



Mental health
advocacy, education
and support.

NAMI Chicago Information & Referral Helpline

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1. I am in a crisis. I am thinking about suicide. Where can I go for help?

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis or having thoughts of suicide, you are not alone. Free and confidential support is available to help you. Trained counselors on the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline can be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Don't wait. Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

If you believe you are an imminent risk of harm to yourself or others, and cannot keep yourself safe, it is important to get connected to mental health treatment immediately by going to the closest hospital. If you are unable or unwilling to get to the hospital on your own, please call 911 and ask for a CIT officer. The Chicago Police Department Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) officers have received specialized training on mental health conditions, de-escalation, and crisis intervention. CIT officers can assist you in getting to a hospital for mental health treatment.

2. Does NAMI Chicago provide direct services, such as individual counseling or medication management?

NAMI Chicago does not provide direct services. Our work focuses on providing support, information, and resources to individuals and communities through outreach, education, and advocacy. However, we can connect you to a vast array of treatment providers and agencies through our information & referral helpline. The helpline seeks to support individuals, families, professionals, and community members to understand and navigate the system of mental health services and refer to services that best meet your needs or the needs of a loved one. When you call the helpline, our highly trained staff and interns will provide compassionate support and personalized referrals to local mental health resources.

To reach the helpline, call (312) 563-0445. Hours: Monday – Friday, 10 am to 5 pm, closed on holidays.

3. Can people recover from mental health conditions? Is there a cure?

There is no cure for mental health conditions, but NAMI Chicago believes there is hope for recovery. Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential. The SAMHSA definition of recovery includes four dimensions: health, home, purpose, and community. Recovery is based on hope; it is person-driven and encompasses many pathways to holistic health. Recovery necessitates that one's basic needs are first met with a safe and stable home. Part of recovery is learning to manage and cope with one's mental health condition and manage symptoms through a self-directed combination of medical, therapeutic, and psychosocial treatments to support physical and emotional wellbeing. Recovery involves building a purposeful life with meaningful daily activities that facilitate the independence and resources to participate in society. Recovery is supported through relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love, and hope. Recovery is based on respect and builds upon individual, family, and community strengths and responsibilities to build a fulfilling life. Click [here](#) to view SAMSHA's model of recovery.

NAMI Chicago encourages you to work with your providers to develop an individual service plan to engage in an array of services at the appropriate level of care to work on your recovery, this may or may not include medications, individual therapy, psychosocial rehabilitation groups, case management, supported employment, and peer support programs. Click [here](#) to read more about models of community based mental health treatment and recovery supports.

4. I or someone I love was just diagnosed with a mental health condition. What do I do now?

Receiving a mental health diagnosis for the first time can cause an array of emotions. Learning about your condition is a great starting point. Ask your provider questions about what the diagnosis means and the next steps in your treatment plan. Ask your provider for reading materials, review our [factsheet library](#) to learn about different mental health conditions and models of treatment and services. Remember that recovery is possible, do not let stigmatizing media messages discourage you; a diagnosis is a gateway to good treatment. Read more about understanding your diagnosis [here](#).

Connecting with others living in recovery with mental health conditions can inspire hope and motivation to work on your recovery. NAMI peer [support groups](#) and recovery-focused [classes](#) are a great way to connect with a community of individuals living in recovery, learn about mental health conditions, and build coping skills.

Stigma and fear of rejection from family, friends, and society is the biggest reason individuals do not seek help for their mental health condition; therefore the support of family and friends is one of the most important factors in recovery. Ending the silence and talking about mental health with your loved one is the first step. Family and friends can also educate themselves on mental health and take actions to fight mental health stigma. NAMI Chicago offers an array of educational and support programs for family members. Read more about the experience of families and caregivers [here](#). We encourage family members to seek support for themselves while supporting their loved one. NAMI Chicago offers educational classes and support groups for families of people living with mental health conditions; click [here](#) for more information.

5. Where can I find a support group in my area?

NAMI Chicago support groups offer peer support for individuals living with mental health conditions and their families. Unlike therapeutic groups, peer support groups are led by trained volunteers with lived experience of a mental health condition or a family member. All support groups are free, do not require insurance, and are held on a drop-in basis with no required length of participation. Additional support groups are held throughout the city by NAMI Chicago volunteers, other NAMI affiliates and recovery-focused organizations click [here](#) to view our support group schedule and information for other NAMI affiliates and organizations offering peer support.

NAMI Chicago also offers structured classes for individuals living with mental health conditions and their families. Classes provide information and teach coping skills using a set curriculum over a specific time period. Click [here](#) to learn about these programs and classes, and call NAMI Chicago at 312-563-0445 to be added to the waitlist so you are notified when the next class is scheduled.

