

2019 NAMI Georgia Legislative Priorities

NAMI Georgia is an affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a grassroots organization dedicated to support, advocate, educate, and support research for individuals and families affected by mental illness. NAMI Georgia has eighteen local affiliates across the state.

Achieve Mental Health Parity in Georgia

The federal Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 requires health insurance policies and practices covering behavioral health be no more restrictive than those covering medical/surgical services. However, Georgia currently has no mechanism to measure or enforce the federal Parity Act.

PASS parity legislation, the PEACH Act, which gives the Office of the Insurance Commissioner the ability to measure and hold insurance companies accountable for parity.

Maximize Federal Dollars to Increase the Insured Population of Georgia

There are 240,000 low-income Georgians who lack affordable options for health insurance. According to a new poll by the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, 64% of registered voters in the state support leveraging federal money to put an insurance card in the pockets of low-income Georgians.

EXPAND insurance coverage in Georgia by leveraging state funds to access federal Medicaid dollars and maintain existing mental health Medicaid codes.

End Unnecessary Incarceration of Individuals with Mental Illness

Disproportionate numbers of people with mental illness are in our criminal and juvenile justice systems, often as a result of untreated or undertreated illness. As a result, jails and juvenile justice facilities have become the *de facto* mental health institutions of our day. NAMI Georgia's Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) program, pre-arrest diversion, and accountability courts are proven methods to reduce the burden on the criminal and juvenile justice systems and the state of Georgia.

INCREASE the number of accountability courts in Georgia to divert mentally ill non-violent offenders to treatment, and SUPPORT CIT by reinstating DBHDD funding for NAMI Georgia to help coordinate advocates for CIT training.

Workforce Development

Nationally, there are workforce shortages of mental health providers including psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, marriage and family therapists, and advanced nurse practitioners who are specializing in mental health care. Georgia is ranked 48th in the adequate availability of mental health workforce. There are 10.9 Psychiatrists per 100,000 people and only 5.9 child and adolescent psychiatrists per 100,000 youth, in the state. In addition, with the prevalence of mental illness at 19%, it is more likely for first responders and other medical professionals to encounter someone with a mental illness than someone who is having a heart attack. **INCREASE the number of professionals in the state specializing in mental health by setting standards for education that offer trauma and suicide courses earlier, offering loan forgiveness for those who work in rural areas impacted by workforce shortages, and increasing the Medicaid reimbursement rate for mental health services.**

Invest in Mental Health

Georgia is ranked 47th in funding for adults. We must increase revenue and supports.

- **Children & Youth** – FOLLOW the Governor’s Commission on Children’s Mental Health recommendations. SUPPLEMENT Georgia’s federal grant for CSC (Coordinated Specialty Care: case management, medication & primary care coordination, therapy, and family education) to expand early psychosis programs.
- **Access** - INCREASE access to mental health care for all Georgians by funding telemedicine initiatives and expanding the Georgia Crisis & Access Line.
- **Co-Occurring Disorders** – APPROVE allocations for targeted pilot programming, for opioid antidotes & therapeutic treatment centers, and for additional Behavioral Health Crisis Centers.
- **Military & Veterans** – IMPROVE the claims process at VA clinics, as well as the assistance provided to those awaiting a disability designation.
- **Affordable Housing** – ALLOCATE funding for programs to expand supported and assisted housing initiatives for those with mental illness. PROVIDE additional assistance to youth homeless shelters to increase educational and psychosocial support.
- **Family Caregivers** – CONTINUE funding, through DBHDD, to NAMI Georgia, whose volunteers annually educate and support over 10,000 Georgians affected by mental health conditions, with no cost to the public.