



# NAMI New York State

## **2017 Legislative Action Agenda**

### **The Need for Safe and Affordable Housing with Wrap-Around Services for People with Mental Illness**

A stable environment is vital and fundamental to the recovery from psychiatric disorders. Safe and affordable housing programs which incorporate recovery oriented support services are the cornerstone of successful recovery from serious mental illness (SMI) within the community setting; yet accessing these essential programs remains a tremendous challenge.

In recent years, the Office of Mental Health has focused on reducing the number of people in the most expensive housing environments such as in-patient beds at state psychiatric hospitals, state operated supervised community residences, and other state funded residential settings. To achieve this, OMH has given priority status in access to housing to individuals residing in these settings. While we acknowledge the necessity to reduce costs, we must ensure that housing opportunities are made equally available to individuals who do not come from these priority populations but are still in need of the housing supports and services.

Additionally, we need to ensure that individuals who are being transitioned from these highly supervised settings are being moved to residential settings that adequately meet their high level of need for supports and services in order to maximize their recovery, avoid future hospitalizations, and ensure the best possible quality of life.

The reduction of beds in state operated housing systems poses a challenge to both those currently in the system as well as the individuals and their families desperate to find housing that will not only provide shelter but also incorporate the full-spectrum of services needed to advance recovery from psychiatric disorders. This is why NAMI-NYS believes that savings from bed reductions must be primarily invested in more beds in the private sector which are specifically tailored for the needs of people with SMI. Failure to have an adequate housing and services for those with SMI will certainly lead to disastrous and more expensive results such as dependency on emergency rooms, inpatient stays, homelessness and incarceration.

When considering the transition of individuals to lower cost residential settings in the community, it must be noted that the funding for current housing resources such as Community Residences, Apartment Treatment Programs and Supportive Housing has remained flat for many years, while the need for the resources and the complex and increasing needs of the individuals

served has grown. Because the funding has not kept up with increase in cost of living since 1990, programs are operating at 43% below where they should be today. NAMI-NYS and our housing advocacy coalition consisting of ACLNYS, MHANYS and NYAPRS is calling for \$38M annually for the next three years (\$115 total for the three years) to address the unmet needs in housing services.

NAMI-NYS also recognizes that in order to provide adequate services, providers must be able to recruit and retain qualified staff. This is not possible when staff is not properly compensated. The work these staff do is challenging and requires a high degree of training, experience and education that is crucial to the success of the people they serve. Because of the low rate of pay and lack of cost of living increases, programs are not able to retain these qualified staff members. It is imperative that we provide staff with a living wage that keeps up with the increases in the cost of living so that our family members have well trained and qualified people to provide their support and services.

These are the people we depend on to ensure the health and safety of our loved ones. We need experienced and trained staff to provide the consistency necessary for a stable home environment. Dependable delivery of care is a critical element in the recovery of people living with a mental illness and is vital to the success of the transformation to community-based services that the Office of Mental Health is establishing. A lack of sustainable care can lead to decompensation and our loved ones going back and forth to the hospital, thus creating an increased financial burden to the state, as well as the potential for further brain damage which will diminish their chances for a life outside of a hospital setting.