Governor, Legislature Issue Temporary Changes to Human Services

The Governor has issued a number of Executive Orders (EOs) to make it easier for people to keep their health insurance and be connected to services, in addition to allowing services and supports to be delivered in different ways since there are few in-person activities allowed. The legislature has taken some EOs and included them in legislation and has taken some additional actions as well. Here are the major changes:

- Expands access to telemedicine services for Children’s Health Insurance Program, Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare enrollees by allowing telephones as well as video and eliminates the three telemedicine visit a week limit.
- Continues Housing Support payments for people in quarantine or hospitalized so they won’t lose their housing.
- Eliminates any cost-sharing, including co-pays and deductibles, for the diagnosis, testing and treatment of COVID-19 for all Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare enrollees. This applies to enrollees in both fee for service and managed care.
- Continues health insurance coverage for Minnesotans on Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare during the pandemic, unless an individual reaches out to DHS and requests termination of their coverage.
- Suspends some application and reporting requirements, interviews, and verifications that are required when applying for General Assistance, Housing Support, MN Supplemental Aid, MN Family Investment Program and SNAP (food).
- Allowing foster care caseworker visits with children by video.
- Allows telemedicine for School-Linked Mental Health services and Intermediate School District Mental

See “Temporary Changes” p 2

NAMI Minnesota Responds to Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is shaking our world. Our lives have been upended and there is great uncertainty. Our collective mental health is negatively impacted but the impact on children and adults with mental illnesses and their families is magnified.

Children with mental illnesses are now home due to schools being closed. They no longer have a routine, interaction with students or teachers, or connection with their school-linked mental health providers. Without in-home supports and school, parents are struggling to help them with their education and keep them safe.

Adults with mental illnesses have also lost their routine, whether it was going to work or the drop-in center, support groups, or seeing their in-home providers. They are more isolated than ever before from the people who helped them, their peers and their families. People with serious mental illnesses are at high risk due to the high rates of smoking, diabetes, poor heart health and obesity making it risky to leave their homes and obtain basics such as food.

NAMI Minnesota has been aggressively addressing these and other issues related to the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health community since early March. We moved classes and support groups online and began training staff and volunteers on this new method of delivering education and support. Next, we obtained permission to provide QPR suicide prevention training online in English and Spanish.

Many questions came through the helpline about how services would be delivered, and could loved ones be visited in hospitals, prisons or the state hospitals. People were concerned about keeping their Medicaid or how to obtain medications. Information was coming from a number of different directions, from all parts of government. NAMI staff developed an extensive document detailing the answers to all these questions and more. It is updated daily on our website.

Knowing that services could not be delivered in-person but that the need was growing, NAMI worked with other organizations in the Mental Health Legislative Network to advocate at the legislature, Congress and the

See “NAMI Responds” p.3
We are in the midst of a crisis, with a lot of unknowns. We don’t know how long we have to stay at home or when we can go back to work or the kids can go back to school. First responders and health care professionals worry about catching the virus and their families worry the same thing. We don’t know if we’re “bending the curve” enough to be sure our hospitals are not overwhelmed. When we don’t know, can’t predict, can’t plan and are isolated – we worry.

Too much worry leads to anxiety and depression. Right now, it’s normal to have these feelings but there are steps we can take to decrease the impact.

First, control what you can. That includes limiting your intake of the news because it becomes overwhelming. Read positive stories or novels. Take the steps needed to stay safe including staying at home, washing your hands, clean frequently used surfaces. Create a routine so there is some semblance of normalcy – take a shower, eat breakfast, go to bed at a reasonable time.

Second, move every day. Whether it’s a walk around the block, doing yoga to a You Tube video, or dancing to music. Movement increases the endorphins in our brains and helps us feel better and less stressed.

Third, be mindful. Be mindful of eating nutritious meals. In times of stress we tend to eat comfort food which isn’t always good for us. Eating some is ok, but try to balance it out with veggies and fruit and lots of water. Cooking, especially with children home, can be a fun activity and lead to better eating. Be mindful of your breathing.

Fourth, connect to others. As human beings we need to connect to others. Pick up the phone, use facetime or some other application to connect to people. Reach in to those who may be really struggling. Helping others makes us feel better as well.

