

# NAMI Whatcom 2022-2024 Strategic Plan



**NAMI Whatcom**  
**offers**  
**HOPE**  
**and a**  
**PATH FORWARD**  
**for people affected**  
**by mental health**  
**conditions and those**  
**who support them.**

# **NAMI Whatcom 2022-2024 Strategic Plan**

NAMI Whatcom continues to serve the behavioral health needs of the community and is now positioned to do so much more. NAMI Whatcom enjoys a strong working relationship between the Board of Directors and staff and continues to offer support, in a number of ways, to those affected by mental illness. We are now ready to build additional capacity to serve new and underserved groups, as well as to enhance programs for those we currently serve.

This report describes a strategic planning process undertaken by the Board and Executive Director during Fall 2021 to guide NAMI Whatcom's future development. The process included a thorough review and assessment of NAMI Whatcom's current situation, a scan of relevant aspects of its environment, and the formulation of a strategic framework consisting of six strategic goals.

This strategic plan will guide NAMI Whatcom's progress over the next three years by:

- Establishing clear priorities agreed upon by all stakeholders;
- Identifying several specific, multi-year goals; and
- Providing a framework to guide decision making and resource allocation.

## **NAMI Whatcom**

Founded in 1984, NAMI Whatcom is an affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), which was started in 1979 when two mothers, each with a son with schizophrenia, met over lunch to discuss the similar challenges they shared raising a child with a serious mental illness. NAMI programs have two components:

- They are free.
- They are led by individuals with lived experience, meaning that program participants live with a mental health condition themselves or someone they love lives with a mental health condition.

Many of our NAMI classes are evidence-based.

NAMI Whatcom recognizes that there are significant barriers facing those with mental health conditions. We don't offer a magic solution, but we can help people learn about symptoms, identify coping strategies, and navigate resources. We want people to know that they are not alone, know how to reach out if they need help, and know how to help one another.

We educate and advocate for better awareness of mental health conditions and behavioral health services. We do so by hosting events and forums so the community, elected officials, and the general public understand what it means to live with mental health conditions. We fight stigma through presentations to schools, faith groups, businesses, law enforcement, and other civic groups where individuals with lived experience can tell their stories. NAMI Whatcom offers hope and a path forward for people affected by mental health conditions.

NAMI Whatcom is a unique 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is affiliated with both the national organization, NAMI, and the state organization, NAMI Washington. We do not receive funding from these organizations. We utilize NAMI signature programs and receive training and support from NAMI Washington. Appendix I (page 13) includes a listing of programs NAMI Whatcom currently has volunteers certified to lead.

## **Mission**

The mission of NAMI Whatcom is to provide hope and improve the quality of life for those who are affected by mental health conditions through support, education, advocacy, and programs informed by research.

## **Vision**

NAMI Whatcom is dedicated to:

- Strengthening our grassroots affiliate organization in order to better address our mission.
- Encouraging those living in recovery and their loved ones to develop the understanding, skills, and strengths they need to cope with mental health conditions.
- Increasing community support for recovery and re-integration of those who have mental health conditions.
- Finding ways to bring individuals living with mental health conditions, caregivers and families, and health service providers closer together by sharing insights and techniques beneficial to individuals in these three categories.
- Full inclusivity of individuals of all races, backgrounds, cultures, and sexual orientations.

## **Values**

NAMI Whatcom values support, education, advocacy, and research. These are the “four pillars” of NAMI and have long been the foundation upon which we have built the NAMI movement.

- **Support:** Mutual emotional support is provided by people who share common experiences and can draw strength from one another across time and space in ways that only those who have “walked a mile in our shoes” can.
- **Education:** We offer a broad array of public education programs and focused training to improve understanding of mental health conditions and their impact on all of our lives.
- **Advocacy:** We work to change systems, improve public policy and bureaucratic procedures, and advance research and treatment options for all people whose lives are affected by mental health conditions.
- **Research:** NAMI Whatcom’s programs and advocacy are based on scientific research, which is conducted through NAMI National and NAMI Washington.

## **About NAMI Whatcom**

### **Program Participants**

NAMI Whatcom serves those experiencing mental health conditions and those who care for them, such as family members, relatives, and friends. NAMI Whatcom works towards a future where all people with mental health conditions can live productive and fulfilling lives.

