

NAMI Juneau's Public Policy Platform is intended to provide guidance to NAMI Juneau, NAMI Alaska, and Affiliates on issues impacting people affected by mental illness and to inform our stakeholders and the public. NAMI Juneau fully adopts the public policy platform issued by NAMI (national). (<https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Public-Policy>). Outlined below are ten policy areas with a brief summary included in NAMI's platform. NAMI Juneau has identified policy issues specific to the state of Alaska which follow on page three.

**I. Identity and Mission:**

NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness, especially those with serious mental illness. NAMI advocates for effective prevention, diagnosis, treatment, support, research and recovery that improves the quality of life of persons of all ages who are affected by mental illness.

**II. Priority and Special Population:**

NAMI's priority populations are children, youth and adults with serious mental illnesses who need services and support, often throughout their lives. These include children and adults who have diagnoses that are considered major mental illnesses that significantly impair major life activities, interpersonally, vocationally, educationally, and in managing activities of daily living. NAMI believes that persons with mental illnesses who are veterans, on active military duty, in the National Guard, or in the Reserves, as well as their families, should receive the same full range of integrated diagnosis, treatment services, and supports across a continuum of care as should be available to all people with serious mental illnesses.

**III. Treatment:**

Secure and consistent access to effective treatment options is crucial for people with mental illness. Without treatment, individuals may struggle considerably, their conditions may worsen, and they may even become a danger to themselves or others. Therefore, treatment should be easy to find, affordable and quickly available. NAMI firmly believes that individuals with mental illness should have access to clinically appropriate medications, evidence-based services and treatment, including psychotherapy, that are provided in a person-centered approach.

**IV. Services and Supports for Children, Adolescents, Young Adults and Families:**

A comprehensive array of treatment, services and supports that address prevention, early intervention, recovery, and support should be available to children, adolescents and young adults living with mental illnesses and their families. They should promote resiliency and recovery and include evidence and research-based interventions. There must be effective system coordination and collaboration between systems serving children, youth, young adults and their family. Services, supports and appropriate accommodations should always be timely, easily accessible, and provided in the least restrictive environment.

V. **Services and Supports for Adults:**

A comprehensive array of treatment, services and supports that address prevention, early intervention, recovery, and support should be available to adults living with mental illnesses and their families. They should promote resiliency and recovery and include evidence and research-based interventions. Services, supports and appropriate accommodations should always be timely, easily accessible, and provided in the least restrictive environment.

VI. **Financing of Treatment and Services:**

NAMI supports health care for all persons with mental illnesses that is affordable, nondiscriminatory, and includes coverage for the most effective and appropriate treatment. NAMI supports equal access to affordable health care for every American. NAMI affirms that a just and humane society, using the instrument of government for policy direction and public resources allocation, must care for its most vulnerable members when they are unable to care for themselves.

VII. **Research:**

Research is vital to advancing our understanding of, and treatments for, mental health conditions. Scientific research can (and has) lead to effective early intervention strategies; better understanding of mental illnesses environmental and social factors; and further knowledge on how other elements—like genetics, physical health, therapeutic interventions, and medications—can impact recovery outcomes. NAMI calls upon Congress and the Executive Branch to focus more attention on research, treatment, education, and rehabilitation related to serious mental illnesses and to appropriate funds sufficient to make that promise a reality.

VIII. **Quality Monitoring, Accountability and Accreditation:**

NAMI recommends significant and meaningful consumer and family representation on all public and private governing boards of organizations that make decisions or recommendations affecting the lives of persons with serious mental illnesses.

IX. **Legal Issues:**

NAMI believes that every person with a serious mental illness is entitled to the same level of service afforded individuals with other physical illnesses.

X. **Criminal Justice and Forensic Issues:**

NAMI believes that everyone should have access to a full array of mental health services and supports in their communities to help prevent interactions with police. If individuals do come to the attention of law enforcement, communities should create options to divert them to treatment and services—before arrest, after arrest and at all points in the justice system. When individuals are in jail, they should have access to needed medication and support, should be signed up for health coverage if possible and should get help planning their release to ensure they get back on track.

