a global scale. This partnership is intended to advance Grand Challenges' goals related to education; shed light on the contributions of social work professionals; inspire collaboration and partnerships with other disciplines; and create a working space for the Grand Challenges networks.
- Grand Challenges leaders and members have continued to be highly visible at national and regional conferences, participating in roundtable discussions, presentations, and special interest groups, as well as booths and networking opportunities at conferences held by organizations including NASW, Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR), The American Council for School Social Work (ACSSW), Wichita State University School of Social Work's POWER Conference, the Kentucky Association of Social Work Educators, and others.
- Wayne State University has committed faculty, staff, funding, and other resources to advance the Grand Challenges, particularly in Greater Detroit, and documented these efforts in [Rising to the Challenge 2017](#).

POLICY

Advances in the Grand Challenges have come not only from educating students, social work practitioners, and our interdisciplinary colleagues, but by working toward policy changes at the local, state, and national levels. There has been a variety of activity on the policy front over the last five years, including:

- The annual Social Work Day on the Hill brings together students and practitioners to Washington, DC, to discuss current social work-related policy issues and learn skills to become better advocates. The GCSW has also co-sponsored several legislative briefings.
- Members of the Grand Challenge to **Build Financial Capability and Assets for All** are leading a statewide [policy experiment](#) testing universal child development accounts (CDA), and findings have informed design and implementation of CDA policies in several states.
- In advance of the 2020 election, the Grand Challenge to **End Homelessness** released a comprehensive [policy brief](#) to educate state and federal officials on the issue.
- Members of Grand Challenges networks have contributed to several reports from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NAEM).
- Members of the Grand Challenge to **Ensure Healthy Development for Youth** have participated in creating the Colorado Statewide Strategic Plan for Primary Prevention, and have worked to promote the infrastructure necessary to increase the use of tested and effective preventive interventions in Colorado, Utah, Massachusetts, and Delaware.
- Research by members of the Grand Challenge to **Promote Smart Decarceration** contributed to passage of the First Step Act (2018) prison reform bill.
- Members of our networks have provided congressional testimony related to several of the Grand Challenges.



COVID-19 AND THE GRAND CHALLENGES

The coronavirus pandemic raging in the United States — and the world — reminds us that there has never been a time when the Grand Challenges' commitment to "social progress powered by science" was truer. Similarly, the message of the Grand Challenges that the "social is fundamental" is clearly paramount as we address this crisis. As we engage in fighting the pandemic, we also hope to prevent "social distancing" from counteracting the importance of our profession's commitment to social integration, social science, and social justice as we attempt to mend the fault lines in our society that this virus is cracking open. Visit the [Grand Challenges for Social Work website](#) for COVID-19 related resources we hope will help social workers and others during this time.

PRACTICE

Hand-in-hand with education and policy work, involving social work practitioners in the Grand Challenges is imperative to achieving “social progress through science.” During the first five years of the GCSW, there have been a variety of innovative and far reaching efforts geared toward and involving the practice community. Notably:

- Skills webinars on policy and practice have been offered regularly to help social workers become more effective advocates. Topics have ranged from [Stay Home? Housing Inequities, COVID-19, and Social Welfare Policy Responses](#) to [Making Change: Messaging Your Issue for Policy Audiences](#).
- Several of the Grand Challenges have been featured in podcasts conducted by social workers, including **Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment** and **Smart Decarceration**.
- A PhD candidate at the University of Utah College of Social Work developed a state-of-the-art virtual reality photography-based [simulation tool](#) to help social workers assess in-home risks and protective factors for child abuse.
- **Harness Technology for Social Good** led a [webinar series](#) on several ways technology has been incorporated into social work practice.
- Leaders of Grand Challenges networks have been instrumental in implementing programs and tools — such as [SurvivorLink](#), [MyPlan](#), [SWVirtualPal](#), and [GenPRIDE Center](#) — that help social work practitioners and the people with whom they work.
- The Coalition for the Promotion of Behavioral Health has developed four [training modules](#) for students, practitioners, and the public on prevention practice, policy, and research.

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY

The GCSW has also strengthened its organizational and leadership structure and sought to create a sustainable funding strategy. It has invested in bolstering communications across the initiative and advancing a wide range of academic and other opportunities to share knowledge and ideas.

Growing momentum and increasing participation in the initiative over its first four years led to a [reorganization](#) in October 2019. A new, more traditional structure now includes an interdisciplinary Leadership Board with external partners and a five-member Executive Committee. These changes have strengthened leadership’s ability to facilitate the work of the 13 Grand Challenges networks, address diversity issues, and better position the initiative to secure external support and funding.

Other organizational highlights over the first five years include:

- **Developing a [comprehensive statement](#) to guide all of the work of the Grand Challenges**
Adopted in February 2019, this includes a Vision, Mission, Domain, Guiding Principles, & Guideposts to Action.
- **Creating [sponsorship opportunities](#)**
Sponsorships fund further development of research, inter-university collaboration, and a wider public understanding of the broad aims and tools of social work. Funds also support infrastructure, including administration, the 13 Grand Challenge networks, webinars, website updates, coordination across networks, communications, and vital connections with other social work organizations and partners.
There have been [six Premier Sponsors and 30 Sustaining Sponsors](#), as well as several contributing and individual sponsors since 2017. (Contributing sponsorships are \$1,000, Sustaining sponsorships are \$2,500 per school/organization, and Premier sponsorships are \$7,500 per school/organization.)

CREATING COLLABORATIVE COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

Over its first five years, the Grand Challenges built a collection of powerful communications vehicles to more fully engage those already involved in the initiative, and inspire even more people to take up this important work and enter into and support the social work profession. These vehicles provide consistent messaging and design to help those involved in all the Grand Challenges networks spread the word about their crucial work more effectively.

Key communications vehicles include:

- A Communications Collaborative made up of communications staff at universities and partner organizations, which meets several times per year to share resources and ideas related to the work and promotion of the Grand Challenges.
- The Up! [e-newsletter](#), which came out quarterly when it debuted in [December 2017](#), and moved to monthly production in 2020 because the newsletter needed more space to share all of the exciting news from across the Grand Challenges.
- An engaging [website](#) with everything one needs to know about the Grand Challenges, from information on each of the challenges and links to their websites to valuable resources, including a [COVID-19 Resources](#) page with information specific to social workers and the Grand Challenges.
- An active social media presence with the Grand Challenges Facebook [page](#), Facebook [group](#), Twitter account [@GCSocialWork](#), hashtag #Up4theChallenge, and LinkedIn [page](#);
- A lively and informative YouTube [page](#) featuring original videos and archived webinars; and
- Colorful and compelling [graphics](#), from logos to infographics that illustrate the initiative or show how to get involved.
- Additionally, the initiative created a themed [calendar](#) for 2020 focusing on one Grand Challenge each month, using social media to highlight work to advance the field and address some of society’s largest challenges. 2020 also saw the development of materials to orient [students to the Grand Challenges](#), including a video and other resources designed to help social work and other students find ways to join in the work.

These are only some of the highlights of the Grand Challenges for Social Work’s first five years. The best is yet to come. Next, learn about the influential work being done by each of the 13 Grand Challenge networks.



Ensure Healthy Development for Youth

The Grand Challenge to **Ensure Healthy Development for Youth** responds to the observation that behavioral health problems in childhood and adolescence often have lifelong repercussions on physical, emotional, and financial well-being. Led by the [Coalition for the Promotion of Behavioral Health](#) (CPBH), this interdisciplinary group includes more than 150 researchers, educators, and practitioners.