Mental health conditions are disorders that affect a person's thinking, mood, and/or behavior. They can range from mild to severe. According to the National Institute on Mental Health, nearly one-in-five adults live with a mental health condition.

A serious mental illness (SMI) is defined as one or more diagnoses of mental disorders combined with significant impairment in functioning. Schizophrenia, bipolar illness, and major depressive disorder are the diagnoses most associated with SMI, but people with one or more other disorders may also fit the definition of SMI if those disorders cause serious functional impairment that substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities.

In 2021, NAMI Whatcom programs included:

- Support groups offered to 1,545 participants, including 188 first-time participants.
- *In Our Own Voice* and *Ending the Silence* presentations serving 609 attendees.
- 39 volunteer-led programs; 23 were led by volunteers living with a mental health condition.

NAMI Whatcom has not compiled detailed demographic information about participants. However, below are estimates of recent participant demographics:

- Support group participants are all 18 years and older.
- Approximately 90% of support group participants are Caucasian women.
- In support groups and education classes, most participants are between the ages of 30 and 65.
- Over 80% of participants are residents of Whatcom County.
- Approximately 3% of our participants are male.
- Of underserved groups (e.g., people of color, men) in Whatcom County, the LGBTQ+ community has the largest percentage of participants in NAMI Whatcom programs at approximately 3-5% of total participants.
- Our middle and high school-based program, *Ending the Silence*, serves a diverse population throughout Whatcom County.

# Organization

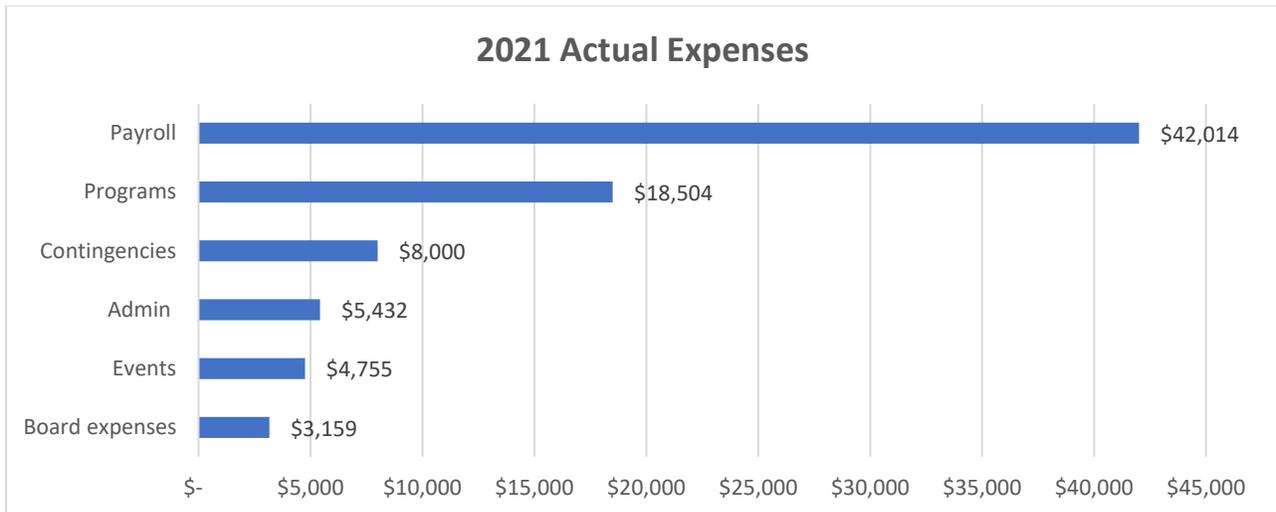
## Staff

Executive Director: Kim Sauter, MS  
Peer Coordinator: Amy Armstrong

## 2021 Board of Directors

Rosemary Webb, President  
Brian Estes, Vice President  
Bruce Smith MD, Treasurer  
Tom Scott, Secretary  
Gracie Lamb  
Chris Ohana  
Meika Rhodes  
Russ Sapienza, Peer Emeritus

# Financial Condition



## Fundraising

NAMI Whatcom’s primary fundraiser is the *Stigma Stomp*, a fun run/walk held at Bloedel Donovan Park in Bellingham, usually the first Saturday in October. The 2020 Stigma Stomp was held virtually, but it was held in person in 2021

Normally, the run/walk is preceded by a health fair held indoors at the park with various vendors and sponsors with tables and information and free merchandise, including a raffle which generates additional revenue. Due to COVID-19, the health fair was not held in 2020 or 2021.