The following statements articulate where NAMI Juneau stands on statewide issues related to its goal of helping individuals affected by mental illness build better lives:

**I. Priority and Special Populations:**

NAMI Juneau's priority populations are children, youth, and adults with mental illness. NAMI Juneau's specialty populations are identified as those whose mental health needs are currently most underserved in Alaska. This includes those in rural communities; Alaska Native and minority populations; individuals of diverse cultures, ethnicities, religions, gender and sexual orientation; those with physical, mental, or emotional disabilities; the elderly; veterans and active duty military; the homeless; and minor children of parents with serious mental illness. NAMI Juneau recognizes the importance of culturally appropriate and comprehensive mental health care services to address special populations. Therefore:

- NAMI Juneau supports policies and practices in mental health care that respect, embrace, and provide appropriate representation for all Alaskans.
- NAMI Juneau supports efforts to educate healthcare professionals in cultural competence and adaptation of services to meet cultural needs.
- NAMI Juneau supports the communication and collaboration between Tribal Health Systems and other State and local mental health care service organizations to optimize the availability of quality mental health care services for the Alaska Native population.
- NAMI Juneau supports collaboration with organizations that represent all Alaskans, including Alaska Natives, Veterans, Alaskans living in remote and rural villages, LGBTQIA; and others, to offer the highest quality and most appropriate mental health services to Alaskans.

**II. Treatment and Services**

NAMI Juneau recognizes the right of every Alaskan to access comprehensive mental health care that is easy to navigate, affordable, and accessible throughout an individual's lifespan. Therefore:

**Acute Care:**

- NAMI Juneau supports improvements to Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API), Alaska's only psychiatric hospital, including addressing staff shortages, patient safety concerns, budget cuts, and unsafe working conditions which have reduced API's capacity.
- NAMI Juneau supports shifting from an overreliance on acute institutional care through the development of adequate community and regional-based services.
- NAMI Juneau opposes the overuse of boarding individuals in psychiatric crisis in hospital emergency rooms when placement in a more appropriate setting is available. Every effort should be made for the expedient transfer of individuals in need of a higher level of care. Safe, supervised settings should be made available in hospitals for individuals experiencing a psychiatric emergency. NAMI Juneau supports a requirement that hospitals provide training in psychiatric crises and de-escalation techniques to all personnel who encounter patients.
- NAMI Juneau recognizes that individuals in psychiatric crisis should be treated with the same respect, dignity, and compassion afforded individuals with physical illnesses. The

use of [any kind of] restraint should not be routine and only employed as a last resort when individuals pose a danger to themselves or others.

- NAMI Juneau supports the development of comprehensive crisis services and response systems that prioritize timely and effective interventions for individuals experiencing psychiatric crises.
- NAMI Juneau supports programs such as Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and other home-based interventions to reduce and prevent negative interactions with police when an individual is experiencing a psychiatric crisis.
- NAMI Juneau strongly opposes shifting the care of individuals experiencing psychiatric crises to the criminal justice system when more appropriate settings are available.

#### Early Identification and Intervention:

- NAMI Juneau recognizes that early identification and intervention is critical to prevent functional impairment which may lead to school dropout, unemployment, institutionalization, homelessness, and suicide.
- NAMI Juneau supports the development of early intervention programs to ensure individuals experiencing the onset of mental illness or severe emotional distress have timely access to effective services and supports. NAMI Juneau supports innovative interventions such as First Episode Psychosis (FEP) programs.

#### Medicaid:

- NAMI Juneau supports expanded health care coverage to low-income Alaskans, including individuals with mental illness. NAMI Juneau opposes any proposal to scale back or repeal Medicaid Expansion.
- NAMI Juneau supports the State of Alaska's efforts through the 1115 Behavioral Health Medicaid Waiver to redesign the behavioral health system which would expand services for at-risk Alaska children and families.
- NAMI Juneau supports the expansion of evidence-based Supported Employment programs in the State of Alaska. NAMI Juneau opposes imposing arbitrary work requirements through Medicaid waivers.

#### Mental Health Parity:

- NAMI Juneau opposes any efforts to weaken mental health protections under the Affordable Care Act, including the sale of short-term limited duration plans.
- NAMI Juneau supports consideration of amendments to state statutes to strengthen mental health parity in Alaska.

#### Primary Care and Behavioral Health Integration:

- NAMI Juneau supports the State of Alaska's efforts to integrate primary care and behavioral health services and the development of comprehensive patient-centered care focused on treating the whole person.

#### Tele-medicine:

- NAMI Juneau supports expanded psychiatric tele-medicine services to improve Alaskans' access to care. NAMI Juneau supports Alaska's Department of Health and Social Services' coordination efforts with tribal health systems to address the disparities in mental health care in rural communities through expanded tele-medicine efforts.

Workforce Development:

- NAMI Juneau supports the prioritization of innovative recruitment and retention strategies to increase the number of qualified and skilled mental health professionals in Alaska.

