Our Business | Mission
NAMI provides advocacy, education, support and public awareness so that all individuals and families affected by mental illness can build better lives.

Our Strategic Drivers and Goals 2015 - 2017

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**Goals**

- Increase our visibility and impact
- Strengthen our voice as a unified organization of lived experiences
- Maximize our outreach to and engagement with diverse communities
- Leverage technology to expand leadership and organization capacity at the grass roots level
- Expand access to education programs through technology solutions
- Maximize connections and support between individuals and communities through technology
- Identify and promote effective practices to address underserved populations, including people who are:
  - Difficult to engage
  - Homeless
  - Involved in the criminal justice system
  - Military and Veterans
- Advocate to ensure health reform and Federal mental health parity lead to improved outcomes
- Promote early identification and intervention
- Develop and integrate initiatives for youth and young adults throughout NAMI
- Support and strengthen State Organizations and Affiliates through re-chartering, re-affiliation and building toward consistent standards of excellence
- Grow financial resources
- Build and expand strategic partnerships
- Enhance staff and volunteer capacity and capabilities across the organization
NAMI 2015-2017 Strategic Plan

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is the nation's largest grassroots organization providing advocacy, education, support and public awareness so that all individuals and families affected by mental illness can build better lives.

NAMI undertakes strategic planning during a pivotal time in the history of our movement. With changes in healthcare and advances in research, we stand on the edge of possibility and hope for recovery and resiliency. The tide may be turning, with more public attention focused on mental illness and an increased emphasis on better outcomes for individuals with chronic health conditions.

However, we recognize that many of our members today feel little cause for optimism as people with mental illness needlessly languish in jails, prisons, emergency rooms and on the streets. As our plan reflects, we will not rest until we remedy these injustices and intervene early to prevent this needless loss of quality of life.

To achieve our goals, we must focus NAMI's energies and build support. This planning process allows us to identify the most important targets for our "time, talent, and treasure" in the upcoming three years.

We believe that our strategic drivers reflect a commitment to moving forward and securing a better future. This requires reaching more individuals, engaging them earlier, and bringing them into the NAMI community. It also uses the tools of the future, leveraging technology to enhance our efforts.

We are unified by our lived experience with mental illness. Strengthened by our collective voices, we commit ourselves to realizing a world where all persons affected by mental illness experience resiliency, recovery and wellness.

Overview

Together with representatives from NAMI's many diverse constituencies and four Advisory Councils, the NAMI Board worked for many months to prepare for the strategic planning process. More than 470 members and volunteers participated in extensive surveying and a Listening Tour. Board work groups studied the political, economic and social environments that would shape future planning. A group of 25 members and
leaders from across the country worked together to craft the plan. Many voices and views were expressed and captured in those preparations—and, appropriately, many voices and views are represented in the resulting plan. NAMI’s opportunity and challenge is to chart the most strategic path among a myriad of options supported by passionate and devoted members and supporters.

In our 2015-2017 Strategic Plan, we have selected strategic drivers in which we will invest extraordinary “time, talent and treasure” and which we believe offer strong potential for significant impact, advancing our mission and realizing our vision.

**Build a Movement** - NAMI will broaden public awareness and inclusion in every part of the alliance.

**Leverage Technology** - NAMI will expand use of technology to build capacity and connection.

**Drive Advocacy** - NAMI will lead advocacy efforts that drive increased access and quality of services.

**Focus on Youth** - NAMI will develop and implement strategies that engage youth, young adults and their families, expanding our reach across the lifespan.

**Strengthen the Organization** - NAMI will grow and develop financing, infrastructure and capacity that support a vibrant and bold organization.

Louis Pasteur observed, “Chance favors the prepared mind.” In a volatile and changing world, NAMI cannot predict the future, but we can make educated guesses about what lies ahead and prepare ourselves accordingly. We can make smart choices about how we will leverage the limited and precious resources at hand. NAMI’s strategic planning process seeks to do just that.

We proudly borrowed from many planning traditions in creating our own process. NAMI members’ shared personal experiences comfort and unite us, and we used appreciative inquiry to draw forth the stories and successes of the past to help shape our future. As keen strategists with constrained funds and staff, we sought the intersection of our passion, strengths and resources to maximize their impact and advance NAMI’s mission.

