



New York State

National Alliance on Mental Illness

Speaking Points for Legislative Visits

Since your legislative meetings are generally less than ten minutes, you want to ensure that you have time to make your advocacy visits as effective as possible. When meeting with your legislators or members of their staff you do not want to read the action sheets verbatim.

Below are some suggestions to ensure that your legislative meeting is as successful as possible: Remember, however, you are all advocacy specialists in your own right, so follow your own instincts if you think it would be most effective.

1-Assign a lead person and a time keeper in advance. The lead person should confirm the name and title of the staff person you are meeting with. Thank them for their time and exchange business cards so a follow up can take place. Hand them the blue folder. Ask how much time you have for this meeting and do not go any longer than the allotted time. Lead person should ask if the staff member is familiar with NAMI; if not, be ready to give a brief summary of our mission...ie: “we are the largest family and consumer grassroots mental health advocacy organization in the country; we offer support, education, and advocacy for people with mental illness”. This should not take more than a minute.

2-The lead person should introduce himself/herself and allow everyone else around the table to introduce *themselves*. (one person doing all the talking is boring.) As you go around the table, each person should briefly say which county they are from and (if they are comfortable with doing so) who is mentally ill in their family, what the diagnosis is, and how they are doing (ie: if they need housing, hospitalization, employment, better medications, etc.) This makes it personal and interesting.

The following are the main points for each of the Action Agenda items. Decide in advance who will address each item and do not spend more than a minute on each.

When time is up, the lead person should ask the legislative representative if they have any questions and if there is anything *we* can do to help *their* member (this could be an opportunity to build a positive partnership). The lead person should then thank the staff person for their time (usually everybody shakes hands) and then everyone should leave as quickly and politely as possible since other groups are probably waiting to come in. Follow up with a thank-you letter addressing specific items discussed if possible. GOOD LUCK!

(OVER)

2013 NAMI-NYS Legislative Action Agenda Talking Points

Reinvestment in Community Services:

- NAMI-NYS is very concerned about the closures of state psychiatric hospitals.
- Full recovery oriented services are now needed in local communities more than ever.
- We want to see the savings from the closures fully reinvested to fund additional housing units, treatment facilities, employment opportunities, education programs, health and wellness programs in our communities.
- No one should have to travel more than an hour to access a psychiatric emergency room or crisis service unit.
- Reinvestment would most likely result in long-term savings to the mental health system as persons suffering with mental illness would be better able to maintain themselves in the community and avoid visits to emergency rooms and psychiatric facilities, a far more costly alternative.

The Need for Safe and Affordable Housing for People Living With A Mental Illness:

- The center piece for successful recovery in the community is access to safe and affordable housing for people living with a mental illness.
- For this population, access to safe and affordable housing remains a tremendous challenge.
- It is important that appropriate services and supports are also provided so that our loved ones have the best chance possible to live in a residence that provides them with dignity and as much independence as possible.
- Mentally ill people transitioning out of jail and forensic units at state hospital facilities are also in dire need of supervised housing. Without appropriate housing in place, recidivism is especially high within this population.

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The Need for the State to Invest in Research of Brain Disorders:

- Major mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, clinical depression, and obsessive compulsive disorder account for an estimated 20 percent of total disability resulting from all diseases and injuries.
- Research is our hope for a future where serious mental doesn't debilitate people and burden our social service system.
- New York State has two world-class research facilities New York State Psychiatric Institute and Nathan Kline Institute.
- We urge you to support funding for New York State Psychiatric Institute and Nathan Kline Institute so better treatments can be found and, eventually, a cure discovered for brain disorders.
- Supporting research is economically beneficial to New York State in terms of grant monies brought in, job creation opportunities, and the potential to ease health care costs by improving and saving lives.

Expansion of Crisis Intervention Teams

- Contacts between law enforcement officers and individuals experiencing mental illness can be deadly, dangerous or result in poor outcomes for the individual.
- Crisis Intervention Teams consist of trained law enforcement officers and mental health professionals working together as first responders to deescalate situations and take appropriate action to assist an individual in the midst of a mental health crisis.
- NAMI-NYS supports the expansion of CIT using the CIT Core Elements program
- Research has shown that CIT saves lives and reduces injuries to individuals and law enforcement officers. It also significantly reduces the arrests and rearrests of people experiencing mental illness.

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The Need to Support the Mental Health of Veterans and Military Families:

- Returning combat veterans are experiencing very high rates of serious mental illness, suicide, addiction, homelessness and incarceration related to posttraumatic stress and traumatic brain injury.
- Of the one-million veterans living in New York State, approximately 100,000 are not receiving necessary treatment.
- The VA estimates that nationally there are 107,000 veterans homeless at any given night.
- We want to ensure that monies designated for mental health and substance abuse treatment for veterans are allocated to Veterans Medical Centers, Community-Based Outpatient Clinics and other programs serving veterans with mental illness and utilized for the treatment of these individuals.

Incorporating Mental Health Education in Schools:

- It is vital that New York's education system does a better job of creating a true comprehension of mental illness and mental health issues.
- Proper mental health is crucial to overall wellbeing, which is why it is necessary that mental health is incorporated into existing health education curriculums.
- Administrators, teachers and students must be given the tools to identify the potential warning signs of mental illnesses which are prevalent in children and adolescents, as well demonstrate the harmful and potential long-term mental health effects of bullying.
- The integration of mental health into our educational curriculum is long overdue. Including mental health education will lead to our children getting the proper support they need; this will also lead to a deduction in harassment and bullying which can contribute to an already high suicide rate in adolescents.
- Expanded school mental health services in elementary schools have been found to reduce special education referrals, improve aspects of the school climate and produce declines in disciplinary referrals, suspension and grade retention.