



Mental health  
advocacy, education  
and support.

## A Guide to **Community-Based Treatment & Recovery Supports**

*All persons with mental illnesses can recover and participate fully in the community.*

### **Medication**

Mental health conditions are often caused by chemical imbalances in a person's brain, and medications can work to improve these imbalances and reduce or relieve symptoms. Medications are prescribed by a psychiatrist or specialized medical provider who will review your diagnosis and clinical history to identify the best medications to treat your mental health condition. All medications have benefits and side effects and some may work better for one person than for another. Medications 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.

### **Therapy**

Often called psychotherapy, talk therapy, or counseling; therapy is when a person, family, couple or group speaks with a licensed therapist in a confidential and safe environment. While your psychiatrist may briefly talk with you during appointments, a therapist is usually a non-medical clinician who is available to meet with you more frequently and does not prescribe medications. Therapy can help you to understanding feelings, moods, thoughts and behaviors, process your experiences, and gain coping skills. Best practice for treating many mental health conditions includes a combination of medication and therapy. Each therapist may utilize a different approach to treatment, and have different training or areas of expertise. When look for a therapist, request a phone consultation to discuss what you are looking for and learn more about their background before making your first appointment.

### **Case Management**

Living well with a complicated health condition (physical or mental) can require working with a number of medical providers and social service organizations. Case management can help individuals coordinate these services. A case manager will assess your needs and explain what resources are available to you, including healthcare, housing, transportation, and employment. They may assist with applications for services, complete necessary paperwork, and ensure you continue to access needed supports so that your treatment needs are met. Case management is typically provided within a package of comprehensive supportive services for people with mental health conditions.

### **Assertive Community Treatment (ACT)**

Assertive community treatment (ACT) is a model of comprehensive mental health treatment that involves intensive outreach provided by a multidisciplinary team offering services in the home and community with 24/7 availability. The ACT team has professional backgrounds in psychiatry, nursing, counseling, social work, and other areas of expertise. They tailor treatment to meet the unique needs of the individual, such as support with medication, therapy, social support, employment, or housing. The ACT team partners with the individual as an equal member of the treatment team. They also work with the individual's support network like family, landlords, and



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employers, and include them in the treatment plan as well. ACT is most often used for people who have transferred out of an institutional setting or have experienced repeated inpatient hospitalizations, and need more support to live independently. A Community Support Team (CST) is a less intensive model of outreach that also delivers treatment, support, and rehabilitation in the community—it is often thought of as a “step-down” from ACT.

### **Supported Employment**

Employment can be an essential step on the path to wellbeing and recovery, but challenges that come with mental health conditions can make it more difficult. Supported employment programs are designed specifically to help with work readiness, searching for jobs, and to provide support throughout employment for people living with mental illness. Program models include Vocational Rehabilitation, Individual Placement and Support (IPS), and other job training programs.

### **Permanent Supportive Housing**

Permanent supportive housing (PSH) assists people with a mental health condition to live independently and receive supportive services within the community. PSH programs can be scattered-site or site-based, and provide therapeutic support based upon the necessary level of care. While you live in supported housing, you may be required to attend group therapy sessions or see a psychiatrist.

### **Peer Recovery Support**

Peer recovery specialists are people living in recovery with a mental health condition who use their personal experiences and knowledge to support others living mental health conditions. Peers are typically formally trained and certified to provide education, empowerment, social networking, and support to assist others in their recovery to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives.

### **Psychoeducation**

Psychoeducation teaches people about their condition and how they’ll receive treatment. Psychoeducation also includes education for family and friends where they learn things like coping strategies, problem-solving skills, and how to recognize the signs of relapse. Family psychoeducation gives the family a better understanding of living with a mental health condition, which can help the person experiencing the mental health condition to recover. NAMI Chicago offers many mental health educational programs for individuals living in recovery, families and friends as well as the community at large.

### **Self-help and Support Groups**

Non-therapeutic, peer-led support groups are a great way to bring together individuals living in recovery to support each other’s mental health. Call NAMI Chicago for a support group schedule or referrals to other organizations offering peer support groups.

### **Clubhouses/Living Rooms/Drop-In Centers**

Community-based centers open to individuals with mental illness can offer a setting for socializing, accessing resources and using computers, and engaging in day programs and activities to build skills and engage in the community. Membership may be required.