The current plan carries forward many themes from previous plans—honoring the groundwork laid before, yet challenging NAMI to push still further. Not surprisingly, this plan focuses strongly on two NAMI cornerstones, advocacy and education. Those efforts are combined with special attention to building a robust and vibrant organizational infrastructure to ensure visibility and longevity. We believe the nation needs NAMI—and we are determined to do what it takes to meet that need. Our plan is action-driven and we seek to build a movement.

**Summary of the Process**

No word better describes NAMI’s planning process—or the resulting plan—than *engagement*.

In December 2013, the Board’s Planning Committee laid out the planning sequence and took on the formidable task of researching and summarizing critical external trends that will inevitably
influence NAMI’s work. The broader process began in earnest with new executive director Mary Giliberti’s Listening Tour, starting with her arrival in January 2014. She interviewed countless stakeholders, both internal and external, to learn more about their hopes and dreams for the organization, as well as to hear their concerns, suggestions and successes.

Building upon our listening, a national survey drew more than 470 respondents who provided rich input on their experience as leaders and members in all parts of the NAMI movement. NAMI’s four Advisory Councils offered their input and contributed their leaders and representatives to every stage of the process.

Finally, a group of 25 individuals from across the country, including the NAMI Board, staff representatives and a representative from each Council was appointed as the Strategic Planning Group (SPG) and charged with developing the strategic framework described here. The SPG members read extensively, prepared carefully for their face-to-face retreat and provided review and reflection after the meeting to craft this document.

Admittedly, this ambitious level of inclusion makes planning more complex but it also adds tremendous depth and richness to the process. One key example of this commitment to inclusion is reflected in the plan itself: we solidified goals around advocating for engagement, including early engagement of youth and young adults and engagement of difficult to reach individuals. These goals allow us to promote intervening early through a variety of means, such as first episode psychosis programs, that help identify conditions that have the potential to be very serious long-term. We will also focus on advocacy strategies that improve outcomes for those often left behind. We find this to be an empowering and unifying way to recognize the spectrum of people’s experiences and paths toward recovery¹, and for us to work to get people the help they need and realize a better future for individuals affected by mental illness.

We filtered our decisions about strategic priorities by asking ourselves “Where must NAMI put extraordinary time, talent and treasure to realize our vision?” In doing so, we challenged ourselves to hone our focus while keeping the big picture in mind and to impose self-discipline while fostering flexibility. Our goal is to remain agile so that our planning remains relevant even as circumstances change around us. At the same time, as we invest in these strategic drivers, we will continue to support the core of NAMI’s ongoing work, providing both consistency and flexibility.

Ultimately, final approval of the 2015-2017 Strategic Plan is the duty and privilege of the NAMI Board. With the benefit of these drivers and further input from staff, the Board will be identifying additional measurements of impact to monitor our progress. Recognizing the changing dynamics of our environment, the Board intends to carefully develop such measures, revisit them as needed throughout the plan implementation period and review progress quarterly.

Assessing Our Environment—Inside and Outside of NAMI

We identified significant internal and external forces that we believe will be most influential and must be accounted for in our planning.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) will transform the health care landscape. NAMI must be equipped to ensure that ACA realizes its potential to benefit those whose lives are affected by

¹ NAMI helped develop and embraces the SAMHSA consensus definition of recovery: http://www.samhsa.gov/recovery/
mental illness. Increasing public attention to the “invisible wounds of war” creates an opportunity for NAMI to better serve veterans, members of the military and their families. Devastating levels of incarceration of people with mental illness demonstrate the profound need for intervention, redirection and better access to care, especially for those from typically under-served communities. With 15 percent of the developed world’s disease burden attributable to mental illness (more than all forms of cancer combined), but only seven percent of research funds in North America spent on mental health,\(^2\) clearly spending allocations and priorities are currently badly misaligned. NAMI must be included in all decision-making in these areas.

As a membership organization, we anticipate that changing patterns of affiliation and competing demands on time will require renewed effort to build support and continued growth for the organization. Similarly, breathtaking advances in technology will transform how we can provide support and education, expanding our potential reach exponentially but challenging us to do so in ways that are sustainable over time. Addressing the fact that 75 percent of mental illnesses surface before the age of 25 will require commensurate adaptation in program and communication strategies to engage youth and their families.

Recognizing the changing demographics of our nation and the increasing need for NAMI in all communities, we will need to redouble our efforts to reach underserved communities and welcome them to NAMI. Although stigma is a barrier for all individuals with mental illness, we know that it is particularly powerful among some communities, necessitating work to promote understanding and health equity.

