

2016 POLICY PRIORITIES

NAMI's vision drives our policy priorities: that all people affected by mental illness should have the opportunity to experience resiliency, recovery and wellness.

➤ INCREASE THE AVAILABILITY OF QUALITY MENTAL HEALTH CARE

About 1 in 5 adults and youth in the U.S. live with a mental health condition. Sadly, nearly 50 percent of children and 60 percent of adults go without care. Quality mental health services and supports and enough mental health professionals to carry them out are critical to a functioning mental health system. Without access to care, people are kept in emergency departments for days and sometimes weeks. Others end up out of school, out of work, in jail, on the streets or—most tragically—die by suicide. 40,000 American lives are lost every year to suicide.

➤ PROMOTE EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION

Mental illness is a public health emergency affecting youth across our nation. 50 percent of all mental illness begins by age 14, 75 percent by age 24. The quicker a young person gets quality services and supports, such as with a First Episode Psychosis (FEP) program, the better the outcomes. Yet, in the U.S., there is an average delay of 74 weeks from the time a person first experiences symptoms of psychosis to when he or she receives care. The UK beats us by a mile with average delays of just 7 weeks. Delays in treatment lead to poorer life outcomes and greater costs.

➤ REDUCE CRIMINALIZATION

About 2 million Americans with mental health conditions are admitted to jails each year—most for non-violent offenses. In many cases, individuals are incarcerated simply because they did not get the treatment and supports they needed. Jails are designed for punishment, not to provide mental health care.

Many people leave jail in worse health than when they entered and are more likely to get locked up again. All of this comes at a tremendous cost to individuals, families, communities and taxpayers.

➤ ENFORCE MENTAL HEALTH INSURANCE PARITY

Health insurers are denying mental health care at nearly 2 times the rate of other medical care—often with no explanation—according to a NAMI survey. The federal parity law requires most health plans to provide equivalent coverage for mental health and medical care, but without appropriate enforcement, insurance companies do not comply. This leaves people unable to get the mental health care they need and are entitled to under their insurance. To make matters worse, few plans provide their enrollees with details of their mental health coverage, accurate lists of mental health providers and the criteria used to make mental health coverage decisions.

➤ SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH CAREGIVERS

An estimated 8.4 million Americans provide care to an adult living with mental illness. The majority are family members who spend an average of 32 hours a week helping a loved one stay safe and stable. Half of caregivers report they get to work late, leave early, or take time off to provide care for their loved one. Most find it difficult to get the services and supports their loved one needs. Not surprisingly, 3 out of 4 mental health caregivers experience high emotional stress. Caregivers of children with serious mental health needs experience similar challenges and also face untold stress.