Since 2015, the group has advanced Seven Action Steps articulated in [Unleashing the Power of Prevention](#), a report published by the National Academy of Medicine. It has published, presented, and advocated both within the field of social work, where it has developed new educational resources, and outside, working with local, state, and federal policymakers.

THE PATH TO PROGRESS

The Steering Committee of the Coalition for the Promotion of Behavioral Health completed a strategic planning process to help guide the coalition in reaching its goals.



LOOKING BACK

The CPBH has concentrated its efforts in three main areas:

- **Increasing** community and state infrastructure for delivering preventive interventions for behavioral health problems in children and youth
- **Scaling-up** tested and effective family-focused interventions in pediatric and health care settings
- **Preparing** the social work workforce to deliver tested and effective preventive interventions for behavioral problems in children and youth

Over the past five years, the coalition has made considerable progress in each of these areas by:

- **Convening** statewide meetings of practitioners, policymakers, and researchers, as well as providing expert testimony to state legislators
- **Participating** in [The Collaborative on Healthy Parenting in Primary Care](#), an initiative of the Forum on Promoting Children's Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Health at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine
- **Contributing** to prevention programs in Colorado (Communities That Care) and Utah (Life Skills Utah)
- **Coordinating** with accreditation bodies, standardizing learning objectives, identifying existing programs in allied disciplines, and creating a repository of relevant course syllabi, among other actions

LOOKING AHEAD

Members of the Grand Challenge to **Ensure Healthy Development for Youth** look forward to engaging more people and organizations in this work and to continuing the important work underway, particularly:

- **Increasing** the interdisciplinary reach of its work
- **Advancing** the 7 Action Steps of [Unleashing the Power of Prevention](#) in additional states, communities, and educational settings
- **Finding** resources to more effectively support the infrastructure of the CPBH and **Ensure Healthy Development for Youth** networks
- **Disseminating** the training modules more widely, including via a January 2021 webinar
- **Prioritizing** reduction of racial and socioeconomic disparities in behavioral health problems

- **Contributing** to a [special issue](#) of the *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research* describing progress relative to the goals and seven action steps of this Grand Challenge

In the past year alone, members of the CPBH have:

- **Helped** develop the [Colorado Statewide Strategic Plan for Primary Prevention](#)
- **Promoted** the infrastructure necessary to increase the use of tested and effective preventive interventions in Colorado, Utah, Massachusetts, and Delaware
- **Authored** and **disseminated** four [prevention training modules](#) for social work students
- **Delivered** ~25 keynotes and other conference [presentations](#)
- **Published** ~20 empirical and opinion [articles](#) promoting prevention
- **Commented** in the media on COVID-19 related [childhood hunger](#), calling for a national task force and plan to address this urgent issue
- **Briefed** federal legislators on ["The Decarceration of Transition Age Youth with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities and Mental Disorders,"](#) as well as ["The Impact of Weapons and Violence on Schools and Surrounding Communities"](#)
- **Developed** a robust [Strategic Plan](#) for implementing the activities of the Grand Challenge

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Close the Health Gap

Millions of Americans do not have adequate access to health care. The Grand Challenge to **Close the Health Gap** is working to redress the fundamental failure of our current, individualist model and its inability to address historical inequities in access to health care around race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability status, geography, sexual and gender identity, and socioeconomic status. Instead, this Grand Challenge calls for a new approach that emphasizes the centrality of the social determinants of health towards resolving these injustices.

During the past five years, network members and others have worked to **Close the Health Gap** through their research, advocacy, and teaching. They have organized three working groups and published and presented widely. They have articulated policy recommendations for state and federal legislators. And, they have expanded the network of Indigenous health researchers through new training programs.

INTEGRATING SOCIAL CARE INTO THE DELIVERY OF HEALTH CARE: MOVING UPSTREAM TO IMPROVE THE NATION'S HEALTH

Several individuals and universities involved with the Grand Challenges participated in the development of the 2019 consensus study from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, "[Integrating Social Care into the Delivery of Health Care: Moving Upstream to Improve the Nation's Health.](#)"

The report contains five overarching goals and associated recommendations that health care systems, government agencies, and others should implement to better integrate patients' social needs into health care delivery and to improve health equity—especially critical in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report recommends the following steps:

- Better integrate social care into health care delivery.
- Support and train an engaged, integrated care workforce.
- Develop an infrastructure for data sharing between health and social care.
- Finance the integration of health care and social care.

Learn more at nationalacademies.org/SocialCare



LOOKING BACK

During the past five years, members of the **Close the Health Gap** Grand Challenge network and their colleagues have engaged in a variety of activities. They have:

- **Promoted** Indigenous and culturally grounded, place-based research in health and well-being through publications and presentations
- **Expanded** the network of Indigenous health researchers through innovative academic preparatory programs
- **Delivered** numerous presentations at the Society for Social Work & Research and other conferences, as well as a [webinar](#) for the National Association of Social Workers
- **Participated** in a consensus study on "[Integrating Social Care into the Delivery of Health Care: Moving Upstream to Improve the Nation's Health](#)" by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine
- **Published** three concept papers on [combating alcohol misuse](#), [promoting health equity](#), and [strengthening health care systems](#)
- **Contributed** to special issues of the [Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions](#), the [Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work](#), and [Human Biology](#), as well as an issue of the [International Journal of Alcohol and Drug Research](#)
- **Wrote** an [editorial](#) on "The Case for a National Health Social Work Practice-Based Research Network in Addressing Health Equity" in *Health & Social Work*
- **Testified** before the [House Committee on Education and the Workforce](#) about expanding access to substance abuse disorder treatment
- **Briefed** federal legislators on "When a Good Life Depends on Federal Policy," "Addressing the Crisis in Older Adult Mental Health," and "Is Treating Depression the Answer to Solving the Opioid Crisis?"
- **Advocated** for the inclusion of social workers in responding to the opioid crisis

LOOKING AHEAD

During the next five years, members of the Grand Challenge to **Close the Health Gap** network and their colleagues plan to:

- **Collaborate** with other Grand Challenges, particularly **Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment**, **Reduce Extreme Economic Inequality**, and **Eliminate Racism**, to address issues that impact health and health equity
- **Continue to advocate** for their [policy recommendations](#):
 1. **Focus** on settings-based research and interventions to improve the conditions of daily life
 2. **Advance** community empowerment and advocacy for sustainable health solutions and prevention
 3. **Cultivate** health innovation in primary care and community-based centers
 4. **Promote** access to health care and insurance for all
 5. **Foster** development of an interprofessional health workforce
 6. **Develop** a global health policy agenda on reducing alcohol misuse
- **Continue to challenge** structural racism, settler colonialism, white supremacy, and racial capitalism and their adverse impact on our biosocial complex
- **Identify** leadership for the working group on *Strengthening Health Care Systems* and grow the working group on *Population Health* more strategically

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WORKING GROUPS

Population Health through Community and Settings-Based Research and Practice

Strengthening Health Care Systems: Better Health Across America

Reducing and Preventing Alcohol Misuse and Its Consequences



Build Healthy Relationships to End Violence

Formerly known as the Grand Challenge to **Stop Family Violence**, the Grand Challenge to **Build Healthy Relationships to End Violence** recognizes the traumatizing impact of interpersonal violence across the lifespan on individuals and families, *as well as* on communities and society. Whereas the former name of this Grand Challenge focused on the overlap between child maltreatment and intimate partner violence, the new framing assumes a broader mandate, grounded in the recognition that violence extends beyond the family unit. Violence is associated with power differentials between dominant and non-dominant groups (e.g., gender, race) and, as such, is perpetuated by prevailing social norms, structures, and systems. The goal of the Grand Challenge is ambitious yet specific: to reduce interpersonal violence by 10% within the decade by strengthening healthy relationships.