Other fundraising efforts include Give Big Day in December, NAMI Walks held in June, and contributions from a variety of program participants.

<b>Stigma Stomp</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Sponsors</b>	<b>Revenue</b>	<b>Expenditures</b>
2019	163	\$9,850	\$18,180 Profit: \$16,181	\$1,999
2020	61	\$7,728	\$11,4199 Profit: \$10,942	\$477
2021	138	\$11,500	\$18,089 Profit: \$15,781	\$2,317*

## Advocacy

NAMI Whatcom is active at the local and state level in advocating for better mental and behavioral health public policies. We participate annually in NAMI Washington’s lobby day/week held in February, which involves meeting in-person or virtually with State Representatives and State Senators in the 40th and 42nd Legislative Districts. We have also provided public comment on Bellingham and Whatcom County law enforcement budgets related to behavioral health staffing, and we monitor the activities of the Whatcom County Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force’s Behavioral Health Subcommittee, among other local activities.

NAMI volunteers and the Executive Director also participate in monthly “SMI” meetings involving individuals and organizations engaged in behavioral health crisis response in Whatcom County. These monthly meetings are facilitated by individuals who are also NAMI volunteers, although these are not official NAMI Whatcom events. Representatives from the Bellingham Police Department, Whatcom County Sheriff’s Office, the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) and Ground-Level Response and Coordinated Engagement (GRACE) programs, treatment providers, and others participate in these monthly sessions.

# **Strategic Assessment**

## **Environmental Scan**

The population and general demographics of the residents of our Whatcom County service area<sup>1</sup> are shown below:

- Whatcom County’s estimated population was 228,000 in 2020.
- The largest city in Whatcom County is Bellingham (91,610 in 2020); the next largest cities are Lynden, Ferndale, Blaine, and Everson.
- In 2019, 92.8% of Whatcom County residents ages 25 and older had graduated high school; 34.3% have bachelor’s degrees or higher levels of education.

<b>2019</b>	<b>Whatcom County</b>	<b>Washington State</b>
<b>Population by age</b>		
Under 5 years old	5.1%	6.0%
Under 18 years old	19.2%	21.8%
65 years and older	18.0%	15.9%
<b>Females</b>	50.6%	49.9%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White	86.2%	78.5%
Black	1.3%	4.4%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	3.4%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	5.1%	10.4%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	9.8%	13.0%

## **Trends in Mental Health Care**

Mental health includes having emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Over the course of a lifetime, many factors can affect mental health, including biological factors, life experiences such as trauma or abuse, and family history. In 2016, 13% of Whatcom County adults reported 14 or more days of poor mental health per month. This was the highest rate reported over the last six years and surpassed the Washington State rate for the first time.

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<sup>1</sup> All data in the Environmental Scan section is drawn from <https://esd.wa.gov/labormarketinfo/county-profiles/whatcom>.

Charts below are from the [2018 Whatcom County Community Health Assessment](#).

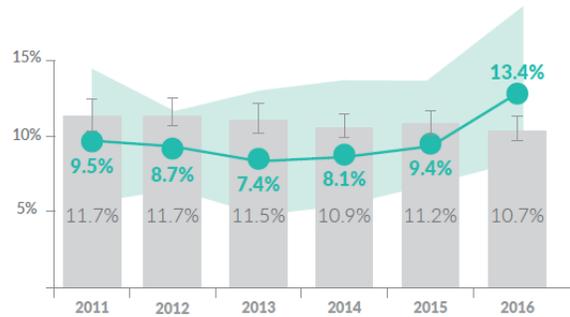
### Adults with poor mental health, 2011–2016

Percent of total population who reported 14 or more days per month of poor mental health

WHATCOM COUNTY VS. WASHINGTON STATE

Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Washington State Department of Health

● WHATCOM COUNTY ● WASHINGTON STATE  
 ■ CONFIDENCE INTERVAL



### Youth suicide contemplation, 2010–2016

Percent of 10th graders who report seriously considering suicide

WHATCOM COUNTY VS. WASHINGTON STATE

Source: Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State Department of Health

