



Policy Platform

Social workers in sports play a unique role advocating and protecting the wellbeing of athletes. To that end, the Alliance of Social Workers in Sports (ASWIS), as the representative body of social workers in sport, supports policies that promote the whole athlete, encompassing their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing as well as the greater community and environment in which they compete and live.



ATHLETES

Physical, mental, and emotional health, financial wellbeing, and personal safety
ASWIS believes that laws, policies, and funding should address the whole athlete: physical, mental, and emotional health and safety.

ASWIS supports laws, policies, and funding that support the following principles:

Physical health. Athletes, both while competing and during the rest of their life, face particular risks to their physical health, and as such should receive specialized research, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment to address those risks and minimize potential consequences. Issues in this area include:

- Opioid and other substance abuse/addiction
- Concussions, including return-to-play and return-to-study
- Safety training of those with athlete oversight
- Medical staff availability
- Informed consent of safety risks
- Pre-screening and baseline testing
- Nutrition, sleep, and other wellness issues
- Pregnancy
- Access to healthcare
- Injury treatment that focuses on recovery and well-being of the athlete
- Post-injury/post-sports care, including the long-term impacts from concussions/brain injuries
- Privacy of health information
- Access to non-pharmacologic treatments for pain

Mental and emotional health. Athletes should have access to specialized prevention, intervention, and treatment services that support their mental, behavioral, and social-emotional health. Issues in this area include:

- Access to sports specialized counseling, social work, and other related professional services
- Cyber bullying and threats
- Substance abuse and addiction (also see “Physical health”)
- Depression, anxiety, mood disorders, trauma, etc.

- Eating and other compulsive disorders, such as those related to the unique weight pressures sports can place on athletes, gambling, and over-exercising
- Family trauma
- Pressures and other related issues of recruitment, free-agency, contracts, and retirement, including potentially unethical/abusive behavior of recruiters, agents, and others
- Transition from being away from home with its family and support structure separation
- Self-harm and suicide
- Potential injury (i.e. brain injury) collateral consequences, such as emotional/personality and behavioral effects and their potential for relational and legal consequences
- Privacy of health information
- Unique challenges athletes face regarding talent decline, whether injury or natural age related
- Post-sports care

Living and financial wellbeing. Athletes need appropriate guidance, support, and/or compensation for their efforts, including how to transition to life after sport. Issues in this area include:

- Financial literacy and life skills
- Gender equity of compensation
- Living support for college athletes
- Fair compensation for use of image and other personal information/features
- Quality education for student athletes
- Media and social media interaction
- Post-injury support for athletes
- Pre and post-retirement counseling and services – helping make the decision when best to retire, how to best transition into retirement, and maintaining financial and wellness security in retirement
- Protection against exploitation, such as from agents, family, and friends

Personal safety. Athletes and those around them deserve to be able to compete and live without fear for their personal safety. Issues in this area include:

- Hazing
- Violence off the field
- Coaching abuses/positive coach-athlete relationships
- Fan etiquette
- Domestic violence, awareness, prevention, and response
- Sexual harassment/abuse/violence, awareness, prevention, and response
- Appropriate safeguards for staff and athlete interactions

Empowerment. Ensure that athletes have a voice and participate in addressing issues of athletes, community/environment, and sports.

Community

Healthy and safe community

ASWIS believes that laws, policies, and funding should address the health, wellness, and safety of the greater sports community.

