



National Alliance on Mental Illness

# nami | New York State

# NAMI SMARTS for ADVOCACY

A GUIDE TO EXPANDING YOUR ADVOCACY VOICE



**SHARE YOUR STORY, SHAPE OUR FUTURE!  
JOIN A TRAINING TODAY!**



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## **ABOUT NAMI SMARTS?**

NAMI SMARTS for Advocacy is a hands-on advocacy training program that helps people living with mental illness, friends and family transform their passion and lived experience into skillful grassroots advocacy.

NAMI SMARTS for Advocacy is designed as a series of three 1-2 hour workshops or modules or as a single full-day training that develop the following skills:

- Telling a compelling story that is inspiring and makes an “ask” in 90 seconds
- Writing an effective email, making an elevator speech and making an impactful phone call
- Orchestrating a successful meeting with an elected official

The unique step-by-step, skill-building design of NAMI SMARTS is effective with a wide range of participants, including those who are new to advocacy as well as individuals with years of experience.

Participants routinely share that they’ve never been able to condense their story or made a clear “ask,” but with NAMI SMARTS, they are now able to.

Lobbyists who represent NAMI State Organizations or mental health coalitions also love this program—they see participants come out confident and able to share their story in a way that moves policymakers.

## **ABOUT THIS GUIDE:**

This guide provides a brief overview of NAMI SMARTS Module 1 & 2, including tips and steps to effectively tell your advocacy story, examples, social media advocacy tips and how to contact and engage your local policy makers.



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## The NAMI SMARTS Difference

NAMI SMARTS for Advocacy gives you step-by-step tools and the hands-on practice you need to feel clear, confident and ready to make a difference.

NAMI Smarts for Advocacy is taught in a series of skillbuilding modules or a day-long training. Contact your local NAMI Affiliate to sign up for more trainings:

**Module 1: Telling Your Story** Real stories are the most potent motivator for legislators. Telling Your Story guides you through writing and delivering a concise and compelling version of your story that will serve as the springboard for your advocacy.

**Module 2: Emails and Phone Calls** Don't think your emails and phone calls are making an impact? Emails and Phone Calls shows you how to write emails that get attention and make phone calls that policy makers remember.

**Module 3: Meeting Your Legislator** Want your meetings with policy makers to deliver results? Meeting Your Legislator demonstrates how to orchestrate a successful dialogue with elected officials. make your voice heard. Join a training today!

**Module 4: Medication & Protecting Choice** Individual response to psychiatric medication varies widely. Managing choice is essential to recovery. Be prepared to make the case with administrative officials and health plan leaders.

**Module 5: Mental Health Parity** Learn about laws that require insurance companies to provide fair mental health coverage and how to spot problems in your health plan. Advocacy Day This module gives you the tips and tools to have an effective meeting with your legislator.



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## STEPS TO TELLING YOUR ADVOCACY STORY

1. Introduce yourself
2. What happened?
3. What helped?
4. How are you different today?
5. What is the need or problem?
6. What will help others?
7. Make your "ask"!

## TIPS TO TELLING YOUR ADVOCACY STORY

- Your audience is not your therapist
- Keep it brief--stick to the highlights and key points
- Emotion should move--not overwhelm
- Motivate with hope and recovery
- Make an "ask"

## TELLING YOUR STORY GUIDE:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_, I live in (city/county) and I am a constituent of your district. I am also a member of [NAMI-NYS or NAMI Affiliate], part of America's largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

I am (an individual, a family member, or a caregiver of someone) living with a mental illness. I'd like to share my story with you and ask for (enter your issue and position - oppose (or do)).

- Explain what happened before you, a loved one, or community received the help you needed.
- Explain what helped the recovery process or what would have helped. What could help others avoid a bad outcome?
- How you, your loved one or community is or can be different today? Conclude your personal story on a inspiring note.
- Transition to what the current need or problem and who is impacted.
- Describe what will help or could help others. How can policy makers intervene?
- Thanking your listener for meeting with you and listening to your story.
- Make your ask! Can you count on them to support your issue? Be as specific as possible and always offer to be a resource for them on mental health issues.
- Plan on following up regularly and politely to build a relationship and help in shifting opinions or, in the case of a supporter, build a legislative champion.



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## TELLING YOUR STORY PEER EXAMPLE:

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Hello, I'm Shannon Johnson from Springville. I'm a member of NAMI Springville, part of America's largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

As a person who lives with schizophrenia, I'd like to share my story with you and ask for your support of mental health services.