Fifth, think the best of people. This means understanding that at times we won’t act our best in a crisis, that children will act out. We are all experiencing anxiety about the future and frankly loss or grief over events, gatherings and special occasions that were cancelled. Lower your expectations. Give people grace and space. There are certainly more things that people can do to make it through this difficult time, but these are five easy things to remember.

Health services for children and their families.

• Allows phone or internet visits for determining eligibility for waiver programs and the waiver case managers can connect this way as well.
• Increases the limits on prescriptions from 34 to 90 days for certain medications such as antidepressants, antipsychotics, and many other medications.
• Allows out-of-state mental health professionals to practice in MN
• Suspends housing evictions and lease terminations.

DHS is also seeking federal waivers to pay for telehealth (and phone) for services provided by mental health certified peer specialists and family peer specialists, Adult Rehabilitative Mental Health Services, mental health behavioral aides in Children’s Therapeutic Support services, and Alcohol and drug counselors and recovery peers, in licensed SUD programs (including providers of SUD Rule 25 assessments, comprehensive assessments and group therapy). They have also asked to allow payment for phone or video for targeted case management visits.

New orders are issued several times a week and the legislature is slated to take additional actions the week of April 13th. To stay up-to-date on what is happening, review the legislative updates and visit namimn.org.

“My husband and I are on a fixed income but we have everything we need. When the COVID check comes in the mail we are going to donate it to NAMI Minnesota.” Pat

“Thank you for the wonderful editorial. It really summarized the fears and concerns we experience as caretakers and members of the mental health community...We always need a voice like yours.” EC

“Thanks so much for all you are doing and for offering these online classes.” MM.
To You, Our Faithful NAMI Supporters: We Need Your Help

You are receiving this newsletter because you have a meaningful connection to NAMI Minnesota. Maybe NAMI has helped your family by providing education and resources to you or to a loved one with mental illnesses. Maybe you have attended our support groups, where you found you are not alone on your journey. Maybe you are a mental health professional who cares deeply about the people you serve and recognizes the value of NAMI Minnesota’s programs and advocacy work.

NAMI Minnesota has been committed these past several weeks to meeting the needs of our community, pouring our immediate energy and resources into addressing the COVID-19 crisis in innovative ways. We have mobilized online classes, online support groups, and other timely resources for you and your family.

We have been a meaningful part of your life and community, and it has been our privilege to be by your side. Today, we ask for your help so that we can continue walking beside you and your family and continue to advocate for substantive changes in the mental health system right here in Minnesota. Your support is critical.

These are hard times for everyone, NAMI Minnesota included. Due to necessary “social distancing” measures to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, we’ve had to cancel three fundraising events scheduled for this spring and early summer. A few large community fundraisers that were scheduled to take place to support our organization were also cancelled. Our NAMIWalks sponsorship revenue has also been affected, and we’ve been unable to bill for much needed grant revenue which was tied to our community work. We need your help to raise more than $150,000 by June 30—the end of our fiscal year.

In order to continue our vital education, support and advocacy efforts for people with mental illnesses and their families, we need your support now more than ever before. Every dollar counts. Your gift will make a difference. Your donation of any size is needed today to keep carrying out our mission in our community.

We are grateful for you and your belief in our work. We are asking you to support us now—we have included a return envelope in this newsletter for your convenience, or you can visit our website at www.namimn.org to make an online donation. Please give today so that NAMI Minnesota is here tomorrow for you, your family, and the community.

With gratitude,

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director

P.S. If you haven’t had the chance to visit our resource page, I encourage you to do so at namimn.org. You’ll find links to our free online support groups and classes and a list of important resources that are being added to daily. We’re all in this together.
LONELY? WORRIED? SCARED?

NAMI Minnesota’s online support groups are friendly, safe spaces to connect with people who have similar concerns or questions, with the guidance of an experienced, trained facilitator.

Give it a try. What do you have to lose, except your doubts, fears and worries?

https://tinyurl.com/NAMI-SUPPORT

Difficulty in accessing treatment?

Call Our NAMI Minnesota Helpline

Need to talk to someone who knows what it’s like?

Go to a NAMI Online Support Group

Want to know how to prevent suicide?

Attend a NAMI Online Class

Looking for resources to get help?

Go to https://tinyurl.com/NAMI-COVID or Email namihelps@namimn.org

These resources are updated daily and available at namimn.org.