ASWIS supports laws, policies, and funding that support the following principles:

Employee wellness. Sports entities/organizations should foster the health and wellness of athletic staff – including administrators, coaches, medical staff, officials, and other support staff. Issues in this area include:

- Creating work environments that support healthy eating, adopting active lifestyles, being tobacco free, managing stress, and avoiding injury and exposure to hazards (e.g., mold, asbestos)
- A comprehensive employee wellness approach with a coordinated set of programs, policies, benefits, and environmental supports designed to address multiple risk factors (e.g., lack of physical activity, tobacco use) and health conditions (e.g., diabetes, depression) to meet the health and safety needs of all employees
- Partnerships between sports entities/organizations and their health insurance providers that can help offer resources, including personalized health assessments, wellness and fitness resources, and other forms of preventative medicine

Family support. The unique needs of families of athletes, particularly collegiate and pro-athletes, should be addressed. Issues in this area include:

- Support for positive family inactions under the particular pressures of sports
- Pressures and other issues related to recruitment, free agency, contracts, and retirement of athlete family member
- Relocation
- Separation from practicing/competing athlete

Environment

Healthy and safe environment

ASWIS believes that laws, policies, and funding should address the health, wellness, and safety of the greater sports environment.

ASWIS supports laws, policies, and funding that support the following principles:

Physical environment. Athletes and those involved in sports should have a healthy and safe physical environment encompassing the athletic facilities and its surrounding areas. Issues in this area include:

- Physical condition during normal operation as well as during renovation (e.g., ventilation, moisture, temperature, noise, and natural and artificial lighting)
- Protecting athletes from:
 - Physical threats (e.g., crime, violence, traffic, and injuries)
 - Biological and chemical agents in the air, water, or soil (e.g., pollution, mold, hazardous materials, pesticides, and cleaning agents)
- Safe and appropriate playing surfaces
- Safety equipment

Event operations. Athletes and those involved in sports should have events that operate with health, wellness, and safety in mind. Issues in this area include:

- Event safety/emergency action plans
- Alcohol serving policy
- Security presence

Spectator interaction. Sports related laws and policies should foster positive spectator experiences and interactions. Issues in this area include:

- Parental and spectator conduct
- Social media and other commentary and virtual interaction with athletes

Sports

Regulation and operations of sports

ASWIS believes that laws, policies, and funding should

promote the benefits of sports participation for all.

ASWIS supports laws, policies, and funding that support the following principles:

Social work in sports profession. Athletes and the greater community benefit from caring, trained, and experienced social workers in sports, and, to that end:

- Promote opportunities and removal of barriers to entering the profession/field
- Align with the National Association of Social Worker (NASW) Code of Ethics and Grand Challenges of the social work profession
- Promote training and certification of social workers in sports
- Recognize the benefits of student experience and coaching of those about to or have recently entered the social work in sports field

Equity and inclusion. Society benefits from the addressing of barriers to and positive promotion of sports participation. Issues in this area include:

- Racial and gender equity and inclusion in sports
- Athletes with disabilities
- Appropriate accommodations
- Promotion and creation of sports participation and leadership opportunities, particularly for under-participating/represented and/or discriminated portions of society

Access. Society benefits when there are opportunities for athletic participation. Issues in this area include:

- School athletics funding
- Space and facilities for sports
- Support for the Olympic movement and Team USA
- Education and awareness raising

Sportsmanship. Good sportsmanship practices should be promoted. Issues in this area include:

- Mentoring
- Doping
- Treatment of officials

Operations. Fair, ethical, and safe operations of sports entities/organizations should be promoted. Issues in this area include:

- Ethical recruitment – development of strategies to help ensure transparency and ethics in athletes, particularly student-athletes, recruiting, and that athletes are not harmed in the recruiting process
- Product marketing and sales relationships with sports entities/organizations
- Behavior and actions of owners/management
- Background checks
- Governing body (National Governing Organization (NGO), school, organization, league, etc.) and governmental oversight
- Athlete and staff codes of ethics/conduct
- Due process in disciplinary proceedings/practices
- Mechanisms to allow for raising of safety and health concerns without fear of reprisal

Beyond the playing field. The positives of sports beyond the playing field should be recognized, supported, and promoted. Issues in this area include:

- Develop education, leadership skills, healthier lifestyles, self-esteem, fair play, and good citizenship through sports
- Charity and volunteerism

- Social justice and advocacy
- Sports diplomacy/sports for peace