6. I need a provider or facility that specializes in a specific disorder. Can NAMI Chicago help me?

Through our vast network of treatment providers and community agencies, the NAMI Chicago Information & Referral helpline can provide personalized referrals to connect you with local mental health resources that best meet your needs. Call 312-563-0445 Hours: Monday – Friday, 10 am to 5 pm. Closed on holidays.

7. Where can I find a list of group homes, residential facilities, or housing that offers specialized care in a specific mental health conditions?

Because the local system of mental health services is complex and can be challenging to navigate, please call the NAMI Chicago information & referral helpline so we can help to clarify your need and provide a personalized referral. Call Hours: Monday – Friday, 10 am to 5 pm. Closed on holidays.

To learn more about treatment settings and community-based mental health treatment, review our factsheets on these topics by clicking [here](#).

8. I don't know how to cope with my friend/family member with their mental health condition. Can NAMI Chicago help me?

The mental health condition of a loved one certainly impacts the whole family. When a loved one is diagnosed with a mental health condition, families may experience a host of emotions – shock, guilt, grief, confusion – but it is important to know that you are not alone. 1 in 5 people are living with a mental health condition, and family members play a large role in supporting and helping a loved one with mental illness and have experienced the thoughts and questions you might be having now. Read more about the experience of families and caregivers [here](#).

Learn as much as you can about your relative's illness; there is a lot of misinformation and stereotypes in the media, so seek out the facts. You can view our factsheet library [here](#). Understanding the signs and symptoms of mental illness may help you to understand your loved one's behavior. Communicate with your loved one and try to understand as much of their experience as possible. Just like you, they may be experiencing a lot of strong emotions; you can play an important role in providing factual information, inspiring hope for recovery, and supporting their engagement in mental health treatment.

Keep in mind, that you are not a professional and you do not have to support your loved one alone. One of the best things family and friends can do to support a loved one is to help connect them to mental health treatment and services. Please call the NAMI Chicago information & referral helpline, we can provide personalized guidance, information, and referrals to treatment providers. Call 312-563-0445 Hours: Monday – Friday, 10 am to 5 pm.

The mental health of a loved one can sometimes impact the health and wellbeing of their family and friends. We encourage family members and friends to take care of themselves first, set boundaries, and practice good self-care. If you are not well then you cannot be there to support your loved one. Consider attending NAMI Chicago's Family & Friends support group or participate in NAMI Chicago's educational class, Family-to-Family. Click [here](#) to view our support group.

9. My friend/family member is resistant to engage in mental health treatment and seems to be deteriorating. What should I do?

Mental Health recovery is not only possible; it's highly probable, the success rates of mental health treatment are higher than some common treatments for heart disease and other physical conditions. Family and friends can play an important role in fighting stigma and inspiring hope for recovery. When an individual is refusing treatment, we encourage you to initiate an open conversation to learn why your loved one does not want to engage in treatment. Highlight the benefits of treatment, and align treatment with your loved one's own goals for the future. Listen to the barriers and concerns they are experiencing and help to troubleshoot by connecting your loved one to resources (Call NAMI Chicago for referrals and assistance, 312-563-0445).

Recovery is based on self-determination so your loved one has the right to refuse treatment. However, we understand that if your loved one is refusing treatment, it can take a toll on you. You cannot control your loved one, only yourself, so we encourage you to set boundaries. Making adjustments to accommodate for your relative's illness doesn't erase

the need for basic structures and expectations. Tell your loved one what you need in order for you to remain in their life. Make sure your loved one knows you do not see them as their illness but as a whole, capable, and independent person, and you expect them to respect your boundaries and standards. To be able to care for the people you love, you must first take care of yourself. Caregivers who pay attention to their own physical and emotional health are better able to handle the challenges of supporting someone with mental illness.

If your loved one is unable to keep themselves and others safe, or is deteriorating to a point that they cannot care for their own basic needs, then they need to go to the hospital, and you may need to initiate involuntary admission if they are still refusing treatment. Click [here](#) to review our factsheet on voluntary and involuntary treatment or in the case of a life-threatening emergency, call 911 and request a [CIT officer](#).

10. What are my rights as a recipient of mental health services or a person living with a mental health condition?

You have the right to quality mental health care. Mental health care must be adequate and humane, free from abuse and neglect, and must adhere to standards of sound nursing and medical practice.

You have the right to information. You will be informed of your rights as a patient upon initiating services. Providers are legally required to provide you the name of the physician responsible for your care and to provide information about your condition and proposed treatment. Providers must explain the benefits, risks, and side effects of proposed treatment in language that you understand and obtain your informed consent.

You have the same rights as other citizens. Simply because you are a recipient of mental health treatment, you do not lose your civil rights. Your rights can only be limited in an emergency, to prevent serious harm to yourself or others or by court order. Based upon federal and state law, individuals who have been committed to mental health treatment via a court order are prevented from obtaining a Firearms Owner Identification Card (FOID).