To this end, network members have spent the past five years publishing widely, convening inclusively, and collaborating creatively with researchers and practitioners from inside and outside the field of social work. They have also articulated and advocated for their policy recommendations. Looking ahead, they have developed a robust strategic plan to organize their activities over the next five years.



MURAL HONORS THE POSITIVE ROLE OF LATINX FAMILIES IN THE PHOENIX AREA

The *Si Se Puede*—*Yes We Can!* mural was created in collaboration with the Survivor Link program in the School of Social Work at ASU and community partner Chicanos Por La Causa.

Photo courtesy of Jill Messing, MSW, PhD

LOOKING BACK

Over the past five years, members of **Build Healthy Relationships to End Violence** network and their colleagues have:

- **Published** two working papers on [ending gender-based violence](#) and [reducing child maltreatment](#)
- **Convened** over 200 practitioners, researchers, and advocates at Arizona State University for a conference on [Promoting Just and Effective Solutions to End Gender Based Violence](#)
- **Worked** with the [Jim Casey Initiative](#) to identify gaps in child welfare research and early intervention work
- **Hosted** a one-and-a-half-day workshop at Washington University in St. Louis which included a systems dynamics analysis exercise related to mainstreaming gender
- **Secured** a \$6.5 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to create [The Center for Innovation in Child Maltreatment Policy, Research and Training \(CICM\)](#) at Washington University in St. Louis as well as a \$1 million grant from the National Institute of Justice [to study intimate partner violence among youth](#) at the University of Washington
- **Contributed** to a special issue of the journal Social Work on [“Mainstreaming Gender in the Grand Challenges”](#)
- **Delivered** two webinars on the implications of COVID-19 for [children](#) and [families](#)
- **Contributed** to the development of [myPlan](#), an online tool designed to help students who may be experiencing dating violence evaluate their safety, make decisions, and connect to campus and community services
- **Directed** the [AmeriCorps Survivor Link Program](#) at Arizona State University, where members have engaged in over 186,000 hours of service across 70 community partner sites, earned \$1,190,000 in scholarship funding, and implemented 961 risk-informed safety plans with domestic violence survivors
- **Evaluated** an anti-human trafficking initiative in Colorado (Innovate Colorado)
- **Participated** in ongoing research projects — [DataSMART](#) and [SURROUND](#) — at the Center for Innovation in Child Maltreatment Policy, Research, and Training

LOOKING AHEAD

Over the next five years, the network to **Build Healthy Relationships to End Violence** will focus their work to:

1. *Scientifically ground the Grand Challenge to inform future research and support other Grand Challenge goals*
2. *Advance the field’s understanding that healthy relationships are a major factor in ending multiple forms of violence*
3. *Develop a toolkit for researchers and practitioners with relevant healthy relationship definitions and interventions*
4. *Position themselves to approach funders to support research, policy development, and practice*
5. *Better prepare social workers (practitioners, students, educators, policymakers, researchers, advocates) to promote healthy relationships and intervene in violence across practice areas and social ecological levels*
6. *Provide a forum to discuss the re-visioning of systems that bridges research to practice and practice to research*

In addition, they intend to:

- **Continue to advocate** for their [policy recommendations](#):
 1. Increase federal funding for prevention and intervention activities, including efforts to reduce the structural inequalities that perpetuate gender-based violence (GBV)
 2. Increase research funding for evidence-based interventions that strengthen and enhance safety in families victimized through abuse and violence
 3. Link data systems to identify opportunities for preventive services
- **Collaborate** with other Grand Challenges around mainstreaming gender and developing approaches to violence prevention that are less carceral and more relationship-based (e.g. [Promote Smart Decarceration](#))

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Advance Long and Productive Lives

The Grand Challenge to **Advance Long and Productive Lives** seeks to harness the skills, talents, and experience of the growing number of older adults to respond to the demands of an increasingly polarized and inequitable country. Adopting a life-course approach, the Grand Challenge seeks to advance science to inform the development of equitable policies and programs in employment, volunteering, caregiving, and education to maximize health, ensure economic security, and provide more opportunities for purposeful living for those of all ages. This Grand Challenge aims to dismantle systemic ageism, racism, sexism and other forms of oppression as they limit such opportunities.

During the past five years, output from members of the network and their colleagues has been prolific, including 120+ publications, 100+ presentations, 40+ media interviews and 17+ grants. Looking ahead, having established a solid conceptual foundation for their Grand Challenge, its members seek to translate their research into evidence-based interventions and expand their network among educators, practitioners, advocates, and students of social work at the undergraduate, masters, and doctoral levels.

LONGEVITY DESIGN CHALLENGE

*NYU Silver School of Social Work Associate Professor Ernest Gonzales, co-lead of the Grand Challenge to **Advance Long and Productive Lives**, led a team that was one of eight finalists in the Stanford Center on Longevity's 2018–2019 [Longevity Design Challenge](#). The team's *i² Housing* intergenerational interdependence initiative builds on traditional home sharing to address the national challenges of rising student debt, social isolation, declining health, and affordable housing among college students and older adults.*



i² Housing

LOOKING BACK

During the past five years, members of the **Advance Long and Productive Lives** network and their colleagues have:

- **Published** two concept papers on increasing productive engagement in [early](#) and [later](#) life
- **Presented** at dozens of conferences and events, including the [Gerontological Society of America](#), [National Academy of Medicine](#), [Actuarial Society of America](#), [Drexel University](#), and [Age Strong @ Work](#)
- **Delivered** webinars on [Engagement and Entrepreneurship Research](#) and [COVID-19 and Age: Risks and Opportunities](#)
- **Commented** widely in the national media, including [Reuters](#), [Next Avenue](#), [The New York Times](#), [The Boston Globe](#), [Curbed](#), [The Huffington Post](#), and [The Associated Press](#)
- **Contributed** a regular column to the AGE-SW newsletter, "[Spotlight on Advancing Long and Productive Lives](#)"
- **Authored** more than 120 articles, books, chapters, reports, and briefs on topics related to the Grand Challenge, including a [special issue of the Clinical Social Work Journal](#) and the book, [Current and Emerging Trends in Aging & Work](#)
- **Secured** more than a dozen grants, including from the National Institute on Aging, U.S. Social Security Administration, AARP Foundation, RRF Foundation for Aging, and Sloan Foundation, to examine work and retirement trajectories, workforce training, and health
- **Directed** studies on [best practices for intergenerational programs](#) and the effects of tutoring on older adults' well-being
- **By invitation, joined** the Committee on Understanding the Aging Workforce and Employment at Older Ages sponsored by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine
- **Testified** before a [committee](#) of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine on developing a behavioral and social sciences research agenda for the next decade on Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, and civic engagement in later life
- **Advanced** to the finals of the Stanford Center on Longevity's 2018–2019 [Longevity Design Challenge](#)
- **Advocated** for enacting universal paid family and medical leave in the U.S. and strengthening the Social Security 2100 Act
- **Developed** a letter in support of paid family leave legislation in the U.S. signed by over 100 academics from all over the U.S.
- **Led economic analysis** efforts that contributed to the passage of paid family and medical leave and paid sick days in Colorado
- **Investigated** age discrimination in the workplace and studied the implications of tying Medicaid eligibility to work

LOOKING AHEAD

Network members have articulated the following objectives for the Grand Challenge to **Advance Long and Productive Lives** over the next five years:

- **Continue** to advocate for their [policy recommendations](#):
 1. **Create** flexible and transitional employment arrangements
 2. **Provide** financial support to caregivers
 3. **Expand** the Corporation for National and Community Service's support for engaging older adults
- **Elevate** intersectionality and inequality in productive aging discourse
- **Continue** to produce the AGE-SW Productive Aging Spotlight
- **Publish** empirical articles on intersectionality as well as reconceptualize productive aging
- **Present** at the Gerontological Society of America on ageism, age-inclusive universities, and older workers amidst COVID-19
- **Involve** more policy makers, practitioners, advocates, educators and students
- **Secure** scholarship funding to recruit more racial and ethnically diverse undergraduates and master's students into the field
- **Translate** research into evidence-based practice interventions

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Eradicate Social Isolation

Recent research has demonstrated that social isolation is as dangerous to human health as smoking. Yet it does not receive nearly the same level of attention from the public, healthcare practitioners or policymakers. As such, the Grand Challenge to **Eradicate Social Isolation** has set out to educate the public, disseminate evidence-based practices, and advocate for policy reform, looking to deepen social connections for people of all ages.

