

POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT
LD 328: An Act to Improve Mental Health in Maine

Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine strongly supports the passage of *An Act to Improve Mental Health in Maine*. NAMI Maine speaks to countless family members and peers living with Severe and Persistent Mental Illness each year navigating the mental health maze seeking treatment and support services to maintain stability in the community.

While 1 in 40 Americans will experience a severe and persistent mental illness across their lifetime, less than half will receive an adequate and effective intervention prior to their illness progressing to the point of meeting criteria for a disability. Sadly 20% of young people who develop a severe and persistent mental illness receive their first formal intervention during an encounter with law enforcement. People who are admitted to the hospital due to severe and persistent mental illness are far more likely to be readmitted within a month's time if they do not receive appropriate community-based services. The average cost of readmission due to a mood disorder is \$7,100. It is currently estimated that the cost of untreated or undertreated mental health disorders costs the nation \$300 billion a year. These numbers are staggering to think of the impact on the state and national economy.

Assertive Community Treatment is an effective, evidence-based practice to support individuals with significant mental health needs in the community. Unfortunately, over the last 15-20 years, ACT services have received funding cuts resulting in an evidence-based treatment being delivered on a sub-standard funding scaling. As a result, the services being delivered have been altered in order to accommodate the budget available. Although ACT is still recognized as an evidence-based program, the services being delivered are not in line with what is best practice. The result has been increased interactions of ACT members with crisis services and law enforcement and unnecessary hospitalizations. Prior to the services receiving funding cuts, ACT Teams would respond in the community on nights and weekends, often eliminating the need for higher level, and more costly services, to become involved. Although the ACT teams strive to deliver the best possible services, without adequate funding they are not able to deliver to the level that many require.

NAMI Maine appreciates that the State of Maine is in difficult fiscal position during these times. However, as funding has been decreased over the years, members receiving ACT have required higher levels of care, resulting in greater accrued costs to the state. We do not question medical best practice measures as it relates to physical health conditions such as cancer, heart disease, or diabetes; we should not question these interventions as it relates to severe mental illness either. ACT saves money spent on more restrictive treatment and supports successful community Integration of people living with a severe and persistent mental illness.

ABOUT NAMI MAINE: *Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.*

LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

Hannah Longley, LCSW, Sr. Clinical Director
(207) 622-5767 □ HannahL@namimaine.org

POSITIONS & POLICY AGENDA

www.namimaine.org/advocacy