



NAMI New York State

2017 Legislative Action Agenda

Improve the Criminal Justice – Mental Illness Interface

Improvements and expansions to several facets of the criminal justice system are necessary to help ensure the best outcomes for people living with a psychiatric disorder who enter or exit the system. NAMI-NYS is calling for the following measures to be enacted:

1-Expansion of Crisis Intervention Teams: Contacts between law enforcement officers and individuals experiencing mental health disorders can be deadly, dangerous or result in poor outcomes for the individual. NAMI-NYS supports the expansion of Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) which would save lives, reduce harm, and result in better outcomes for the individuals and the police. Crisis Intervention Teams consist of law enforcement officers specially trained to deescalate situations and take appropriate action to assist an individual in the midst of a mental health crisis. We want to see further investments in this vital program.

2-Expanded Mental Health Courts: Mental Health Courts are crucial in generating the most successful outcomes for people living with a mental illness. Mental Health Court judges evaluate each case individually to determine the best plan for each offender. If that person lives with a mental illness, recovery oriented treatment programs are often deemed to be better alternatives than incarceration. Mental Health Courts can be an essential point of entry to recovery services that can contribute to a reduction of arrests, recidivism, emergency room visits and long term in-patient care. Mental Health Courts are a sound investment as they can save the state money by proactively addressing issues that often lead to potential long-term expenses such as hospital stays and prison sentences.

3-Abolish Long Term Solitary Confinement: NAMI-NYS strongly supports reforming the use of solitary confinement capping the amount of time someone serves in solitary and restricting the use of solitary confinement for juveniles under the age of twenty-one and any person with a mental illness or a developmental disability.

4-Raise the Age: NAMI-NYS applauds Governor Cuomo's commitment to calling for raising the age for criminal responsibility from 16 to 18. 70% of juvenile offenders have a mental health diagnosis. This is why NAMI-NYS has advocated for the state to raise the age someone can be charged as an adult.

5-Improve Mental Health Treatment and Family Engagement in the Correctional and Forensic System: Too many people living with a mental illness have entered the correctional system. The inability to properly sustain treatment for someone's psychiatric disorder while in prison can have disastrous results that put both the inmates and the correction officers at risk. New York must improve mental health care in prison and encourage communication with families so they can voice concerns about their loved one's mental health.