During the past five years, network members have been studying, publishing, and presenting widely on social isolation in diverse populations and across the lifespan. In 2020, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the imposition of social distancing measures to slow its spread, social isolation has reached crisis levels. In response, members of this Grand Challenge have sprung into action, launching new programs, delivering webinars, publishing articles, and conducting a survey on the implications of social distancing for mental health and well-being.



LOOKING BACK

During the past five years, members of the network for **Eradicate Social Isolation** and their colleagues have:

- **Compiled** a [special issue](#) of the *Clinical Social Work Journal* on eradicating social isolation in diverse populations and across the lifespan
- **Organized** a symposium at the Society for Social Work & Research conference on [“Adversity, Marginalization, and Social Isolation: Risks and Resilience”](#)
- **Participated** in the [Social Isolation Impact Summit](#), hosted by the Motion Picture & Television Fund and the Milken Institute’s Center for the Future of Aging
- **Delivered** the keynote address at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa on the importance of human relationships
- **Served** on the ad hoc committee and **contributed** to the Consensus Study Report of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine on [“Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults”](#)
- **Advocated** for [policy, practice, and educational changes](#) to ensure that social isolation, particularly among older adults, receives adequate attention
- **Presented** a CSWE Teaching Institute: “Eradicate Social Isolation: Teaching and learning strategies for generalist and advanced curriculum”

LOOKING AHEAD

Network members have articulated the following objectives for this Grand Challenge over the next five years:

- **Continue** to advocate for their [policy recommendations](#), using best practices gleaned from innovative approaches in the UK and other countries around the world:
 1. **Increase** access to social supports that strengthens social connections for children, families, older adults and people with disabilities
 2. **Build** more age-friendly communities that strengthen social connections
 3. **Reduce** barriers to social inclusion for those marginalized by racism and other forms of oppression
- **Organize** their research activities around a set of research questions focused on social support, social integration, and social exclusion
- **Engage** network leads and national colleagues on strategies to embed strategic teaching tools into the curriculum at the BSW, MSW, and PhD levels
- **Increase** the scope and cohesiveness of their network to better expand and coordinate their efforts
- **Include** community leaders from across the country in generating strategies to eradicate social isolation and build social connection

In 2020 alone, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, members of the network to **Eradicate Social Isolation** have:

- **Established** a helpline at Wayne State University to train volunteers to help reduce stress and social isolation among healthcare workers
- **Launched** a Virtual Health Ministry program in Washington, DC, in which social work student navigators link congregants at area churches with services as well as a Grandparent Reassurance Program
- **Delivered** webinars on [“Isolation & Creativity in the Time of COVID-19”](#) and [“Social Work: A Relational Profession in a Time of Social Distancing”](#)
- **Published** articles on the implications of COVID-19 for [older adults](#), African Americans, and the [brain itself](#)
- **Conducted** a survey to understand the impact of COVID-19 related social distancing on mental health and well-being

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End Homelessness

The Grand Challenge to **End Homelessness** boldly aspires to ensure that everyone has stable housing in the United States, where approximately 1.5 million people are homeless each year.¹ Translating rigorous research into evidence-based interventions and informed political advocacy, this Grand Challenge aims to address homelessness both directly and indirectly by expanding housing options and creating greater income stability. In 2020, in the midst of a pandemic-induced recession, this Grand Challenge took on additional urgency as cities and states have begun to lift their eviction moratoria.

During the past five years, members of the Grand Challenge network have published prolifically, lectured widely, and advocated energetically for this cause. Against the backdrop of rising homelessness rates in major cities, they have articulated detailed policy recommendations for the incoming administration. Within their field, they have updated their curricula in line with the principles of Housing First and outside their field, they have addressed common misconceptions about homelessness.

¹U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2015)

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO END HOMELESSNESS

1

Expand investment in affordable housing through existing and new revenue sources.

2

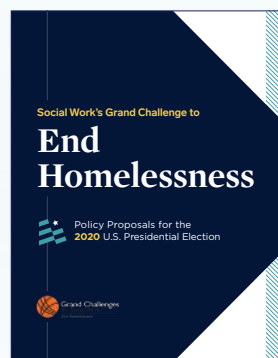
Shift funds from transitional emergency programs to lasting solutions such as rental vouchers and permanent supportive housing for those with disabilities.

3

Prevent homelessness or ensure its brevity by supporting rapid re-housing and time-limited rental assistance.

4

Ensure that the guiding principles of housing first (low barriers to housing, harm reduction, client-centered services) form the cornerstone of homeless services for adults, families, and youths.



From *End Homelessness: Policy Proposals for the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election*, 2020, available at the [End Homelessness website](#).

LOOKING BACK

Over the past five years, **End Homelessness** Grand Challenge network members and their colleagues have:

- **Advocated** for Maryland's Ending Youth Homelessness Act, which creates a grant program to fund housing and supportive services for unaccompanied homeless youth and those at risk of homelessness and against HUD's [Making Affordable Housing Work Act](#)
- **Compiled** a [series of essays](#) on homelessness by policy experts. Published in advance of the 2020 election to inform candidates of possible solutions to the U.S. housing crisis, the authors call for:
 1. **Expanding** investment in affordable housing
 2. **Supporting** rapid re-housing and time-limited rental assistance
 3. **Shifting** funds from transitional emergency programs to rental vouchers and permanent supportive housing
 4. **Designing** homeless services around the principles of Housing First
- **Published** a [chapter](#), "Homelessness in Los Angeles and New York City: A Tale of Two Cities," and a [book](#), "Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems and Changing Lives"
- **Presented** widely on the subject, including at the University of Denver's Science for Action series, where Benjamin Henwood delivered the [keynote address](#), "Shouldn't Ending Homelessness be the Easy Part?" and at the National Symposium on Solutions to End Youth Homelessness, where Deborah Padgett led a [session](#) on "Implementing Community Driven Research and Evaluation in Youth Programs"
- **Testified** in lawsuits aiming to improve homeless services and reduce police harassment in Miami, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC
- **Developed** a [curricular guide](#) for teachers and students of social work around ending homelessness with the National Center for Excellence in Homeless Services and the Council on Social Work Education
- **Conducted** a [research survey](#) with the National Center for Excellence in Homeless Services to identify ongoing research and interested faculty, and to connect researchers across institutions
- **Spoken out** against myths of homelessness surrounding crime, substance use, and [service resistance](#) in such outlets as [Radio Health Journal](#) and [The New York Times](#)
- **Contributed** to a [special edition](#) of the Journal of Social Work Education, featuring 13 articles on how various social work programs are updating their pedagogy in line with the movement to end homelessness
- **Participated** in the Los Angeles Homeless Count, which directed \$110 million in HUD funding to the county in 2018
- **Responded** to COVID-19 by [commenting](#) on and [researching](#) the implications of the pandemic for homelessness and the housing crisis more generally

LOOKING AHEAD

Over the next five years, network members are committed to **continuing** to advocate for the recommendations outlined in the original policy brief and expanded upon in *End Homelessness: Policy Proposals for the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election*, including:

- **Expand** access to housing subsidies, including Housing Choice Vouchers
- **Ensure** that evidence-based psychosocial interventions accompany housing assistance
- **Develop** and **evaluate** housing-led interventions for specific populations including youth, older people, and veterans

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The Grand Challenge to **Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment** is grounded in the recognition that environmental changes are inextricably linked to human health and well-being. Environmental issues such as urbanization, population growth, and extreme weather events are also social justice issues with a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable members of society.

