The COVID-19 outbreak has led to a fourfold increase in the number of people accessing mental health services for help with depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems.”
(Mental Health America: www.mhanational.org)

NAMI Alaska is a peer-led mental health education organization serving all of Alaska and an umbrella organization for NAMI affiliates in the communities of Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and Utqiagvik. Together, we work to improve the lives of Alaskans affected by mental illness through education, support, and advocacy. We are now working to extend our programs and supports to rural Alaskan communities.

2021 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

- Understand and Support the mission of NAMI
  NAMI Alaska advocates for access to services, treatment, support and research, and is steadfast in our commitment to raising awareness and building a community of hope for all of those in need (with no state funds). We work to promote our Alaskan NAMI affiliates across the state and connect individuals with NAMI resources in their area. Our major goals are to organize affiliates in underserved rural communities, equip families to support mentally ill family members and engage in advocacy on the local, state and federal level.

- Support HB 60/SB80 - Access to Mental Health Education in K-12 Public Schools
  Half of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14 and early identification and intervention are essential to keep young lives on track. According to the 2017 Youth Risk Behavioral Health Survey, one in three Alaskan students reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two weeks in the past year and 22.8% had seriously considered suicide. Strengthening Alaska public school’s existing health curriculum to include mental health education and awareness will teach students to recognize the warning signs of mental distress and provide them with the language and resources to connect to help. This legislation expands existing health education requirements to include mental health curriculum in all K-12 health classrooms. Consider requiring health education in schools.

- Support HB 8 – Relating to protection of children and vulnerable adults
  NAMI supports public policies and laws to ban the discredited, discriminatory, and harmful practice of conversion therapy. No person should be subject to a so-called treatment that instead causes the individual harm. People who have experienced conversion therapy are at a greater risk for depression, anxiety, and self-destructive behaviors.
• **Improve Mental Health Crisis Services Statewide** - Support the development of *CRISIS NOW, and the ‘988’ emergency line implementation* as components of a comprehensive crisis services and response system that prioritize timely and effective interventions for individuals experiencing psychiatric emergencies when more appropriate settings are available. Alaska’s mental health crisis services are not adequate to meet the needs of individuals experiencing a psychiatric emergency. When individuals with mental illnesses cannot access treatment and support services and undergo a crisis, they often cycle through expensive institutional care such as jails and hospitals.

• **Improve Community Mental Health Support Services.** NAMI Alaska recognizes the right of every Alaskan to access comprehensive mental health care that is easy to navigate, affordable, and accessible throughout an individual’s lifespan. Effective treatment and support services are essential for individuals with mental health conditions to recover. When services are available in the community, individuals are less likely to rely on expensive institutional care. Community support services should be easy to locate, affordable, and available. Therefore, we support:

  • **Support preserving and enhancing behavioral health community support services** that help Alaskans live productively in their communities to include fully funding the State Division of Behavioral Health to serve the needs of Alaskans, promote resilience, prevention and healthy Alaskans.

  • **Continue to authorize Medicaid** to provide behavioral health services for Alaskans.

  • **Ensure rural Alaskans have access** to care through peer services, tele-health services and in-person providers, including a focus on connectivity and accessibility in rural communities.

  • **Support fully funding the Medicaid program.** Reductions to the Medicaid program threaten the entire health care system and will decrease access to quality and affordable healthcare for Alaskans, including children and adults with mental health conditions.

  • **Support expanding prevention and early intervention programs** to ensure children and youth experiencing the onset of mental health conditions have timely access to effective services and support that continue into adulthood.

  • **Executive Order #119** – Please give seriously consideration to the impacts of splitting the Department of Health and Social Services into two departments.

*For more information about NAMI Alaska, mental support, education and advocacy, see:* [www.namialaska.org](http://www.namialaska.org)