

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.

2022 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.
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 achieve and maintain recovery over the course of their lifetime.

2022 NAMI Vermont Expanded Advocacy Priorities**1. Build community awareness and eliminate stigma and discrimination.**

- a. Build awareness of NAMI Vermont's programs and services.
 - i. Initiate and participate in community events throughout the state.
 - ii. Deliver In Our Own Voice (IOOV) presentations.
 - iii. Deliver Ending the Silence (ETS) presentations to educate students, families, and school personnel.
 - iv. Educate organizations and the community about mental illness through presentations and workshops.
 - v. Educate the press and general public about mental illness in cases where violent acts attract attention.
 - vi. Exhibit at conferences and other events to promote our mission.
- b. Eliminate criminalizing mental illness whether done out of ignorance of the cause of the behavior or as a method of facilitating treatment.
- c. Create a culture of acceptance so that individuals are safe to self-disclose mental health challenges.

2. Increase mental health funding.

- a. Provide stable and adequate funding for public mental health programs to meet community needs for mental health services.
- b. Sustain and grow NAMI Vermont.
- c. Provide stable and adequate funding for Medicaid, Medicare, and private insurance parity that ensures access to a full array of effective services and continuity of care.
- d. Provide competitive compensation for mental health professionals and providers.

3. Ensure access to effective mental health services.

- a. 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 and funding.
 - iii. Provide choice of treatment options which includes (but is not limited to):
 1. family education, medication, counseling/therapy, support groups, Soteria-Pathways Vermont, Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP), Collaborative Network Approach, therapeutic residences/crisis beds, coaching, peer support, etc.
 2. alternative holistic treatments
 - iv. Increase staffing and funding to ensure an adequate number of respite beds or other alternatives are available for hospital diversion.
 - v. Recruit and retain mental health workforce to eliminate open positions (e.g., adult and child psychiatrists/psychologists, nurses, case managers, etc.)
- 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 data driven root cause analysis for ED wait times as well as voluntary and involuntary hospitalizations.
- 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. Ensure diversity, inclusion, and equity for populations most at risk of developing mental illness (veterans, LBGTQ, 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 timely and appropriate transition to community housing from emergency rooms, inpatient hospitalization, step-down residential facilities, and corrections to the 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. Ensure secure-safe transport and use only soft-covered restraints when necessary.
 - ii. Ensure data is collected 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. Support implementation of the newly developed “Use of Force” policies, training, and recruitment.
- b. Crisis response services
 - i. Ensure adequate funding for 988, crisis center hubs, mobile crisis teams, and crisis stabilization services throughout Vermont.
 - ii. Ensure that crisis response services include professional providers and 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 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. Ensure connection of inmates with a serious functional impairment to housing, treatment, supports and enrollment in programs (i.e., federal SSI/SSDI, Medicaid, Health Insurance Exchange plans) and other benefits preferably before release from custody.
 - c. Prioritize treatment over punishment for low-level, non-violent offenders with mental illnesses or mental health conditions.
 - d. Divert people living with mental illness or a mental health condition from jail to appropriate treatment.
 - e. No inmate, particularly one with a serious functional impairment or who is in a 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.
 - 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. 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 professionals receive training to identify people at risk for a mental health condition and ensure appropriate follow-up.
 - b. Ensure support and treatment for those most at risk of developing mental illness.
 - c. Provide “Ending the Silence” training for middle and high school 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. Promote and ensure accessibility to training and programs to prevent suicide.

10. Ensure the integration and parity of mental health, substance use, and primary care services to promote wellness.

- a. Ensure primary health care providers and lawmakers address the critical need for integration of physical and mental health care for better treatment and improved overall health.
- b. Promote parity (insurance coverage/reimbursement and level/quality of care).
- c. Promote accessibility to and affordability of physical health and wellness services.

11. Assist people with a mental health condition achieve and maintain recovery over the course of their lifetime.

- 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 the Designated Agencies, VocRehab, Pathways Vermont, Another Way, Ticket to Work program, etc.)
- c. Eliminate discrimination by ensuring employers provide equal pay and opportunity to qualified individuals with a mental health condition.
- d. Provide resources to participate in meaningful supported volunteer opportunities and education programs.

NOTES

- Updated at Advocacy Retreat on 07/01/2021, 07/08/2021, 08/25/2021, and 09/02/2021. Approved by Advocacy Committee on 09/02/2021. Approved by Board on 09/11/2021.
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