



## **2017 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

The National Alliance on Mental Illness of Washington (NAMI Washington) is part of the larger NAMI organization - the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. There is an urgent need to reform the state system of mental health treatment, to ensure that all individuals and families affected by mental illness can build better lives. NAMI Washington is committed to being an active agent of change in this effort. In 2017 NAMI Washington will lead advocacy efforts to improve access to timely and effective mental health treatment by focusing on the following legislative priorities.

### **1. PROTECT and INCREASE ACCESS TO QUALITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

An ideal state mental health system should be comprehensive, built on solid scientific evidence that is focused on wellness and recovery. It should be inclusive, reaching underserved areas and neglected communities, and fully integrated into the broader health care system. Research has shown that timely treatment produces better outcomes and quicker recovery for individuals with mental illness. Delays in treatment can increase the severity of mental illness and consequently the intensity and cost of the services being provided. Seamless care coordination can prevent suicides, homelessness, loss of job earnings, and incarceration. Legislative issues related to protecting and increasing access to Washington State's mental health care services will include but are not limited to:

- Advocate a change to the **Involuntary Treatment Standard** from the current "imminent" standard to "substantial likelihood."
- Refine and monitor the **Assisted Outpatient Treatment** law to support effective implementation throughout the state.
- Support the proliferation and enhancement of state funded **Clubhouses**.
- Support the training, employment, and adequate compensation of **Certified Peer Specialists**.
- Support funding of expanded **Permanent Supportive Housing** and **Supportive Employment** programs and services.

### **2. DECRIMINALIZE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CONDITIONS**

In a mental health crisis, people are more likely to encounter police than get medical help. As a result, 2 million people with mental illness are booked into jails each year. Nearly 15% of men and 30% of women booked into jails have a serious mental health condition. Having a behavioral health condition is not a crime, it should be treated and viewed as what it is – a disease. People living with mental illness, chemical dependency, or both (a co-occurring disorder) do not belong in our criminal justice or corrections system – but in treatment and recovery programs. Legislative issues related to decriminalizing mental illness in Washington State and protecting people living with mental illness who come into contact with the criminal justice system will include but are not limited to:

- Support **Diversion and Re-Entry** programs including the creation and **expansion of community based capacity**.

- Amend RCWs related to the imposition of **Legal Financial Obligations (LFOs)** to decrease the impact of LFOs on individuals with mental illnesses
- Support the recommendation of the **Deadly Force in Community Policing Task Force** to change the RCW to hold police accountable for unjustified shootings.
- Advocate for an **Independent Ombudsman for the Department of Corrections** to ensure accountability in transparency and oversight.

### **3. PRIORITIZE PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION**

Mental illness affects young people at an alarming rate. One half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and 75 percent begin by age 24. What's even more astounding is that even after an onset of symptoms, the average young person does not get treatment until eight to 10 years later. Research shows that early identification and intervention leads to better outcomes, may lessen long-term disability, and reduce costs associated with crisis treatment services, as well as avoiding years of unnecessary suffering. Family members are a central resource in the treatment of children and adults living with serious mental illnesses and should be an integral part of the treatment team and empowered to facilitate mutually agreed upon treatment team goals. Research overwhelmingly shows that when families take an active part in treatment decisions, consumer outcomes are better. Legislative issues related to prevention and early intervention care in Washington will include but are not limited to:

- Support the recommendations of the **Children's Mental Health Task Force** to **increase system capacity** for children's mental health care through effective system coordination and collaboration between systems serving children, youth, young adults, and their families; providing **culturally and linguistically appropriate services and assessments**; and supporting evidence-based, age appropriate **school curricula about mental illness and behavioral health education**.
- Align RCWs related to disclosure of health-related patient information with Federal **HIPPA** standards.

### **4. ENSURE THE FINANCIAL STABILITY OF A QUALITY MENTAL HEALTH CARE SYSTEM**

Washington State lacks the revenue to adequately fund its most basic services. This is because we have the most unfair and unstable revenue system in the nation. Lack of revenue combined with the recession has resulted in \$12 billion in cuts and chronic underfunding for our important social service safety net programs. Legislative issues related to funding stability and the budget supported by NAMI Washington include but are not limited to:

- Advocate for the **Fiscal Impact** bill requiring the Office of Financial Management to include cost of not implementing programs into all Mental Health related bills.
- Advocate for the renewal of the **Recording Fee Surcharge** on real estate transactions to continue support for homeless service programs
- Support the growth of the **Behavioral Health Workforce** by, inter alia, expanding the state's existing professional loan repayment program.
- **Protect Revenue for Health and Safety Net Services**, these services should not be pitted against other critical program which allow Washingtonians to be healthy and thrive.
- Support **New Revenue**