

2011 Public Policy Platform

Who are we?

NAMI Maryland is a statewide organization, with thirteen local affiliates, dedicated to advocacy for and education of persons with serious brain disorders/mental illnesses, their families and the community. NAMI Maryland advocates for the public and private resources needed to assure the availability, accessibility and quality of comprehensive mental health treatment and rehabilitative services throughout the State of Maryland.

Our Core Values

- The belief that services should be relevant to the consumer's culture and life experiences, and barriers to treatment such as lack of language access and lack of cultural competence must be eliminated.
- The recognition that mental illness is a brain disorder and should be treated with a level of understanding and competency equal to treatment of any other chronic illness.
- The acknowledgement that persons with mental illness can effectively manage this illness with proper treatment and support, and often recover and live healthy and productive lives and that they have a right to plan their own goals, advocate for themselves and choose their own advocates.
- The belief that the practice of blaming family members for the mental illness of their loved ones should be eliminated and, instead, that families be treated with understanding, compassion, and sensitivity.
- The belief that families should be involved in ongoing mental health treatment planning along with the consumer with the consumer's permission.

Recent Background from the 2010 Legislative Session

In the 2010 state legislative session NAMI Maryland and its Public Policy committee focused heavily on working with a coalition of mental health and disability organizations to pass an alcohol tax targeted toward funding services for people with disabilities. Although it didn't pass, great progress was made in educating legislators and the public as well as in developing partnerships with other advocacy groups.

Due to budget constraints, Maryland's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene unilaterally made the decision to close the Upper Shore Hospital. The decision was based on the fact that funding for state psychiatric hospitals did not include a Medicaid match. Although it was viewed as a strategic cut by the department, there were concerns about mental health treatment for Eastern Shore residents that were expressed at that time, and that remain today. NAMI Maryland advocated for increased services on the Eastern Shore, which did result in some increased funding to the local Core Service agency, Mid-Shore Mental Health Systems, Inc.

There were significant cuts made to Maryland's health and human services funding in 2010, however, NAMI Maryland, in partnership with the Maryland Mental Health Coalition, was successful in minimizing the projected cuts during the legislative session.

In 2011 NAMI Maryland will advocate for:

Financing of Treatment and Services

- Support revenue initiatives targeted toward increased funding for mental health services, for example, a dedicated tax on alcohol.
- Monitor the implementation of insurance parity and healthcare reform to ensure compliance with federal law, maximize benefits to persons with mental illness, and support policies that will ensure that public and private health insurers provide adequate mental health coverage.
- Continue to use funds for existing levels of care which provide services integration for the continuum of recovery-based mental health treatment and rehabilitative services. This includes Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, 24/7 crisis services, and criminal justice diversion programs. As funding permits, expand these services to underserved communities, including in Maryland's rural areas.
- With the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010 and the establishment of the Maryland Health Care Reform Coordinating Council to assist in implementation of the Act in Maryland, the system for mental health care delivery and payment in the public and private arena is undergoing significant review and assessment. We will advocate that any changes that occur provide for comprehensive and integrated behavioral health care, ensure that a broad range of mental health services are provided and allow for expansion of services without loss of current services covered by public or private insurance.
- Ensure that there are policies which require private insurance companies to provide a full range of outpatient mental health services comparable to those provided by the publicly supported Medicaid system.

Access to Services

- Improve access to and availability of high-quality, culturally and linguistically competent and recovery-based mental health services that promote best practices in care for all individuals regardless of insurance status, ability to pay or geographic location.
- Ensure adequate hospital bed capacity is available. Acute and longer term inpatient treatments are vital components in the array of treatment interventions and services that are necessary to assure a

timely and durable recovery from the symptoms of mental illness.

- Ensure that discharge planning and community reintegration are consumer-driven, with family participation whenever possible and appropriate, and that housing, supported employment, and adequate therapeutic and community supports are included.
- Ensure continuity of care and access to medications for consumers regardless of where they are being treated and particularly when transitioning from institutional care to community living.
- Adopt incentives to increase and sustain a better qualified mental health workforce, including training for peer specialists, psychiatric rehabilitation paraprofessionals and direct care workers.
- Require that service providers prioritize access to services to people with serious and persistent mental illness, providing oversight and advocacy through well-trained care managers. Services should use an integrated consumer centered approach that may take professionals out of the traditional office setting to a location that is comfortable for the consumer.
- Provide solutions that support treatment of and assistance to individuals with severe mental illness who do not acknowledge their illness and/or resist treatment and who, without treatment and supports, present a danger in the community.
- Provide easily accessible emergency services, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week in professionally staffed crisis centers or psychiatric emergency departments.

Services and Supports for Adults

- Provide adequate, effective and coordinated mental health treatment and services in all areas of Maryland based on a Recovery Oriented System of Care model.
- Ensure that evidence-based practices are utilized to provide the most effective services.
- Provide coordinating services for consumers, such as case management, to assist in their recovery wherever they reside.
- Provide safe, affordable housing for individuals with serious mental illness.
- Ensure medical care and psychiatric care are coordinated to address the health needs of the whole person.
- Provide meaningful employment opportunities with supports available for all levels of abilities, including supportive employment programs and other programs to help individuals succeed in the workplace.
- Eliminate policies that create barriers to employment for individuals with mental illness.

Services and Supports for Children, Adolescents, Young Adults and Families

- Implement an effective, comprehensive, statewide system of care for children and youth with mental health needs and their families based on a Recovery Oriented System of Care model.

- Allow parents wherever possible to retain custody of their children, with adequate supports, regardless of their ability to pay.
- Provide limits on the use of restraint and seclusion for children.
- Train teachers, school counselors and primary care providers in early detection of mental illness and in making referrals to appropriate mental health professionals.
- Ensure that parents are full participants in their child's Individual Education and Treatment Plans.

Special Populations

- Ensure access to appropriate and timely services for veterans in all stages of recovery, regardless of discharge status or disability.
- Provide dual diagnosis programs for treatment for those with both substance use problems and a mental illness so that both conditions are addressed at the same time and, if possible, at the same site.
- Provide improved coordination and treatment for individuals with co-occurring disorders including substance use, developmental disorders and functional limitations.
- Develop policies that recognize and provide for the unique needs of aging caretakers of people with psychiatric disabilities.
- Develop suitable, non-discriminatory community residences and the same improved services for elderly persons with serious mental illnesses as for other adults.

Criminal Justice and Forensics Issues

- Ensure that individuals entering the criminal justice system are screened at point of entry for serious mental illness and co-occurring disorders and that provision is made for services to be provided to address their needs.
- Ensure that a statewide continuum of care is provided for persons with psychiatric or co-occurring disorders who become involved in the criminal justice system, including Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT), jail diversion programs, In-Prison Therapeutic Community (ITC) programs, mental health courts, and other forensic services, along with the supports necessary to provide safe and effective services in the community.
- Make provisions for post-release medication, identification, and access to treatment providers in the community.
- Recommend training for corrections, judicial, and law enforcement personnel to promote effective and compassionate interaction with people living with a mental illness.

Quality Monitoring, Accountability and Accreditation

- Improve data collection, promote outcomes measurement and ensure accountability in mental health services delivery, including promoting new technology to maximize service delivery.

Research

- NAMI Maryland supports both effectiveness and efficacy-based research, focusing on severe and persistent mental illnesses, especially those with marked burdens of disease.
- NAMI Maryland recognizes the wealth of research institutions within Maryland and supports efforts to collaborate across institutions, organizations and programs to develop research protocols to further investigation into mental illness and its causes and treatments.

For additional information please contact:

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