### 2. WHAT HAPPENED

I was married and had a successful career in business. I worked hard and never imagined I would experience a mental illness. But, I did.

I started seeing a therapist after experiencing nightmares, nervousness and problems going to work. I thought that with a few visits to a therapist, these problems would be over. But, my symptoms got worse and worse. Eventually, I lost everything.

### 3. WHAT HELPED

With the help of a psychiatrist who diagnosed me with schizophrenia, I found my way back again. I will always remember him telling me that having schizophrenia did not mean life was over. He gave me hope.

### 4. HOW I'M DIFFERENT TODAY

Today, I'm proud to be working again and volunteering with NAMI's In Our Own Voice program.

### 5. WHAT IS THE NEED OR PROBLEM

Many people have mental illnesses like mine, but not everyone gets the help they need.

### 6. WHAT WILL HELP OTHERS

A strong mental health system helps more people get the right care at the right time to experience recovery.

### 7. MY "ASK"

Thank you for meeting with me and listening to my story. Can I count on you to protect mental health services?



#### NOTE GUIDE:

- What's the peer's purpose?
- What moved you?
- Which part struck you?
- What part left you feeling hopeful or inspired?
- Where did the peer transition?
- What was the "ask"?





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## STORY PRACTICE SHEET

### 1. My introduction

Include your name and city and organization, if applicable. We encourage you to describe yourself as “a member of [NAMI State Org or NAMI Affiliate], part of America’s largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.” Add how you are affected by mental illness and your issue and position.

### 2. What happened

Aim for 3-9 sentences. Briefly describe the most important and compelling thing(s) about your situation.

### 3. What helped

Aim for 1-5 sentences. Briefly describe what helped in your recovery (or what would have helped). Aim for a hopeful tone that helps show what is helpful.



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## STORY PRACTICE SHEET

### 4. How I'm different today

Aim for 1-3 sentences. Share what is going right in your life or how you are experiencing recovery. This concludes your personal story on a positive note that inspires.

### 5. What is the need or problem

Aim for 1-2 sentences. Transition to the challenge(s) faced by people living with mental illness that you want addressed.

### 6. What will help others

Aim for 1-2 sentences. Talk about what will help. Let your listener know what will address the need or problem you described.

### 7. My "ask"

Aim for 1-2 sentences. Thank your listener for listening to you. Then, ask your listener for a commitment. Be specific.



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## TIPS ON CONTACTING YOUR POLICY MAKERS:

Find your local policy maker here:

<https://www.multistate.us/resources/2022-legislative-session-dates>



### MODES OF COMMUNICATION

- Emails
- Phone calls & phone banking
- Letters
- Social media (Twitter/Facebook & more)
- In-person/zoom meetings
- Elevator pitches



### TIP 1: NUMBERS COUNT

- Policy makers count the number of calls/emails they receive on an issue and what position their constituents are taking
- Few people actually contact their elected officials, so policymakers believe that a single email/call represents the views of 10-100 constituents.
- This gives you an advantage. Taking the time to write or call, is making a larger impression than you might think.
- Getting community members to also contact builds momentum around the issue
- Multiple contacts in a session= policymaker and their staff recognizing you. With the right approach, you can build a good relationship and even greater influence

### TIP 2: TIMING IS EVERYTHING

- Whenever possible, coordinate your efforts with people you know and make an even bigger impact.
- Emails and phone calls that are timed to come in groups make a large impact.
- If five advocates call a policy maker within the same hour, the policymaker or staff will think the phone is ringing off the hook and that your issue is “hot.”
- If your policymaker receives several emails in one morning or day, they will think your issue is raising a lot of attention.

### TIP 3: MAKE IT PERSONAL

- Use your story to explain why the issue is important to you

### TIP 4: MAKE AN ASK

- Let policymakers know what they can do to support your issue by having a clear ask at the end of your message
- Ask for a firm commitment to assess their level of support
- If they don't commit, try to determine why not, so you can create a follow up plan





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## PERSONALIZED EMAIL GUIDE:

### SUBJECT LINE

Identify your bill or issue and support, opposition, or request for action.

### GREETING

Address your policy maker formally. Begin with “Dear [elected title] [last name]:”

### STATE THE ISSUE AND POSITION

Indicate why you are writing. Let your policymaker know the position or action you would like him or her to take on your issue.

