



Mental health  
advocacy, education  
and support.

## Strengthening Illinois' Mental Health System Fall 2018

NAMI Chicago promotes policies that improve the mental health system locally and statewide. To identify the most urgent gaps in the local and statewide mental health system, we conducted a stakeholder survey during July 2018. The survey results identified the following gaps:

### Current Major Gaps in the Mental Health System

- **Insurance coverage for wrap-around services**
  - These wrap-around services include services such as peer support, outreach and engagement, vocational supports, education, housing, and among other services.
- **Access to appropriate treatment setting for the appropriate length of time**
  - One respondent said of their struggle to find care: "I'm not able to find an appropriate level of care so I end up being passed around until I decide on no care at all."
- **Criminal justice system as an entrance to the mental health system**
  - Many individuals enter the mental health system through criminal justice involvement. Not only stigmatizing, this is a traumatic, ineffective, and expensive use of resources that can be better spent on early intervention and prevention efforts.
- **Funding and health insurance parity**
  - Funding and insurance coverage are ever present issues in our mental health system.

*Based on the survey results, NAMI Chicago is developing a set of policy priorities for the upcoming year that will inform our advocacy efforts.*

### Pathway to a Comprehensive Mental Health System

- **Prevention is the foundation of a strong mental health system.**
  - Treating symptoms of a mental illness early provides the opportunity to live in recovery for many young people, and can stem the trajectory into criminal justice involvement and long term disability. We view mental health not as a specialty service, but part of our overall wellness. Building awareness and promoting wellness are strategies to move our system to a prevention-oriented response, rather than a crisis-oriented response.
- **Everyone deserves access to the appropriate treatment at the right time**
  - Receiving the appropriate treatment at the right time keeps people engaged in services and puts them on the path to recovery. We need to make significant investments in a variety of services, including early intervention, support services including peer support, and access to stable housing.
- **Crisis services function as the safety net for the mental health system**
  - Unfortunately, many people first experience the mental health system through 911 emergency responders, emergency departments, and the criminal justice system. We must strengthen and standardize our statewide system of clinical mobile crisis response for both youth and adults while ensuring the system utilizes trauma-informed principles. The state must strengthen connections to community-based supports for crisis stabilization and long-term supports.
- **Quality of mental health services is crucial**
  - Negative experiences discourage individuals from continued engagement in treatment. To build a healthier community, services should promote recovery and quality of life. Providers and payers must be consistently held accountable for providing high-quality services. Patient experience and their outcomes must be at the center for evaluating services.