You have the right to independence. You have the right to receive services in the least restrictive environment and with the greatest degree of freedom of individual choice. All persons over the age of 18 that do not have a guardian have the right to refuse services except in the case of an emergency or under a court order. Whenever possible, your views and preferences will be taken into consideration when emergency action is required. Learn more about your rights when facing [involuntary treatment in mental health facilities](#). While in an inpatient or residential mental health treatment facility you have the right to free communication, personal property, money, banking, and labor.

You have the right to confidentiality. Federal and state laws dictate strict guidelines to protect the privacy of your medical records. When initiating medical or mental health services you will be provided a copy of the provider's privacy policies. Legally information about your mental health diagnosis, treatment, evaluations, examinations, and rehabilitation cannot be disclosed without your written consent (or the written consent of your guardian). Only in an emergency, is a provider permitted to disclose this information without consent to protect harm to yourself or others, or in court hearings for involuntary commitment.

You have the right to equitable health insurance coverage. Mental health and substance abuse services are included in the Ten Essential Health Benefits required of all insurance plans as required by the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Federal and state parity laws require that insurance companies cover behavioral health benefits and physical health benefits equally. Learn more about mental health and addiction parity in Illinois [here](#).

You have the right to non-discrimination in employment, public education, housing, real estate, financial credit, and public accommodations due to a mental disability. This includes the right to reasonable accommodations in the workplace as well as public accommodations.

For more information on the rights of individuals living with mental health conditions and accessing mental health services, click the links below:

[Guardianship & Advocacy Commission](#)

[Equip for Equality](#)

The rights of patients, individuals living with mental health conditions, and psychiatric disabilities are delineated in the federal American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA), as well as the Illinois Mental Health and Developmental Disability Act and Medical Patients Rights Act.

11. I cannot afford my medication/doctor's fees. Where can I go for financial assistance?

NAMI Chicago cannot provide direct financial assistance, however through our information & referral helpline we can help you to troubleshoot options to urgently obtain medications in an emergency and provide referrals for affordable ongoing care and medication management. Call (312) 563-0445 Monday – Friday, 10 am to 5 pm.

12. Will this medication work better than the one I'm on? Is the combination of medications my doctor prescribed right? Is my dosage too high? Etc.

Mental health medications work to improve chemical imbalances in the brain to reduce or relieve symptoms of mental health conditions. Medications are prescribed by a psychiatrist or specialized medical provider, and therefore, NAMI Chicago cannot provide medical advice or treatment guidance. Your provider will review your diagnosis and clinical history to identify the best medications to treat your mental illness. All medications have benefits and side effects and some may work better for one person than for another. Medications can take 6-8 weeks to achieve full effects, and it is possible to experience side effects before symptom improvement. Always take medications as prescribed, and be honest with your doctor if you feel a medication is not working, you are having side effects, or would like to stop or change your treatment. Medications are not cures, and medicines are most effective when combined with therapy and other recovery supports. Learn more about medications [here](#).

13. My friend or family member is in jail due to their mental illness. How can we help?

Unfortunately, too many people living with mental illness find themselves in our criminal justice system. Without access to preventative mental health services, many individuals living with mental illness become acutely symptomatic which can result in police contact and arrest. Sometimes symptomatic behavior may be perceived to officers as criminal or dangerous. Other times individuals may self-medicate with illegal drugs or individuals may be arrested for crimes of survival. Nationwide, 1 in 10 law enforcement responses involve a person living with mental illness, and between 30-50% of intakes at Cook County Jail self-report mental health or substance use disorders.

Learn more about how to handle the arrest of a loved one with mental illness [here](#). Mental health treatment and services are available to your loved one while incarcerated; contact NAMI Chicago for assistance in notifying the jail social worker of your loved one's diagnosis. Call (312) 563-0445 Monday – Friday, 10 am to 5 pm.

14. Does NAMI Chicago offer legal advice, or have a listing of lawyers?

The NAMI Chicago does not have lawyers on staff and are therefore unable to provide legal advice. However, the information & referral helpline can provide referrals to lawyers and legal services that focus on the needs of individuals and families affected by mental illness. Legal services for SSI applications, special needs trusts, patient rights, and discrimination; NAMI Chicago can provide you a resource that can help. To reach the NAMI Chicago information & referral helpline, call (312) 563-0445. Hours: Monday – Friday, 10 am to 5 pm.

15. My family member is missing and may be homeless. What can I do to find my relative?

People with mental illness cannot always communicate their thoughts clearly or understand what others are saying to them. In confusion, some will retreat. Others have grandiose ideas and cannot make sound judgments. Sometimes they leave home or other secure surroundings, and they become homeless or missing, leaving distraught family members desperate to locate their loved ones.

If you have a missing loved one with serious mental illness, NAMI National's [Missing Persons Support](#) website section lists several steps and resources that may aid you in your search.