**III. Family Member & Primary Caregiver Support:**

NAMI Juneau recognizes that primary caregivers and family members play an essential role in the care and wellbeing of individuals with mental illness. Therefore:

- NAMI Juneau supports a comprehensive system that addresses the needs of family members and primary caregivers that provides them with adequate information, training, and support.
- NAMI Juneau supports programs that provide family members and primary caregivers with assistance in navigating the mental health system and an understanding of their caregiver rights.
- NAMI Juneau supports programs that provide family members and primary caregivers with information and resources regarding financial and disability benefit planning and advance health care directives.
- NAMI Juneau supports programs that promote wellness education for family members and primary caregivers, including stress management and self-care.
- NAMI Juneau supports policies that include family members and primary caregivers as a part of the healthcare team whenever possible and in ways that allow them to understand their loved one's diagnosis without limiting the patient's independence. To this effect, NAMI Juneau supports efforts to clarify and improve the understanding of, and compliance with, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act's (HIPAA's) Privacy Rule by all Alaskan health professionals to ensure family members and primary caregivers can be effective supports for individuals experiencing mental illness.
- NAMI Juneau supports hospital discharge policies and practices that provide notice to family members and primary caregivers, when appropriate, and provides them with relevant caregiving information and education, including referrals to community resources following an acute psychiatric hospitalization.
- NAMI Juneau supports efforts by policymakers, healthcare providers, insurers, and other medical and behavioral health stakeholders in working toward a coordinated and integrated system of care that supports prevention, intervention and wellness for the entire family.

**IV. State and Federal Funding**

NAMI Juneau supports efforts to expand inpatient, outpatient, and community-based support services in Alaska. Therefore:

- NAMI Juneau supports adequate funding for comprehensive mental health services along the continuum of care for Alaskan children, youth, and adults.
- NAMI Juneau opposes reductions to the State of Alaska's Mental Health and Operating Budgets that would result in any decrease to mental health services.

- NAMI Juneau supports increased funding to expand psychiatric services in Alaska to help alleviate the overuse of emergency rooms and inappropriate use of jails to board individuals in psychiatric emergencies.
- NAMI Juneau supports public awareness efforts to emphasize the cost to the public of untreated mental illness and to build support for more cost-effective treatment programs such as early intervention, community-based services, and comprehensive crisis intervention programs.

**V. Public Awareness**

NAMI Juneau recognizes that for mental health care services to improve, it is critical that the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental illness be eliminated. Therefore:

- NAMI Juneau supports efforts to raise public awareness, knowledge, and understanding of mental illness through education and public health initiatives.
- NAMI Juneau supports efforts to increase awareness of the effectiveness of treatment and to promote the availability and use of early intervention and treatment services.
- NAMI Juneau supports advocacy efforts addressing the need for improved and expanded mental health care services throughout the state and particularly in rural Alaska.
- NAMI Juneau supports efforts to promote the importance of providing culturally-informed mental health services, programs, and educational opportunities.

**VI. Legal Issues**

NAMI Juneau recognizes that guidance and clarification is needed regarding the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act's (HIPAA's) Privacy Rule for providers to facilitate the best treatment for individuals with mental illness and family members and caregivers to best support their loved one. Therefore:

- NAMI Juneau supports efforts to educate providers, patients, and family members on HIPAA's Privacy Rule, specifically the disclosure and sharing of relevant health information during a psychiatric crisis, hospitalization, or when there is an elevated risk of suicide.
- NAMI Juneau encourages family members and caregivers to seek out clarifying information on HIPAA's Privacy Rule to best support their loved one.

**VII. Criminal Justice**

NAMI Juneau recognizes that the Department of Corrections is the largest provider of mental health services, both nationally<sup>1</sup> and in the State of Alaska<sup>2</sup>. NAMI Juneau recognizes that jail is often an inappropriate placement for individuals in need of comprehensive mental health treatment and support services. Therefore:

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<sup>1</sup> (Torrey, 2014)

<sup>2</sup> (Hornby Zeller Associates, Inc., 2015)

- NAMI Juneau supports the expansion of diversion programs such as the Coordinated Resource Project to divert people with mental illness from jails and into treatment, when appropriate.
- NAMI Juneau supports expanded access to medication management and mental health services for individuals who remain incarcerated.
- NAMI Juneau supports expanded reentry programs to help individuals with mental illness who are involved in the criminal justice system navigate services and supports.
- NAMI Juneau supports collaboration between state and local mental health authorities and state and local correctional and law enforcement agencies to develop strategies and programs for compassionate intervention and treatment of individuals with mental illness who are involved in the criminal justice system.
- NAMI Juneau supports a requirement that institutional and community Correctional Officers be trained in psychiatric crisis de-escalation and suicide prevention strategies.
- NAMI Juneau supports expanded Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) programs for all law enforcement officers and other first responders in Alaska. NAMI Juneau supports prioritizing CIT programs for Village Public Safety Officers.