Over the past five years, members of this Grand Challenge network have made tremendous progress towards “catalyzing social responses that strengthen individual and community capacities for anticipating and adapting to environmental changes.” They have launched a website, formed an Advisory Council, and generated numerous peer-reviewed articles, briefs, books, and presentations. They have encouraged their institutions to update curricula in line with the conceptual basis of the Grand Challenge. And they have forged interdisciplinary alliances, leveraging their expertise to advocate for policy changes at all levels of government.

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Working with Teens to Document Environmental Disasters

Jennifer Willett, PhD, an assistant professor at the University of Nevada, Reno, School of Social Work, is exploring environmental justice issues through community-based participatory research methods. In one project, funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Evaluation, she is working with 15 high school students from Title 1 schools who serve as co-researchers to document “slow violence” scenarios—hidden environmental disasters that occur over time and space—in Nevada. The project uses photovoice—documentation via photography and storytelling—and is focused on climate disasters like wildfires and floods, infrastructure needs in low-income neighborhoods that intersect with environmental degradation, and the continued impact of historic mining processes. The team has presented its findings to various stakeholders across the region and in Washington, DC, and is currently developing actions to address these scenarios with AmeriCorps programs.



Illegal vehicle dumping is a dangerous problem in Sun Valley, a working class neighborhood in Reno, NV. Beyond being an eyesore, dumping creates fire hazards and pollutes the environment.

Photo courtesy of Youth Scientists on the Research for Change NV Team

LOOKING BACK

In a 2015 [concept paper](#), leaders of the Grand Challenge to **Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment** identified four major areas for social work with respect to environmental change:

1. Disaster preparedness and response
2. Population dislocation
3. Community-level organizing and development
4. Mitigation, advocacy, and practice engagement

Over the past five years, members of the Grand Challenge network and their colleagues have engaged in myriad activities that are helping to **Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment**. They have:

- **Launched** a new [website](#) and [blog](#) to showcase their writing and research. Recent blog posts include: “[Caring for the Environment becomes Business’ Business](#),” “[Do Solar Lamps Help Children Study?](#),” and “[From Climate Grief to Direct Action](#)”
- **Published** numerous [briefs](#), [reports](#), [books](#), and [peer-reviewed articles](#) on the subject, including the book “[People and Climate Change](#),” co-edited by network co-lead Lisa Reyes Mason, which “closely examines people’s lived experience, climate-related injustice and inequity, why some groups are more vulnerable than others, and what can be done about it”
- **Conducted** studies that provided insights and recommendations for the local communities of [Flint, MI](#), and [North St. Louis, MO](#)

LOOKING AHEAD

Members of the Grand Challenge have articulated the following objectives for the next five years:

- **Further specify** the goals of the Grand Challenge and the associated actions required to achieve them
- **Increase** mentoring supports for earlier-stage researchers interested in joining the network
- **Develop** strategic partnerships with other Grand Challenges, such as **Close the Health Gap** and **Eliminate Racism**
- **Pursue** opportunities to [effect policy](#) at all levels—local, state, and national
- **Increase** involvement in local community development efforts
- **Establish** stronger connections between social workers and environmental justice advocates
- **Continue to advocate** for their policy recommendations:
 1. **Adopt** and **implement** evidence-based approaches to disaster risk reduction
 2. **Strengthen** equity-oriented urban resilience policies and proactively engage marginalized communities in adaptation planning
 3. **Develop** policies targeting environmentally induced migration and population displacement (e.g. amending the Stafford Act)

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Harness Technology for Social Good

The Grand Challenge to **Harness Technology for Social Good** is unique among the Grand Challenges in that it sets out not to address a specific issue or problem, but to fundamentally transform the field of social work with respect to its relationship to technology. Specifically, it aims to harness big data and deploy information and communication technology to improve the efficacy of social programs, accelerate the pace of social discovery, and reduce inequalities.

During the past five years, network members have led the field in this direction through their practice, research, teaching, and advocacy. They have served as a resource for the field, providing information and serving as a forum for people to meet and connect around the technology issues affecting them and their work.

A great deal of movement has occurred in 2020, as COVID-related social distancing measures drastically accelerated the field's adoption of technology — from remote working and teaching to virtual conferences to telehealth. In this sense, the coronavirus pandemic brought new attention and urgency to this Grand Challenge.



LOOKING BACK

Over the past five years, members of the Grand Challenge to **Harness Technology for Social Good** and their colleagues have:

- **Authored** working papers on [harnessing big data](#) in social work and [innovating social work practice](#) through the integration of technology
- **Articulated and advocated** for [policy recommendations](#) including:
 1. **Expanding** internet connectivity for underserved households
 2. **Unlocking** government data to drive solutions to social problems
 3. **Opening** the possibility of social work practice across state lines
- **Hosted** a six-part webinar series covering such topics as [telemental health](#), [thanatechnology](#), and [digital mapping](#) as well as a special webinar on COVID-19, "[Leading in a time of crisis](#)"
- **Participated** in [Project Connect](#), an initiative of the University of Washington School of Social Work for "social work students to gain valuable experience by working with local agencies to support vulnerable populations impacted by the COVID-19 crisis"
- **Hosted** a conference, sponsored by the University of Southern California, on social work and technology
- **Published** numerous articles and a book, "[Teaching Social Work with Digital Technology](#)," which aims to help "educators make pedagogically sound, rational, practical, and ethical decisions about integrating technology into their social work programs"
- **Advised** their colleagues and students of social work, both formally and informally, including several DSW students from USC whose final projects were focused on technology, including resource website and apps
- **Developed** SWVirtualPal, a [social media platform](#) for social workers, as part of their work with [iHeartTech](#), the Institute for Healthy Engagement and Resilience with Technology
- **Discussed** the implications of [artificial intelligence](#) for the field of social work in light of COVID-19 in [The Social Work Podcast](#), hosted by network co-lead Jonathan Singer
- **Pioneered** novel applications of virtual reality to social work education at the [University of Utah](#) and [Ball State University](#)

LOOKING AHEAD

Over the next five years, **Harness Technology for Social Good** network members and their colleagues will work toward the following objectives:

- **Provide feedback** on the Technology Advisory Group of the Council on Social Work Education
- **Conduct and publish** a first-of-its-kind, rigorous, comprehensive review of the scholarly literature around social work and technology published between 2015 and 2019. This peer-reviewed publication will provide a better understanding of the state of the science around these issues
- **Engage** in policy-related efforts around the "digital divide," which has become more striking in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic
- **Collaborate** with all of the Grand Challenge networks to identify creative, effective uses of technology to address issues in each challenge area

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Eliminate Racism

Racism permeates American society, and eliminating racism is inextricably linked to the work of each of the Grand Challenges for Social Work (GCSW). Indeed, the GCSW had previously developed a statement of [Vision, Mission, Domain, Guiding Principles, and Guideposts to Action](#) that clarified that “the commitment to ending racism and other injustices is fundamental throughout the Grand Challenges.” However, this statement was not strong or specific enough to express the GCSW’s commitment to eliminate the scourge of historic and structural racism.