● WHATCOM COUNTY ● WASHINGTON STATE  
 ■ CONFIDENCE INTERVAL



**1/6**

of Whatcom County youth reported seriously considering suicide in 2016

### Youth suicide contemplation by gender, 2010–2016

Percent of 10th graders who report seriously considering suicide

WHATCOM COUNTY

Source: Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State Department of Health

● FEMALE ◇ MALE



## **Key External Relationships**

Many Whatcom County partners serve those affected by mental illness. Below is a list of many of the groups that NAMI Whatcom does or should have a relationship with:

- First Responders: Bellingham Police Department, Whatcom County Sheriff's Office, smaller city (e.g., Ferndale) Police Departments, various fire departments, and Emergency Medical Technician professionals.
- Health care providers: PeaceHealth, Lake Whatcom Residential and Treatment Center, Compass Health, Unity Care NW, Sea Mar Community Health Centers, and others.
- Whatcom County crisis response and law enforcement diversion programs, such as Mobile Crisis Outreach Team (MCOT), LEAD, and GRACE.
- Whatcom County Health Department.
- East Whatcom Regional Resource Center.
- Whatcom County Health Department (provides some funding for paid staff).
- Higher Education: Whatcom Community College, Western Washington University
- Whatcom Family and Community Network/Whatcom Prevention Coalition
- Community Partnership for Transition Services (Justice Involvement)
- School districts in Whatcom County.

## **Challenges**

- Current staff members are overworked. We currently have no capacity to hire extra staff or to pay our current staff more.
- Since NAMI functions largely through volunteers, if the number of volunteers declines, our capacity to offer services becomes limited. We must continually recruit, train, and retain volunteers to maintain our programs.
- Staff salaries have no dedicated funding source. Our grants do not cover salaries but still require effort by our paid staff.
- There is a stigma surrounding mental health issues which can discourage people from seeking help until there is a crisis. This underscores the need for more preventative programs.
- Many people lack access to computers/tablets. This has presented a challenge throughout the COVID-19 pandemic with an increase in Zoom meetings.
- There is sometimes a perception that NAMI may not be available when needed. If there is a downturn in numbers of volunteers (especially peers), the ability to offer programs could be compromised. It may also be possible that our funding could be cut.

## **Opportunities**

- Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have offered many of our services through Zoom. While not always the preferred mode of delivery for many, continuing Zoom meetings could expand access to our programs to a greater and more diverse population.
- We should increase our work with relevant groups and agencies, such as those working with public safety agencies and those that both inform and reduce the incarceration of

people experiencing mental illness. We can also develop a relationship with Whatcom Family and Community Network which works with suicide prevention (?).

- We have the opportunity to recruit and train volunteers to assist with administrative work to provide relief to our small, dedicated staff.
- NAMI Whatcom has a number of sibling affiliates in the state with which we can share work and ideas, such as NAMI Skagit, NAMI Snohomish, and NAMI Yakima.

## **Strategic Orientation**

In order to inform the development of meaningful multi-year goals, we addressed the following three questions:

- What target groups will NAMI Whatcom serve?
- What unique value does NAMI Whatcom provide to those target groups?
- What is the scope of programs required to deliver that value?

### **Target Groups: Who will NAMI Whatcom serve?**

NAMI Whatcom’s mission states that it will serve those affected by mental illness. We currently serve the needs of the following groups:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Needs</b>
Youth in school (middle and high school)	Education about mental health
Families and caregivers	Support and resources
Peers over 18	Support and resources
Suicide survivors	Peer support and resources
Government agencies	Information/advocacy

We plan to increase service to the following groups, which we currently underserve:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Needs</b>
Families of people with a dual diagnosis	Assessment of needs from members of this group; development of a plan to meet those needs
Spanish-speaking community	Support and resources
People of color	Support and resources
Men	Support and resources

### **Value: What unique value do we provide?**

- We provide resources and information to enhance the quality of life of those affected by mental illness.
- Peers who are 18 years and older serve as leaders; therapists do not lead our programs.
- We strive to maintain a positive and respectful environment even when there is contention.
- Our classes and other programs are evidence-based.