### WHY IT’S PERSONAL - OPTIONAL

Describe why this legislation matters to you personally and how you are affected by mental illness.

### YOUR STORY OR TALKING POINTS

In one to three sentences, add a brief highlight of your story that is relevant. Or, make one to three brief points.

### YOUR “ASK”

Describe (again) the action or position you want your elected official to take. Politely ask them to tell you how they intend to vote.

### GIVE THANKS

Thank your elected official for their time or for their attention to your issue.

### CLOSE

Choose a respectful closing. Follow with your name, address, phone number, and email address.

Find your local policy maker here:

<https://www.multistate.us/resources/2022-legislative-session-dates>

## PERSONALIZED EMAIL EXAMPLE:

Protect Mental Health in HB 39

Dear Senator Walker:

I am writing to urge you to protect the mental health budget.

I am the mother of a son with bipolar disorder and I can tell you that mental health care can make the difference between despair and recovery. I have seen it in my own family.

My son is a young adult who is enjoying life, working hard and making me proud.

But before he got the treatment he needs, I saw him in the back of police cars and held him in my arms after a suicide attempt. No child—and no family—should have to go through this.

Your help is needed to protect services and help families living with mental illness. Please let me know how you intend to vote on HB 39.

Thank you for your attention to mental health care.

Respectfully,

Jenny Jones  
5555 NW Hill Ave.  
Springville, OR 97999  
(555) 555-5555  
jjones@fernhill.com





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## HOW TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO ADVOCATE:

### SOCIAL MEDIA POST TIPS:

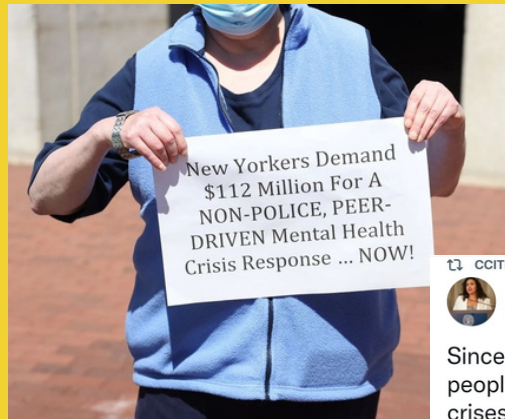
- TAG YOUR POLICY MAKER
- STATE THE ISSUE/BILL AND POSITION
- WHY IT'S PERSONAL/IMPACT
- RELEVANT/TRENDING HASHTAGS
- MAKE SPECIFIC "ASK"
- REMEMBER VIDEOS ARE VERY IMPACTFUL




### RECORD & POST YOUR STORY!

Use the tell your story guide & record yourself, a loved one, community members sharing their advocacy story.

### SOCIAL MEDIA POST EXAMPLE:



CCITNYC Retweeted

 **Kimberly Blair, MPH**  
@Blair\_Affair

Since 2015, NYC police have killed 18 people experiencing mental health crises; 15 were POC. End the violence w/ @CCITNYC's proposed non-police response.

#MentalHealthCareNotPolice  
@NYCMayor @NYCSpeakerCoJo  
@DianaAyalaNYC @FarahNLouis  
@JumaaneWilliams @IAmJohnOliver  
@TrevorNoah

 **NAMI NYC** ❤️  
@NAMINYCMetro

It costs taxpayers \$447,337 to incarcerate one person in NYC Jails. Rikers Island is the largest mental healthcare provider in the state. Reimagine investing in support instead of punishment! TREATMENT NOT JAIL NOW! Pls R/T and follow @TNJAct. #MentalIllnessAwarenessWeek



@NAMI\_NYS



@NAMINEWYORKSTATE



@NAMINEWYORKSTATE



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## MOCK ADVOCACY MEETING WITH POLICY MAKER

During last year's legislative session, NAMI-NYS staff recorded a mock advocacy video demonstrating how to tell your story and tie it to an advocacy issue by using the NAMI Smarts for Advocacy "Telling Your Story" Model."



### TIPS FOR MEETING YOUR POLICYMAKER

- Prep for success
  - Know your issue
  - Know your policymaker
  - Plan your meeting
  - Use person-first language
  - Manage spin
  - Expect resistance
- Make a connection
  - Tell your story
  - Make an "ask"
- Thank your policymaker
  - Leave fact sheets/resources
- Plan to follow up

Contact NAMI-NYS at [info@naminys.org](mailto:info@naminys.org) to learn more.