In this context, the Grand Challenge to **Eliminate Racism** was established in 2020 — a year in which the nation and the world’s attention was once again focused on racial injustice and ending systemic violence and oppression against Black people. It recognizes that the United States is built on a legacy of racism and white supremacy that has consistently and significantly affected the daily lives of millions of people. It acknowledges that today, racist policies, bias, and discriminatory practices continue to promote racial inequality in myriad ways. In response, the **Eliminate Racism** network will identify evidence and practice-based interventions that take on discrimination in all its forms and redress racism’s most dangerous and negative effects on the health and well-being of our country by joining the national efforts to build anti-racist systems, policies, and communities. We encourage all to share how you are working to #EliminateRacism so that we may work together to tackle this Grand Challenge.



LOOKING BACK

The Grand Challenge to **Eliminate Racism** was formalized in 2020. Network co-leads and members of the wider GCSW community have been working for the past five years to establish the foundation for this effort. Among other actions, they have:

- **Spoken out** about social work and racism, including on the [Social Work Podcast](#) on the question of “What role do social work deans & directors play in addressing the legacy of racism and white supremacy?” and on [U Rising](#) about social work’s commitment to anti-racism
- **Participated** in the [inaugural conference](#) of the *Collaboration on Race, Inequality, and Social Mobility in America*, “Race at the Forefront: Sharpening a Focus on Race in Applied Research”
- **Cosponsored** a [Congressional briefing](#) on “Black Lives Matter: Social Work and the Future of Policing” along with the Grand Challenges to **Promote Smart Decarceration** and **Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice for All**
- **Cosponsored** a Social Work Leadership Roundtable [Town Hall](#) on Racial Equity

LOOKING AHEAD

A book on the Grand Challenge to **Eliminate Racism** will be published by Oxford University Press in 2021. The book is edited by network co-leads Martell Teasley and Michael Spencer, and their colleague Melissa Bartholomew, and includes authors representing each of the other 12 Grand Challenges. In addition to publishing the book, members of the Grand Challenge have articulated the following objectives for the next several years:

- **Focus** on evidence and practice-based research that cultivates innovation to improve the conditions of daily life of people impacted by racism and facilitates systemic change on the individual, organization, community, and societal levels
- **Advance** community empowerment and advocacy for eradicating racism and white supremacy through solutions that create sustainable changes
- **Foster** the development of an anti-racist social work workforce that promotes access to resources and opportunities and encompasses transdisciplinary collaboration
- **Promote** teaching and learning within social work education programs that examines structural inequalities and white privilege, and their impact on individual and group outcomes
- **Develop** a policy agenda for eradicating racism and white supremacy from institutions and organizations, where structural racism is evident and causes the most damage
- **Examine** the profession of social work itself with respect to rooting out racist policies and practices

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Succeeding Together

We want to hear about your efforts to #EliminateRacism!
 Tag us on Twitter — @GCSocialWork — to share your work and inspire others!
[#Up4theChallenge](#) | [#EliminateRacism](#)

Promote Smart Decarceration

The United States has the largest incarcerated population in the world, and people of color, low-income people, and people with disabilities are substantially overrepresented. The Grand Challenge to **Promote Smart Decarceration** aims to reduce the prison and jail population by one million people by 2025. In doing so, it intends to redress these disparities and maximize public safety and well-being.

During the past five years, members of the Grand Challenge have published, presented, and spoken out on these issues, both within the field of social work and more broadly. The decarceration movement has gained considerable traction recently, as criminal justice reform featured prominently in the Presidential election. Following the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other Black men and women, the Black Lives Matter movement powerfully amplified calls for bail reform as well as police and prison abolition.

ACHIEVING GOALS TOWARDS SMART DECARCERATION

Smart decarceration is the development of effective, sustainable, and socially just solutions to achieve criminal justice transformation. To achieve this, three interrelated goals must be accomplished:



1

Substantially reduce the incarcerated population in jails and prisons.



2

Redress the existing social disparities — racial, economic and behavioral health disparities — among the incarcerated.



3

Maximize public safety and well-being.

From Smart Decarceration Practice Behaviors for Social Work Competencies: A Guide for Educators and Learners, 2018.

LOOKING BACK

During the past five years, members of the **Promote Smart Decarceration** network and their colleagues have:

- **Published** numerous [book chapters](#) and [peer-reviewed articles](#), such as “Improving the Evaluation of Adult Mental Disorders in the Criminal Justice System With Computerized Adaptive Testing,” co-authored by network co-lead Matt Epperson, in the *Psychiatric Services Journal*
- **Convened** two national conferences, “From Mass Incarceration to Effective and Sustainable Decarceration” in St. Louis in 2015 and “Tools & Tactics: Promising Solutions to Advance the Era of Smart Decarceration” in Chicago in 2017
- **Responded** to COVID-19 by [surveying prisoners](#) about their reactions to the communication and containment strategies employed by prison officials in relation to the pandemic
- **Participated** in numerous virtual events, including a [both/and or either/or exercise](#) around social work and policing, hosted by *The Social Work Podcast*, as well as a [virtual convening](#) of the Prosecutors Research Network, a [virtual summit](#) on the State of Incarceration at Arizona State University, and a [virtual panel discussion](#) on “The Role of Prosecutorial Discretion in Driving Mass Imprisonment,” hosted by the University of Utah
- **Created** new courses at schools including the University of Maryland School of Social Work and the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration
- **Edited** a [book](#), *Smart Decarceration: Achieving Criminal Justice Transformation in the 21st Century*. Co-edited by network co-leads, Matt Epperson and Carrie Pettus-Davis, the book contains 15 chapters by researchers, practitioners, and advocates providing context, concepts, and strategies for achieving decarceration
- **Developed** a [curriculum guide](#), “Smart Decarceration Practice Behaviors for Social Work Competencies,” for teachers and students of social work. The document presents Smart Decarceration practices within the framework of the Council on Social Work Education’s (CSWE) nine core competencies
- **Advocated** for bail and prison reform at the local, state, and federal levels, including at the White House, where network co-lead Carrie Pettus-Davis participated in a [Prison Reform Summit](#)
- **Delivered** a [Congressional briefing](#) on “Black Lives Matter: Social Work and the Future of Policing,” along with the Grand Challenges to **Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice** and **Eliminate Racism**

LOOKING AHEAD

Network members have articulated the following objectives for the next five years:

- **Assemble** a [special issue](#) of *Criminal Justice and Behavior* on *Smart Decarceration*
- **Formulate** plans for more explicitly addressing racial equity in their work
- **Continue** to advocate for their policy recommendations to:
 1. **Restrict** the use of incarceration whenever possible
 2. **Reduce** racial and economic disparities through decarceration efforts
 3. **Remove** civic and legal exclusions for people with criminal charges and convictions
 4. **Reallocate** resources to community-based supports

