



2021 Mental Health Policy Priorities

Top Tips from NAMI Smarts for Advocacy Communicating with Elected Officials

- Plan your story: Take notes, jot out everything that is important to you. Then, pare it down; focus on your main message. If your whole story could be narrowed down to one sentence, what would it be? Make sure your story stays true to that one theme throughout and you will have a powerful, well-told story.
- Be concise: Legislators receive a very high volume of communication, especially if there is a lot of attention on a certain issue, hearing or news topic. Use the “elevator speech” method, even if you are writing your message. If you only had a few minutes in an elevator with someone who could make a difference, what would you say in those few minutes?
- Ask for action: It is important to tell your story so the legislator understands why the issue matters. But it is equally important to tell the legislator what you want them to do to help. Is there a proposed bill they can support, or maybe create a bill? Does the issue need budget support? (You can learn about the current issues and actions that are suggested by staying in touch with NAMI RI and MHARI.)

How to Find Your Local Legislator

[Find Your Legislator Tool - Rhode Island](#)

In Rhode Island, you may use this tool for many purposes. Using this website, you can register to vote, update your existing voter registration, find a local place to vote in an election, determine your local legislators. To find your local Senators/Representatives, click the icon that looks like a trio of people (“Find Your Elected Officials”), enter your address and zip code information in the form, and the website will look up your officials

for you! The results page will show your federal legislators, the local leaders (such as Attorney General, for example) who were voted into office, as well as your representatives and senators. Here is an example, based on the NAMI RI office:

Your Elected Officials



You can click on each of these boxes to see a profile of that leader, including the email address and office phone number you can use to contact that legislator.

High Priority Legislation / Policies

Youth Suicide Prevention

House Bill 5353, Representative Terri Cortvriend

What it does: Requires student and school staff training on suicide awareness and prevention

- In RI, suicide is the second leading cause of death for people age 15-34
- 15.9% of high school students report having considered suicide and 10.5% report that they have attempted suicide
- Students are afraid to ask for help and often feel isolated in their crises
- Teachers and school staff are not aware of the tools and resources to help students

Behavioral Health Provider Reimbursement Legislation

House Bill 5546, Representative Robert Craven

Senate Bill 591, Senator Joshua Miller

What it does: Increases the public and private insurance reimbursement rates to outpatient behavioral health providers

- Rhode Island’s behavioral health providers are reimbursed 23.4% less than their counterparts on the medical side of plans. This is a parity violation.
- As a result, health insurance provider networks are insufficient
- Consumers have to go on long waitlists to see providers
- Consumers pay for out-of-network providers 4 times more often for behavioral healthcare compared to primary care
- Insurance networks lack diversity

Trauma-Informed Schools

House Bill 5936, Representative Marcia Ranglin-Vassell

What it does: Implements trauma-informed practices in schools statewide

- Trauma informed schools “incorporate policy, procedure and curriculum into a holistic approach that supports every student’s potential”. (www.crisisprevention.com)
- Trauma informed school models support every student’s mental and physical health
- Schools can become safe havens and safe working environments for staff by implementing trauma-informed models

Housing

Budget Article 16

What it does: Creates a permanent funding stream to construct and preserve affordable housing

- RI has a housing shortage
- RI tenants are rent-burdened and must earn \$17.51/hour to afford a one-bedroom apartment
- Low-income populations are 1.5 to 2 times more likely to have depression

Mental Health Services in Schools

House Bill 5076, Representative Joseph McNamara

What it does:

Allows schools to be reimbursed by Medicaid for mental health services

- 50% of all cases of mental illness begin by age 14
- One in five (19.0%) of children ages 6 to 17 has a diagnosable mental health problem

- Older teens struggling with depression are more than twice as likely to drop out
- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death in youth ages 10 to 14

Mental Health Treatment Court

What it does: Creates within the district court a dedicated calendar offering treatment and sentencing alternatives to eligible defendants deemed to suffer from serious and persistent mental illness to be known as the "Mental Health Treatment Calendar."

- 15% of inmates are incarcerated due to untreated serious persistent mental illness
- Prison is the largest psychiatric institution in the State
- It costs \$195,000 per year to incarcerate a man in high security prison
- Medicaid/Medicare do not cover the cost of health treatment or medications for inmates. That falls to the State.

Eleanor Slater Hospital (ESH)

Needs continued oversight from the General Assembly and accountability to restore public's trust

- ESH is an important part of RI's continuum of care. We need to invest in the full continuum of care
- RI has a responsibility to care for our most vulnerable. We should not shift this responsibility to private facilities that may go out of business and abandon people with disabilities
- ESH should be funded, brought up to code, and open for admissions and readmission

RI Needs An Olmstead Plan

RI is one of 6 states that does not have any type of plan for people with disabilities. A comprehensive "living" Olmstead Plan would help the State assess the supply and demand of housing options and support services for people with disabilities. It would help coordinate and fund housing options; community and home-based services; assistive technology; transportation; and education and employment supports to enable people with disabilities to avoid unnecessary institutionalization and live their best lives.

