Advocacy Goal:
Youth and adults living with mental illness or a mental health condition receive the right care at the right time and in the right place to experience lives of resiliency, recovery and inclusion.

2021 NAMI Vermont Advocacy Priorities (numbered for reference only)
1. Build Community Awareness and Eliminate Stigma and Discrimination
2. Increase mental health funding
3. Ensure access to effective mental health services for everyone
4. Provide access to appropriate, affordable housing and transportation
5. Ensure safe and respectful crisis intervention
6. Promote appropriate outcomes where the criminal justice system and mental health issues intersect
7. Promote training and quality standards at facilities staffed by mental health professionals and providers
8. Promote early diagnosis and intervention strategies
9. Promote and collaborate on suicide prevention initiatives with other organizations
10. Ensure the integration and parity of mental health, substance use, and primary care services to promote wellness
11. Assist people with a mental health condition to achieve and maintain recovery over the course of their lifetimes

2021 NAMI Vermont Expanded Advocacy Priorities

1. Build community awareness and eliminate stigma and discrimination
   a. Build awareness of NAMI Vermont’s programs and services.
   b. Initiate and participate in community events throughout the state.
   c. Schedule In Our Own Voice (IOOV) presentations.
   d. Schedule Ending the Silence (ETS) presentations to educate students, families, and school personnel.
   e. Educate organizations and the community about mental illness through presentations and workshops.
   f. Exhibit at conferences and other events to promote our mission.
   g. Eliminate the scapegoating of people living with mental illness for violent acts that attract public attention.

2. Increase mental health funding to:
   a. Sustain and grow NAMI Vermont.
   b. Provide stable and adequate funding for public mental health programs to meet community needs for mental health services.
   c. Provide stable and adequate funding for Medicaid, Medicare and private insurance parity that ensures access to a full array of effective services, continuity of care, and eligibility for youth and adults to address mental health.
   d. Provide competitive compensation for mental health professionals and providers.
3. **Ensure access to effective mental health services for everyone**
   a. We need to invest in proven, cost-effective, community-based treatment and services that promote recovery.
      i. Ensure prompt access to outpatient care and treatment, including drop-in outpatient crisis services to alleviate emergency room visits.
      ii. Increase peer run and peer staffed support services.
      iii. Provide choice of treatment options which includes (but is not limited to):
          1. family psychoeducation, medication, counseling/therapy, support groups, Soteria-Pathways Vermont, Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP), Collaborative Network Approach, therapeutic residences/crisis beds, life coaching, peer support, and other alternative holistic treatments.
      iv. Increase staffing and funding to ensure an adequate number of respite beds or other alternatives are available for hospital diversion.
   b. Ensure treatment for hospital-level care:
      i. Increase staffing and funding to ensure an adequate number of geographically distributed level 1 acute care beds and inpatient beds are available (voluntary and involuntary.)
      ii. Eliminate emergency room wait times over 4 hours to receive the appropriate care.
      iii. Promote and inform effective data collection to monitor and evaluate the wait times for treatment and hospital beds of involuntary and voluntary hospitalized psychiatric patients.
   c. Ensure inclusion of supportive family members and other supportive individuals in the evaluation and treatment of individuals with mental illness or mental health conditions.
   d. Encourage the creation and registration of Psychiatric Advance Directives to make medical decisions.
   e. Support diversity, inclusion, and equity for populations most at risk of developing mental illness (veterans, LGBTQ, BIPOC).
   f. Ensure cultural and linguistic resources are available for clients and the community.

4. **Provide access to appropriate, affordable housing and transportation**
   a. Provide a full array of affordable, safe, and supportive permanent/transitional/community housing options
   b. Ensure access to housing to reduce wait times to discharge from emergency room, in-patient hospitalization, residential treatment, and corrections to community.
   c. Ensure that safe and affordable transportation options are available for those living with a mental health condition.
   d. Advocate for safe and affordable transportation for family members to visit hospitalized loved ones.