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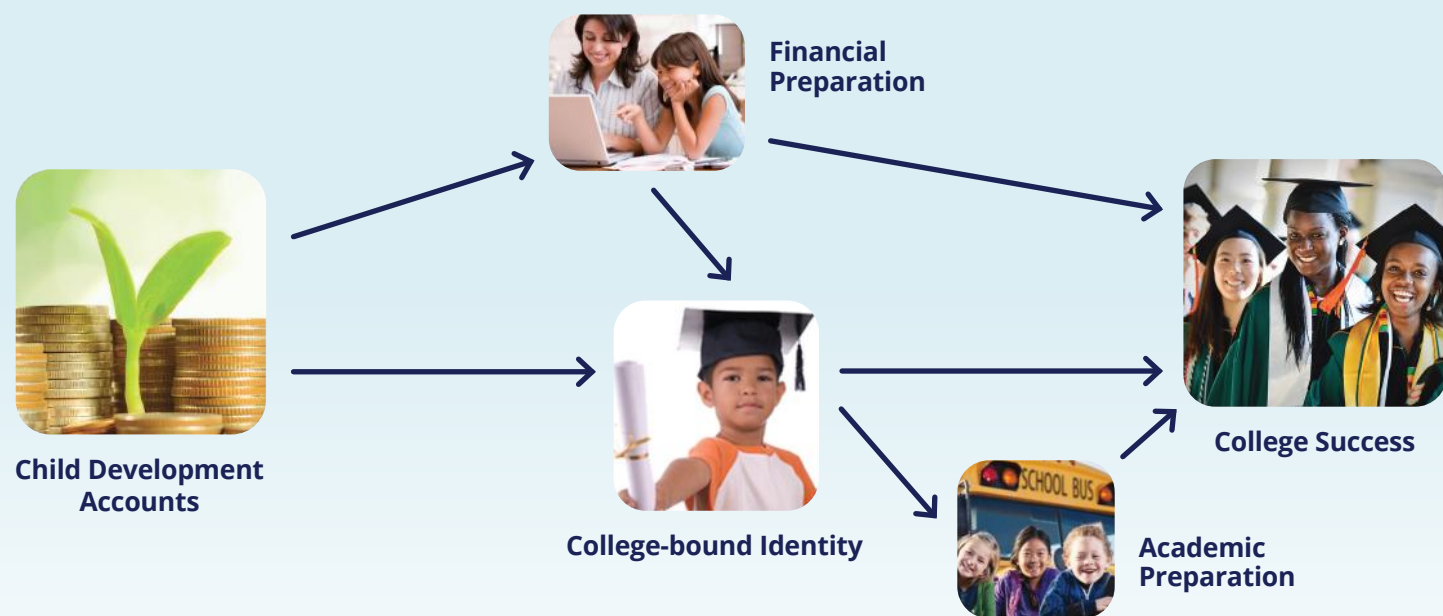
Build Financial Capability and Assets for All

The Grand Challenge to **Build Financial Capability and Assets for All**, also known as Financial Capability and Asset Building or FCAB, ensures that all people have access to the financial policies, services, supports, knowledge, and tools that enable them to achieve financial stability and security. In doing so, the Grand Challenge responds to growing financialization, financial insecurity, and economic inequality that threaten the well-being of millions of families. It envisions a key role for social work to empower people to build financial capability and assets and inform policy that ensures inclusion and equity.

Members of the network have advanced research, policy, education, and practice initiatives to expand financial capability and grow assets. A primary focus is to document and reverse structural bias against low-income and low-wealth groups, especially Black and Brown people, women, and other vulnerable groups across the lifespan. Network members proposed and are testing Child Development Accounts, a policy to reach all children with an asset account (see graphic). They have developed evidence-based curricula for social work education. Network members analyze the provision of essential financial products and services and ways to improve access. Others study direct practice approaches to family violence, problem gambling and other finance-related difficulties, the effects of asset limits in public benefits, the burden of student loans, retirement insecurity, and the potential of financial technology to build financial capability and assets.

The work of this Grand Challenge has never been more important than now, as the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted and threatened the financial well-being of so many more families.

LIKELY PATHWAYS FROM CHILD DEVELOPMENT ACCOUNTS TO COLLEGE SUCCESS



Reprinted with permission from Beverly, Elliott, & Sherraden (2013).

LOOKING BACK

During the past five years, **Build Financial Capability and Assets for All** network members and their colleagues have:

- **Studied** [SEED for Oklahoma Kids](#), the first randomized, controlled experiment of universal and progressive CDAs in the United States
- **Informed** adoption and implementation of CDA policies in [seven U.S. states](#), and FCAB education, policies, and practice [globally](#) in Azerbaijan, [Canada](#), Israel, Korea, Mainland China, Singapore, and Taiwan
- **Organized** five special issues on FCAB for leading social work and consumer science journals
- **Developed** a [Financial Social Work Certificate Program](#)
- **Convened** four [FCAB conferences](#) since 2015
- **Created** a social work curriculum for FCAB, a [curricular guide](#), online modules, and a [textbook](#), Financial Capability and Asset Building in Vulnerable Households, among others
- **Edited** a [handbook](#) on Financial Social Work: Direct Practice with Vulnerable Populations
- **Supported** development of FCAB courses in more than a dozen social work degree programs, with plans underway for more, and guided numerous doctoral dissertations on FCAB
- **Explored** the impact of [COVID-19](#) on household finances in a series of articles and blog posts
- **Developed** policy briefs on lifelong [asset building](#), [financial services](#), [CDAs](#), [cultural competency](#), [social work in financial practice](#), and others, including “[Start Lifelong Asset Building with Universal and Progressive Child Development Accounts](#)” and “[Policy Recommendations for Helping U.S. Households Build Emergency Savings](#)”

LOOKING AHEAD

In the next five years the financial capability and asset building network will:

- **Study** the financial well-being effects of financial capability policies, programs, and practices on vulnerable groups
- **Advance** theory and understanding of FCAB, including how individuals and social structures shape financial capability and assets
- **Test** social policy and intervention innovations to promote FCAB
- **Inform** policies, programs, and practices that reduce racial/ethnic inequality in financial wellbeing
- **Analyze and tackle** the financial consequences of the pandemic
- **Prepare** social workers and human service practitioners in the US and other countries with basic financial capability knowledge and practice skills, and increase specialists in FCAB
- **Leverage** opportunities for cross-grand challenge collaborations, especially with the **Reduce Extreme Inequality** and **Eliminate Racism** networks
- **Analyze and improve** how financial technology (fintech) can be leveraged for vulnerable populations

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Reduce Extreme Economic Inequality

The Grand Challenge to **Reduce Extreme Economic Inequality** stems from several startling observations. First, the top 20% earn 50% of the total annual income in the United States.¹ Second, the top 1% own nearly 30% of the total wealth in the United States.² Third, the impact of gaps in wealth and income are particularly pronounced in communities of color³, and income and wealth gaps persist between men and women. In response, members of this Grand Challenge have called for what amounts to a new social contract to reduce inequalities in wealth and income, and to close the financial gaps among racial groups, and between men and women. Their strategies include expanding job creation, the Earned Income Tax Credit, cash transfer programs, and access to childcare, as well as strengthening labor standards and creating new policies to encourage inclusive, progressive wealth building.

During the past five years, the network supporting the Grand Challenge to **Reduce Extreme Economic Inequality** has organized working groups, published and presented widely, developed a new curriculum for teaching about economic inequality, authored policy briefs, and advocated for its priorities on Capitol Hill. Network members also worked closely with the Grand Challenge to **Build Financial Capability and Assets for All**. They focused not only on the development of basic income, but on the policies and supports that relate to the acquisition of stable, living wages, and dependable family assets.

¹United States Census Bureau, 2019. Table A-4. Selected Measures of Household Income.

²Brookings.edu, June 25, 2019.

³Akee, Jones & Porter, 2019. Race matters: Income shares, income inequality, and income mobility for all U.S. races. Demography 56, 999-1021.

