

NAMI Maryland Advocacy Update March 15, 2021

As the all-important “crossover” deadline approaches next week, a number of bills supported by NAMI Maryland are moving! Crossover is the date by which a bill needs to pass out of the chamber in which it was introduced to ensure ample time for full and final passage in the other chamber.

NAMI Maryland Legislative Priorities

Thank you to those of you who have contacted your legislators regarding [**HB 108/SB 286**](#)! The Senate voted out the bill with a commitment for full funding of behavioral health crisis response grants of \$10 million per year when the bill is fully implemented! The funding increase will help ensure local governments are investing in a comprehensive crisis program equipped to address Marylanders in crisis 24/7 and reduce interactions with law enforcement in crisis situations. **It's not too late to contact your legislators in the House of Delegates to urge them to act on this critical priority.**

Legislation to create a mental health check in call program is also looking primed for passage. NAMI testified in strong support of this legislation that would expand our 211 Program to let Marylanders opt-in for periodic mental health check-ins and help accessing services. [**SB 719/HB 812**](#) has passed the House of Delegates unanimously.

Addressing Racial Health Disparities

As hard as it is for anyone to get proper mental health care in the United States, it's even harder for racial, ethnic, religious and gender minorities. Not only are there the problems most of us experience—issues with insurance, long wait times, difficulty finding specialists, skyrocketing deductibles and co-pays—but there are added burdens of access and quality-of-care. Two of the legislative priorities supported by NAMI Maryland are gaining momentum – [**SB 5**](#) and [**HB 463**](#).

Telehealth

On telehealth, the Senate has adopted key provisions to protect individuals with mental illness, including: audio-only telehealth services, reimbursement for providers at the same rates for in-person care, protecting consumer choice in both private insurance and Medicaid for all health care services, permitting patients with private insurance to get telehealth services at any location, and requiring Maryland Medicaid to ensure Parity Act compliance in telehealth services. Telehealth expansion has been a lifeline for many during the pandemic, and we will keep advocating for the House to ensure choice, parity, and ease of access too.

Optum ASO Issues

We've heard from many NAMI Maryland members and providers regarding concerns about the transition to the Optum Administrative Service Organization (ASO). Following our advocacy day, legislation to help providers and the state hold Optum accountable was introduced and supported by us. [**SB 638/HB 919**](#) authorizes the Maryland Insurance Commissioner to enforce

minimum performance standards for the ASO that is responsible for managing care and paying claims for Maryland public behavioral health system.

Optum runs the state's behavioral health ASO, which typically manages more than \$1 billion in payments a year for more than 200,000 Marylanders with behavioral health issues. The extreme billing issues and service denials are putting access to services at risk – extraordinarily concerning in a year when more Marylanders are relying on Medicaid and our current pandemic is taking an incredible toll on the mental health of everyone.

Webinar Coming Up!

Please join us on March 22 for a legislative advocacy update webinar and discussion about what's going on during the legislative session and NAMI's continued statewide advocacy efforts.