- Our services and resources are free.
- We provide a resource line and a directory of current mental health providers in our area.
- We provide a safe haven to explore feelings and experiences and to honestly and openly confront things head on.

## **Scope: How do we deliver programs and activities?**

- Although we provide presentations to middle and high school groups, in general our programs are for people who are eighteen or older.
- We do not provide psychotherapy or other clinical treatments (see list of programs in Appendix I).
- We mainly serve residents of Whatcom County.
- We represent the issues of people affected by mental illness to relevant governmental agencies, such as police, and to community groups, such as churches and schools.
- Curricula for our classes and the training of volunteer leaders and facilitators is provided by National and Washington State NAMIs.

## **Strategic Goals**

The strategic planning process identified six high-priority goals for NAMI Whatcom during 2022-2024. The person or Board member taking responsibility for shepherding this goal is identified in parenthesis below, if applicable.

1. Establish at least one peer and/or family support group(s) for those with dual diagnosis. (Meika)
2. In 2022, establish an Advocacy Committee to engage officials on state and local mental health public policy (following guidelines by NAMI National and NAMI Washington), composed of at least one member from the Board of Directors and at least one NAMI Whatcom volunteer. (Brian)
3. By developing new programs, different forms of outreach, and other activities, increase the participation of underserved residents of Whatcom County in NAMI Whatcom programs and events (Kim and Amy).
4. Review current staff positions, update job descriptions, and determine whether additional staff hours are needed. If additional staff hours are needed, develop a plan to add paid staff hours and/or recruit volunteers to address the need. (Rosemary)
5. Increase NAMI Whatcom revenues from donors and funding from local governments at least 30% during 2022 to 2024.
6. Develop and implement an evaluation plan for NAMI Whatcom activities. (TBD, depending on 2022 NAMI Washington evaluation data)

## **Plans to Achieve Goals (to be completed 1st quarter, 2022)**

- Develop an implementation plan.
- Identify resource and capability requirements.
- Develop timelines and accountabilities.

## Appendix I – NAMI Whatcom Programs

<b>Program</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Meeting Frequency</b>
NAMI Family Support Group	Peer-led support group for family members, significant others, and friends of people with mental health conditions.	Weekly
NAMI Connections Recovery Support Group	Peer-led support group for people with mental health conditions.	Weekly
NAMI Family to Family Class	Class for families, significant others, and friends offered through Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). This class facilitates a better understanding of mental health conditions, increases coping skills, and empowers participants to become advocates for their loved ones living with mental health conditions.	Several times annually
NAMI Peer to Peer Class	Class for adults with mental health conditions. The course is designed to encourage growth, healing, and recovery among participants.	Several times annually
NAMI Basics	Class for parents, guardians, and other family caregivers who provide care for youth (ages 22 or younger) who are experiencing mental health symptoms.	
NAMI Family & Friends	Four-hour seminar that informs and supports people who have loved ones with a mental health condition. Participants learn about diagnoses, treatment, recovery, communication strategies, crisis preparation, and NAMI resources.	
NAMI Homefront	Class for families, caregivers, and friends of military service members and veterans with mental health conditions. The course is designed specifically to help these families understand those challenges and improve their ability to support their service member or veteran.	

<b>Program</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Meeting Frequency</b>
NAMI Smarts	Hands-on advocacy training program that helps people living with mental illness, friends, and family transform their passion and lived experience into skillful grassroots advocacy.	
NAMI Ending the Silence	Presentation designed for middle and high school students, school staff, and parents or guardians of middle- or high school-aged youth. Audiences learn about the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions, how to recognize the early warning signs, and the importance of acknowledging those warning signs.	
NAMI In Your Own Voice	Presentation for the general public to promote awareness of mental health conditions and recovery.	
NAMI Sharing Your Story with Law Enforcement	Presentation program that trains peers and families to share their stories during law enforcement trainings, such as Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training.	
Survivors of Suicide Loss	Support group for family members and friends who have lost a loved one to suicide.	Twice monthly
Bridges of Hope	Presentation for clergy and congregations of all faith traditions who wish to create a welcoming and supportive environment for individuals and families living with mental illness.	
<i>Compartiendo Esperanza</i>	Bilingual presentation for Latino communities designed to promote mental health awareness, explore signs and symptoms of mental health conditions, and highlight how and where to find help.	