

NAMI Maryland 2019 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

ACCESS TO TREATMENT + IMPROVED PARITY

Barriers to treatment are myriad and especially problematic for individuals with mental illness and their families. NAMI strongly supports the reduction of legal and other barriers that prevent access to timely, effective, and affordable services, including enhanced enforcement of parity requirements. From routine denials of coverage to lack of in-network providers to burdensome authorization processes, accessing mental health care in Maryland is often difficult and expensive. Despite state and federal laws which require parity, enforcement is virtually nonexistent. NAMI supports efforts to reduce barriers to treatment, reaching and treating individuals with mental illness, and inclusion of family members in all of these efforts.

In 2019, NAMI Maryland will advocate for:

- Stronger statewide Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and greater resources and involvement for families seeking treatment of their loved ones.
- Stronger network adequacy measures, including greater accountability from our insurance carriers, including requiring carriers to open their networks to mental health providers, offer fair reimbursement rates, and demonstrate parity around authorization requirements.
- Measures that ensure Marylanders can access timely and affordable care – meaning if patients have to go out of network, they have recourse for affordable coverage.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Improve the criminal justice system's response to individuals with mental illness and their families and increase diversion from criminal justice to community services wherever possible. Marylanders with mental illness are increasingly involved with the criminal justice system, often for minor violations. The consequences can be costly for communities, law enforcement and corrections and tragic for individuals with mental illness and their families. NAMI strongly supports efforts to divert individuals from the criminal justice system and a greater commitment to identifying and treating those already involved with the criminal justice system.

In 2019, NAMI Maryland will advocate for:

- Creation of a statewide Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) technical assistance center as a resource for law enforcement and to build on our shared success in the expansion of a CIT grant program last year.
- The reduction or elimination of restrictive housing or administrative segregation in Maryland jails and prisons.

PROTECT AND INCREASE FUNDING FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

Maryland's mental health service delivery system is fragmented and remains underfunded. Many with mental illness still experience disparities in the quality, timeliness, and availability of mental health services based on where they live in Maryland. In 2017, we successfully passed the HOPE Act, legislation that requires funding for increased services and reimbursement rates for behavioral health providers. In 2018, we successfully passed the Behavioral Health Crisis Response Grant Program, legislation that provides \$12 million in funding spread out over three years for local community crisis services support. Protecting these and other funds are an on-going priority for NAMI.

In 2019, NAMI Maryland will advocate for:

- Increased funding to secure additional psychiatric hospital beds, both forensic and civil, and adequate professional staffing.
- Protecting the 3.5% behavioral health community provider rate increase passed by the Maryland General Assembly.
- Increased funding to expand SOAR Programs which prevent and reduce homelessness for individuals with mental illness and/or a substance use disorder.