In our planning process we had a robust discussion about the different ways that different communities explain and express their experiences. We came to the understanding that NAMI historically and today focuses attention on those whose lives have been significantly impacted by a mental health condition/mental illness. We agreed to use language that appeals to the communities that we are trying to reach and serve while preserving our focus and attention where it needs to be – on those who are most in need and at risk.

**Reaffirming Our Mission**

*NAMI provides advocacy, education, support and public awareness so that all individuals and families affected by mental illness can build better lives.*

NAMI is and always has been about people. Our focus is on meeting the needs of people for whom mental illnesses have had considerable impact. We are uniquely qualified for that purpose because we have been there.

Since NAMI’s inception in 1979, we have been at policy-making tables in communities and all levels of government to convene and advance critical conversations. Similarly, we have been at countless kitchen tables across the country, helping individuals and families feel understood and supported. From the beginning, we have sought to be a trusted friend for those who can benefit from the lessons we have learned in our lived experience.

Moving ahead, we are intentionally bringing forward the importance of public awareness to our mission. The time has come for us to proudly brand NAMI in the minds of many more people, all

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NAMI Strategic Plan 2015 - 2017
across the country—delivering our promise and value—in order to raise the public’s awareness of mental illness, its impact and the hope and reality of recovery and resilience.

We speak of building better lives, creating an all-important sense of community and belonging, of engaging rather than isolating people who share our experience. “You are not alone” is much more than a slogan for us. It is the heart of our mission.

Articulating Our Vision

NAMI envisions a world where all persons affected by mental illness experience resiliency, recovery and wellness.

We contribute to building the world we desire by supporting and partnering with research, treatment and recovery innovations that strengthen the resiliency of individuals, families and communities. We hold accountable those in power to affect those improvements.

We actively educate and advocate for access to whole health, recovery and wellness, ensuring a full range of supports and treatments are made available and accessible across the lifespan and spectrum of life experiences, in cities and rural areas, in culturally relevant and respectful ways, in person and virtually.

We see the powerful potential of a world characterized by resiliency, recovery and wellness. We see a world in which we will no longer have people with mental illness needlessly in emergency rooms, homeless and in jails and prisons.

Selecting Strategic Drivers and Their Goals

We view our strategic priorities as active, so we have chosen to describe them as drivers—the directions in which we will invest “extraordinary time, talent and treasure” because we believe these investments will achieve meaningful impact, propelling both NAMI and the nation forward.

We have listed our Strategic Drivers in a sequence that reflects the amount of new focus we must bring to their implementation. Ideally, each driver enhances and advances the others.

Build a Movement: NAMI will broaden public awareness and inclusion in every part of the alliance.

- Increase our visibility and impact
- Strengthen our voice as a unified organization of lived experience
- Maximize our outreach to and engagement with diverse communities

Leverage Technology: NAMI will expand use of technology to build capacity and connection.

- Leverage technology to expand leadership and organizational capacity at the grass roots level
- Expand access to educational programs through technology solutions

NAMI Strategic Plan 2015 - 2017
• Maximize connections and support between individuals and communities through technology

Drive Advocacy: NAMI will lead advocacy efforts that drive increased access and quality of services.

• Identify and promote effective practices to address underserved populations, including people who are difficult to engage, homeless, involved in the criminal justice system, as well as military and veterans
• Advocate to ensure health reform and Federal mental health parity lead to improved outcomes

Focus on Youth: NAMI will develop and implement strategies that engage youth, young adults and their families, expanding our reach across the lifespan.

• Promote early identification and intervention
• Develop and integrate initiatives for youth and young adults throughout NAMI

Strengthen the Organization: NAMI will grow and develop financing, infrastructure and capacity that support a vibrant and bold organization.

• Support and strengthen State Organizations and Affiliates through re-chartering and re-affiliation and building toward consistent standards of excellence
• Grow financial resources
• Build and expand strategic partnerships
• Enhance staff and volunteer capacity and capabilities across the organization

Looking Ahead

Some years ago we asked our Facebook fans what one word best describes NAMI. The response was immediate and overwhelming: hope. This year in our surveying we saw much the same sentiment – NAMI continues to be a voice of hope, empowerment, advocacy and support in the lives we touch.

Too many people have yet to know that comfort and power. With this plan as our guide, we will continue to build our movement and bring NAMI’s strengths to more people, from all walks of life and corners of the nation. We must do no less.

“What stood out most of all was everyone’s deep wish for NAMI to matter, to become nationally visible, to become more disciplined and more focused on change-centered action.”

~ SPG participant