



Laurie Emerson, Executive Director
NAMI Vermont
January 31, 2017
Mental Health Advocacy Day
Caring for Vermonters - Invest in Mental Health
Committee: House Corrections & Institutions
Re: NAMI Vermont - Priorities and Programs

Madam Chair and Committee Members, thank you for inviting NAMI Vermont to testify to your committee.

- **Who I Am:** My name is Laurie Emerson. I am the Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Vermont (NAMI Vermont).
- **Today is Mental Health Advocacy Day** - “Caring for Vermonters - Investment in Mental Health” - 44 co-sponsoring organizations and advocates are here today.
 - Please visit us in Room 11.
- **Who We Are:** NAMI Vermont is the independent Vermont chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a statewide non-profit, grassroots, volunteer organization
- **Who We Serve:** Family members, friends, individuals affected by a mental health condition, the community, and professionals who work directly with people affected by a mental health condition
- **Our Mission:** NAMI Vermont supports, educates and advocates so that all communities, families, and individuals affected by mental illness or mental health challenges can build better lives.
- **Core Competency:** Lived experience is key in the success of our organization and programs
- **Statistics:**
 - 1 in 5 people experience a mental illness - that’s approximately 25,000 individuals.
 - One in 20 adults lives with serious mental illness such as schizophrenia, major depression or bipolar disorder.
 - 70% of youth in the juvenile justice system have mental health disorders. 20 percent experience disorders so severe that their ability to function is significantly impaired.¹
 - 50% of previously incarcerated individuals living with serious mental illness are re-arrested and return to prisons not because they have completed new offenses, but because they have not been able to comply with conditions of probation or parole, often due to mental illness factors.²

- **What We Do:**
 - Support Groups
 - Family Support Groups
 - Connection Recovery Support Groups
 - Education
 - Family-to-Family - 5 classes - 75 people served
 - Mental Illness and Recovery - 3 classes - 49 people served
 - Provider Education
 - In Our Own Voice Presentation
 - Resource Guidebooks - Distributed 1500 copies
 - Annual Conference
 - Advocacy
 - Participate in committees and workgroups
 - Presentations and exhibits throughout state
 - Fight stigma and discrimination through education
 - Advocate at the State House by educating legislators
 - Organize Mental Health Advocacy Day
 - Annual Walk
 - **Funding:** Through grants, donations, Annual Walk, Conference

What Do We See as Priorities?

- Need to improve mental health services in Vermont prisons
 - Eliminate solitary confinement of prisoners in mental health crises
 - Replace Middlesex facility – need to expand beds for long term residential care to free up other Level 1 beds so that people are not waiting the ER to get acute level care in the hospital
 - Investment in proven, cost-effective mental health services can help reduce burdens on the correctional system.
 - Transition services upon release
 - Continue funding for mental health court
1. Shufelt, M.S. and Cacoza, J., *Blueprint for Change: A Comprehensive Model for the Identification and Treatment of Youth with Mental Health Needs in Contact with the Juvenile Justice System*, National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice, (2007).
 2. Council of State Governments, *Report of the Criminal Justice/Mental Health Consensus Project*, (2002).