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE INCOMES AT THE BOTTOM



Increase Earnings from Low-skilled Jobs



Make Part-time, Shift & Variable Work More Humane



Expand the EITC



Expand Child Care to Enable Stable Employment



Expand Active Employment Creation



Strengthen Unemployment Insurance



Stop Privileging Income from Capital over Income from Labor in the Tax System

LOOKING BACK

In 2016, members of the Grand Challenge made these [policy recommendations](#) as part of their new social contract:

1. Strengthen labor standards and reform employment policies
2. Expand active employment creation
3. Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)
4. Expand childcare access to enable stable employment
5. Create new, lifelong policies for inclusive and progressive wealth building
6. Develop a universal child allowance

Over the past five years, network members, their colleagues, and other social workers have taken numerous substantive actions toward these goals, including:

- **Publishing** numerous [peer-reviewed articles](#), [book chapters](#), and encyclopedia entries
- **Presenting** multiple webinars, including two on COVID-19: "[Learning from History about Disaster and Economic Inequality](#)" and "[Stay Home? Housing Inequities, COVID-19, and Social Welfare Policy Responses](#)"
- **Co-authoring** two policy briefs: "[Start Lifelong Asset Building with Universal and Progressive Child Development Accounts](#)" and "[Convert the Child Tax Credit into a Universal Child Allowance](#)" and advocating for these policy recommendations on Capitol Hill and participating in the [March 2019 Social Work Day on the Hill](#)
- **Highlighting** the work of social work and social welfare researchers who study innovative proposals, including [universal basic income](#), [secure schedules for low-wage workers](#), child development accounts, sector strategies in workforce development, and [unconditional cash grants for new parents](#)
- **Developing** a curriculum for teaching social work students about extreme economic inequality and creating a [website](#)

LOOKING AHEAD

Over the next two to five years, the network plans to focus on policies and practices in their two critical areas, each to be supported by a working group, to design, implement and evaluate proposed solutions:

- **Equality in Work and Income** will explore how to make work benefit all employees by stabilizing earnings, increasing wages, improving working conditions, and equalizing paid time off for health and caregiving. It will also review how social and tax policy are interrelated with and affect paid employment. The group will look at the programs that are successfully "moving the needle" on guaranteed basic income, paid family leave, minimum wage, youth employment, and child allowances.
- **Inclusive Asset-Building** will look at gross inequities in access to wealth and asset-building resources, particularly as they relate to young people and those in marginalized communities. The group will identify, describe, analyze, and suggest improvements to programs that are successful in changing the distribution of economic assets and balance sheets in the U.S., as well as reducing predatory practices.

To accomplish this work, the network will:

- **Host** a working conference to identify and assign action items and update the overall agenda for the Grand Challenge
- **Develop** Special Interest Group activities directly related to core policy initiatives
- **Improve** communications by updating the website and expand their social media presence
- **Deepen** coordination with other scholars and practitioners of social work as well as other poverty-related organizations
- **Publish** a guide to analyzing policies with respect to reducing economic inequality

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WORKING GROUPS

Inclusive Asset-Building

- **Focus:** Addressing inequities in access to wealth and asset-building resources
- **Strategies:** Child Development Accounts, Revised Tax Policies

Equality in Work & Income

- **Focus:** Making work benefit all employees
- **Strategies:** Guaranteed Basic Income, Paid Family Leave, Minimum Wage, Youth Employment, Child Allowances, etc.

Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice

The Grand Challenge to **Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice** recognizes glaring inequities in access to healthcare, affordable housing, quality education, and gainful employment. It sees a vital role for social work in deconstructing the underlying prejudice, bias, and stigmatization that perpetuate and exacerbate these inequities. And it sees social workers as agents of change in their communities and institutions.

Consistent with its vision of a society of equal opportunity and justice, Grand Challenge members have published and presented widely on the subject during the past five years and advocated for state and federal policies to accelerate integration and combat discrimination. For school districts, the network has also launched the School Success Project to identify and reduce disproportionate suspension and expulsion. Looking ahead, the network envisions teaming up with other Grand Challenges, such as **Eliminate Racism** and **Promote Smart Decarceration**, to further their common goals.

A VISION OF AN EQUAL AND JUST SOCIETY



Healthcare

In 2016, the uninsured rate among working-age members of the Latino community in states that had expanded Medicaid eligibility decreased from 36% to 23%. In states that opted not to expand Medicaid eligibility, the rate remained virtually unchanged.



Education

Although African American children and youth account for 15% of the U.S. public-school population, they represent 48% of those suspended from school, outpacing all other ethnic groups in school suspension rates, with no evidence that they engage in misbehavior at higher rates.



Housing

Although the 1968 Fair Housing Act prohibits housing discrimination, American metropolitan areas remain highly segregated: the majority of White Americans live in neighborhoods that are more than 80% White, and nearly a third of White Americans—roughly 63 million people—live in neighborhoods that are more than 90% White.



Employment

The wage gap in the United States persists. As recently as 2018, compared to every \$1 that men of all races earn:

- White women working full time earn an average of \$0.79
- Black women earn only \$0.63
- Latina women earn as little as \$0.54

LOOKING BACK

During the past five years, members of the **Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice** network and their colleagues have:

- **Received** a \$174,423 [grant](#) from the Russell Sage Foundation to conduct a study on how older Latinx immigrants navigate community resources
- **Authored** five working papers on [addressing social stigma](#), [integrating Latinx immigrants](#), [supporting African American children](#), [building inclusive communities](#), and [reducing disparities in juvenile justice](#)
- **Launched** the [School Success Project](#), which aims to “raise awareness and promote school success by reducing disproportionate suspension and expulsion of school-aged youth.” Based at the University of Utah’s College of Social Work, this watchdog entity grew out of the 2017 [working paper](#), “Increasing Success for African American Children and Youth”
- **Published** numerous books and articles, including [“Facing Segregation: Housing Policy Solutions for a Stronger Society,”](#) [“LGBT Stigma and Stress: How Social Workers Can Help,”](#) and the [introduction](#) to a special issue of the Journal of Teaching and Social Work on “Preparing Bilingual, Bicultural Social Workers to Serve the Growing Latino Population in America”
- **Presented** at the [annual conference](#) of the Society for Social Work and Research
- **Co-sponsored** a congressional briefing on [“The Intersection of Health and Justice: A Look Inside County Jails,”](#) calling for better physical and mental healthcare services for people admitted to jails
- **Worked** through the [Latinx Leadership Initiative](#) at Boston College School of Social Work to “increase the number of Latinx social workers in the United States and develop social work practitioners who are equipped to work effectively with Latinx communities across the country”
- **Spoken** out against the [immigration policies](#) of the Trump Administration with respect to their harmful implications for children
- **Advocated** for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, arguing for retaining financial supports to ensure affordability for students and including social work programs in Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need

LOOKING AHEAD

Members of the Grand Challenge to **Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice** network have articulated the following objectives for the next five years:

- **Increase** collaboration with related Grand Challenges, such as **Eliminate Racism** and **Promote Smart Decarceration**
- **Emphasize** the Grand Challenge in light of the growing racial and ethnic inequities in U.S. society
- **Continue** to advocate for policy recommendations, including:
 1. **Accelerate** Latinx immigrant integration and expand coverage under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA)
 2. **Enhance, expand, and strengthen** federal antidiscrimination laws, including the Voting Rights Act
 3. **Eliminate** zero tolerance policies in schools and promote the use of evidence-informed practices and policies to address racial disciplinary disproportionality

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Sources: 2016 GCSW [Policy Brief](#), 2017 [concept papers](#) and the Center for American Progress [website](#)

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YEARS REMAINING

UP!AHEAD. TOGETHER.

The Grand Challenges for Social Work initiative was established to champion social progress powered by science. To partner with colleagues in different disciplines to make meaningful change together. To encourage collaborations far and wide to tackle our nation's toughest problems.

Join us! And, share news about your projects related to the Grand Challenges.

Twitter: @GCSocialWork | #Up4theChallenge

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