

2019

NAMI Georgia Legislative Priorities



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National Alliance on Mental Illness

Georgia

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.



Mental Health Parity in Georgia

Without effective treatment, people with mental illness and substance use disorders may find it **difficult to find or maintain a job, less able to pursue education and training opportunities, and require more social support services.** Comprehensive insurance coverage consistent with parity requirements can provide access to treatment and services. **In fact, it is estimated to cost the United States at least \$300 billion annually (Reeves, 2013).**

SOLUTION

PASS the PEACH Act, parity legislation, which gives the Office of the Insurance Commissioner the ability to measure and hold insurance companies accountable for parity, **ensuring that all individuals with behavioral health conditions have access to the treatment they deserve** through full implementation of federal and state insurance laws.



Maximize Federal Dollars to Increase the Insured Population

More than 1,365,000 Georgians (19%) have a diagnosable mental illness; 61% of those who need treatment do not receive it. Research has shown that people enrolled in New Medicaid are getting more mental health care, managing chronic depression better, and using costly emergency department care, less.

SOLUTION

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

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.



End Unnecessary Incarceration of Individuals with Mental Illness

Disproportionate numbers of people with mental illness are in our criminal and juvenile justice systems, often because of untreated or undertreated illness. **In fact, there are over 1.2 million people currently residing in prisons and/or jails with mental health condition in Georgia.** As a result, jails and juvenile justice facilities have become the de facto mental health institutions of our day.

SOLUTION

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.

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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. **In fact, in Georgia there are only 10.9 Psychiatrists per 100,000 people and only 5.9 child and adolescent psychiatrists per 100,000 youth.**

SOLUTION

INCREASE the number of professionals in the state specializing in mental health by incentivizing programs who offer courses earlier in a student's training, incentivizing professionals who specialize in mental health training, and offering loan forgiveness for those who work in rural areas.

SUPPORT the requirement and expansion of mental health education for pediatricians, first responders, and EMS.

How Else Can We Support Mental Health in Georgia? INVEST IN MENTAL HEALTH

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 - In 2018, the Georgia House of Representatives adopted a resolution recognizing telehealth as an important tool to improving population health in the state by increasing access to medical professionals **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.