

2022

NAMI Georgia Legislative Priorities



Make 2022 the Year for Mental Health. Comprehensive Mental Health Reform For All.

- **Fully fund** behavioral health care including implementing 9-8-8 crisis line.
- Stop discrimination in access to behavioral health care by implementing and **enforcing parity protections**.
- Create a plan, including Certified Peer Specialists, to **confront Georgia's mental health workforce crisis** & improve access to care for all Georgians.
- **Improve Medicaid** processes and increase reimbursement rates for behavioral health care.



NAMI GEORGIA PRIORITIES

NAMI Georgia is an affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a grassroots organization dedicated to supporting, advocating, educating individuals and families affected by mental illness. NAMI Georgia has 20+ local affiliates across the state. To learn more, visit www.namiga.org.



Implement & Enforce Parity

- › There is currently no mechanism in Georgia to measure or enforce the federal mental health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008.
- › Insured Georgians have significantly more difficulty accessing behavioral health treatment than accessing other medical care.
- › Insurance companies impose limitations, both quantitative and non-quantitative, on accessing behavioral health benefits that are not imposed for other medical benefits.
- › Georgians are 4.2 times more likely to have to go out of network for an office visit for behavioral health services compared to primary care.

SOLUTION

- › Establish one or more state bodies to oversee parity compliance, including ensuring compliance with federal and state legal parity obligations, funding to hire and train staff to provide parity transparency and accountability, establishing a parity complaint portal for submission of complaints by Georgia consumers (including tracking of complaint processing) and funding to implement a marketing campaign to educate Georgians on their parity rights.



Fund Mental Health & Substance Use Disorder

- › According to the Substance Use and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA [EAN1]), one in four Americans has a mental or substance use disorder.
- › Georgia ranks 48th in access to mental health care.
- › Services that require expansion to adequately serve Georgian's include: prevention, early intervention, mental health treatment, substance use treatment, hotlines and warmlines, crisis intervention and overdose prevention.

SOLUTION

- › Fully fund a comprehensive behavioral health care system including funding for early intervention — including school-based behavioral health, effective crisis response; including the new 9-8-8 crisis line, and the implementation of mobile crisis units and co-responders models of law enforcement working with clinicians and Certified Peer Specialists.
- › Approve specific 1,115 Waivers and IMDE exclusions for Medicaid funds to pay for mental health and substance use services.
- › Fund community-based behavioral health services such as supportive housing, supported employment, peer supports, respite centers, addiction recovery support centers, and NAMI affiliates.
- › Expand coverage to all Georgians who are otherwise uninsured and need behavioral health services.

2022 NAMI Georgia Legislative Priorities



Decriminalize Mental Illness

- › We must restore responsibility for mental health care back to Georgia's public safety net, and away from city and county jails across the state.
- › Each year Georgians are spending tax dollars to house people with mental health concerns in their county and city jails, most on minor, non-violent charges, because of the lack of access to mental health supports and services.

SOLUTION

- › Increase the number of accountability courts in Georgia.
- › Divert non-violent offenders with mental health concerns into treatment.
- › Invest in mental health services that keep people out of jail in the first place.
- › Continue Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training of police, corrections, and other first responders on safely and effectively responding to people with mental health concerns.



Workforce Development

- › Georgia is ranked 48th among all states in access to mental health care, driven by the inadequate availability of mental health workforce.
- › 72% (114 of 159) of Georgia's counties are deemed mental health professional shortage areas.
- › 76 of Georgia's 159 counties do not have a licensed psychologist
- › 52 counties do not have a licensed social worker.
- › 45 counties do not have a licensed psychologist OR a licensed social worker.

SOLUTION

- › Provide loan forgiveness for those who work in areas impacted by workforce shortages, otherwise known as service deserts.
- › Fund a tax credit for mental health providers willing to serve as preceptors particularly in underserved/low health access areas of Georgia.
- › Establish a Division of Cultural and Linguistic Services at DBHDD to meet the needs of the increasing number of Georgians who have different cultural understandings of behavioral health and who speak different languages and dialects, and address the extremely limited or nonexistent programs and personnel to serve this population.
- › Expand the Certified Peer Specialist workforce and training opportunities



Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health

- › Early intervention for behavioral health challenges is both clinically effective and cost-efficient due to lowered treatment intensity, fewer and less severe continuing symptoms, and quicker and fuller recovery.

SOLUTION

- › Establish a task force to evaluate best practices for community mental health, substance use disorder service reimbursements, and early intervention and prevention services.
- › Increase access to behavioral telehealth in schools
- › Expand gatekeeper training for school personnel and universal prevention activities –e.g., mental health, suicide prevention, substance misuse
- › Include a payment structure and rates that cover the costs of services for outpatient care, high fidelity wraparound services, and therapeutic foster care.

How Else Can We Support Mental Health in Georgia?

Empower an entity to develop a Comprehensive Behavioral Health Plan. Produce solutions and make recommendations through policy changes and policy development. Focus on specific goals to eliminate obstacles and barriers to services and treatment. Empower the entity to establish the outcome measures to properly monitor and evaluate implementation. Hold state agencies accountable for successful mental health outcomes.

Psychiatric Advance Directives (P.A.D), in addition to being valuable in a crisis, the process of developing a P.A.D can help people clarify their preferences for treatment and plan for crises – including having conversations that can sometimes help prevent crises from occurring. The planning conversations often include family members or others in a person's social support network.