5. **Ensure safe and respectful crisis intervention**
   a. Law enforcement
      i. Continue secure-safe transport and use only soft-covered restraints when necessary.
      ii. Ensure data collection regarding types of restraints used when transporting individuals.
      iii. Ensure mental health crisis training and refresher training (e.g., Team Two, Academy, CIT) are provided to all law enforcement professionals.
      iv. Ensure community involvement by those directly impacted to review and improve “Use of Force” policies, training, and recruitment.
   b. Crisis response services
      i. Ensure adequate funding for and expand mobile crisis teams and other crisis response services throughout the state of Vermont.
ii. Ensure that crisis response services include professional providers and where possible individuals with lived experience.

iii. Ensure mental health crisis training and refresher training (e.g., Team Two) are provided to first responders, mobile crisis teams, and outreach teams (911/211 dispatchers, EMTs, hotline/warmline responders, etc.).

6. **Promote appropriate outcomes where the criminal justice system and mental health issues intersect**
   a. Ensure incarcerated individuals have the right to quality mental health care, substance use treatment, and medical care both while incarcerated and upon release into the community.
   b. Prioritize treatment over punishment for low-level, non-violent offenders with mental illnesses or mental health conditions.
   c. Divert people living with mental illness or a mental health condition from jail to appropriate community treatment.
   d. No inmate, particularly one with a serious functional impairment or who is in mental health crisis, should be held in isolating circumstances that may harm his or her mental health. If segregation is deemed necessary for disciplinary or administrative purposes, its duration should be defined and strictly limited by rule.
   e. Ensure connection of inmates to housing, treatment, supports and enrollment in federal SSI/SSDI, Medicaid, Health Insurance Exchange plans and other benefits before release from custody.
   f. Increase step down housing for inmates being released from custody to avoid unnecessary prolonged custody or release dates.

7. **Promote training and quality standards at facilities staffed by mental health professionals and providers**
   a. Provide training to professionals who work directly with individuals affected by mental illness (e.g., In Our Own Voice, Provider Education, customized presentations) to eliminate stigma and discrimination, build empathy and raise awareness about what it means to live with mental illness or a mental health condition.
   b. Ensure funding and leadership support to administer the Six Core Strategies to eliminate or reduce the number of seclusion and restraints and expand the strategies to all levels of care including residential.
   c. Meet or exceed Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) standards for certification of every mental health care facility.
   d. Assure quality and excellence in care in least-restrictive settings at all levels of mental health care.

8. **Promote early diagnosis and intervention strategies**
   a. Ensure primary care physicians, other medical providers, counselors, school professionals such as guidance counselors, special educators, and teachers receive training to identify people at risk and ensure appropriate follow-up.
   b. Promote support for all veterans with mental health conditions for those most at risk of developing mental illness, including the veteran and LGBTQ populations.
   c. Provide “Ending the Silence” training for students, staff, and parents.

9. **Promote and collaborate on suicide prevention initiatives with other organizations**
   a. Promote early intervention strategies (e.g., education, support groups, counseling, Youth Mental Health First Aid, Mental Health America for Students, social media communications) to help prevent suicidal ideation and behaviors.
   b. Promote appropriate restrictions on access to firearms to reduce suicide.
   c. Ensure state funding for the Vermont Suicide Prevention Center.
10. Ensure the integration and parity of mental health, substance use, and primary care services to promote wellness
   a. Ensure lawmakers and health care funders address the critical need for integration of physical and mental health care for better treatment and improved overall health outcomes for people living with mental illness or a mental health condition.
   b. Promote parity (insurance coverage/reimbursement and level/quality of care).
   c. Promote access to physical health/wellness services for those with mental illness.

11. Assist people with a mental health condition to achieve and maintain recovery over the course of their lifetimes
   a. Provide resources to strengthen resiliency and to empower individuals to achieve their aspirations throughout their lifetime.
   b. Establish policies and statewide programs that lead to meaningful competitive employment and economic self-sufficiency (e.g., “supported employment” and other employment services through VocRehab and Pathways Vermont, Ticket to Work program, etc.)
   c. Reduce discrimination by ensuring employers provide equal opportunity to qualified individuals with a mental health condition.
   d. Provide resources to participate in meaningful supported volunteer opportunities.
   e. Promote establishment of and access to supportive education programs.

NOTES