NAMI Minnesota’s Top Legislative Goals for 2022

The lingering COVID-19 epidemic has taken a toll on the mental health of Minnesotans. While everyone has faced challenges, the impact has been heaviest on students, people with low incomes, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. With over a billion dollars in federal COVID relief dollars, and an over $7 billion dollar surplus, now is the time for the legislature to act decisively and make significant investments in mental health.

In a survey of NAMI members this summer, we learned that many crucial services were very challenging to access. For those who needed residential mental health treatment, 47.8% found it difficult to obtain this level of care and 30.4% could not access residential treatment at all.

Over 50% of NAMI respondents reported seeking inpatient psychiatric treatment, with 44% saying it was difficult to find a psychiatric bed and 17% unable to secure an inpatient admission.

One person reported: “Inpatient hospitalization was difficult. All beds were full in Thief River Falls.” For any other health condition these shortages would be unacceptable.

Our mental health system is not broken; we haven’t finished building it. While we know what works, there are huge barriers: workforce shortages, low reimbursement rates, lack of coverage by private health plans, and increasing demand for mental health services.

NAMI Minnesota has adopted its 2022 Legislative Goals. The top goals are to:

- Expand Minnesota’s mental health workforce by: paying for supervision, creating incentives for mental health practitioners to become mental health professionals, expanding the loan forgiveness program, and funding cultural healers.
- Create a community-based competency restoration process, locked IRTS, and forensic navigators.
- Define network adequacy according to the availability of services, and create open networks during this crisis.
- Fund the voluntary engagement services.
- Create and fund children’s crisis homes and increase funds for respite care.
- Prohibit jails from charging for phone calls from jail to case managers, mental health professionals and health care navigators.
- Provide education and training for judges on mental health issues.
- Promote safe gun storage and means restriction education.
- Increase funding for protected transport to be used instead of police vehicles during a crisis.
- Prohibit suspension of K-3 students, and fund social emotional learning.
- Create a lead in the MN Dept. of Education on mental health.
• Support bonding dollars for affordable and supportive housing.

NAMI will also be closely monitoring, and advocating for federal dollars to be spent wisely on our mental health system. Greater engagement from the mental health community is sorely needed and NAMI urges everyone to become involved in our grassroots lobbying efforts. Sign up for legislative updates at namimn.org.