2015 Capitol Day a Success!

Great weather, great turn-out, and a great day on Capitol Hill! This year's Capitol Day event featured interesting speakers and productive meetings with legislators.

Pictured above: Members of NAMI Gulf Coast meet with their legislator, Dr. Greg Biom.

Read the event recap and view Capitol Day photos...

View updates from the 84th Legislative session...

NAMI Texas Launches New Website

NAMI Texas was proud to announce the launching of its new site at this year's Capitol Day event in late-February. Read more about the development of the website, check out the types of features included, and view the site map for the main navigation items in this e-newsletter issue. Then, be sure to visit our new site at www.namitexas.org!

Find out more about the new website...

Like NAMI Texas? Like Us on Facebook!

The NAMI Texas Facebook site is back up and running. Share your solidarity with our organization by liking our page and browse the latest postings about current mental health issues and research.

Get connected with our NAMI Texas Facebook page...

Save the Date

2015 NAMI Texas Annual Conference
"Pathways to Wellness"
October 23 & 24, 2015
Dallas, Texas
Reserve your hotel room today!

Letter from the President

Read the introductory letter from our new NAMI Texas President...

NAMI Texas Office Has Moved!

In an effort to reduce overhead costs and to position our organization closer to related community organizations for future collaboration, the NAMI Texas office has moved. We're still in the heart of Austin, Texas, but some of our contact information has changed as a result.

Check out the new contact information for NAMI Texas...

Affiliate Spotlight

NAMI El Paso offers a full spectrum of services and programming to both English and Spanish. Find out how they "habla Español" the NAMI way.

Get ideas for your Affiliate...

Ask-An-Advocate

Greg Hensch, Licensed Social Worker and Public Policy Guru, shares the low down on how to connect with your lawmakers and make the case for mental health policies.

Learn how to advocate for the estate...

Journey of Hope

Billie McInturff fought back from her brother's suicide and found her inspiration in volunteering and teaching NAMI Family-to-Family classes for NAMI Wichita Falls.

See how Billie turned a tragic event into an opportunity to help others...
Capitol Day

Contributor:
Matt Wolff, Director of Public Policy, NAMI Dallas

A sunny and bright afternoon greeted the over 350 attendees of the Capitol Day 2015 rally at the south steps of the pink-red granite edifice that is home to the Texas Senate, and House of Representatives as well as the offices of Governor Greg Abbott. Several prominent members of the 84th Texas Legislature emerged from the building to address the impassioned crowd. Among them were Senator Charles Schwertner, M.D. of Georgetown (Chair of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee), Senator Lois Kolkhorst of Brenham (Vice-Chair of the same committee), Representative Harold Dutton of Houston, Representative Elliott Naishat of Austin, and Representative Cindy Burkett of Sunnyvale.

Representative Burkett, who has a lifetime of experience as a family member of individuals living with mental illness, and thus a firsthand knowledge of Texas’ public mental health system that few in the legislature can match, had this to say, “Last session, the legislature allocated to the Department of State Health Services a much-needed investment of nearly $350 million above the previous biennium’s budget” to address inadequacies of the system. “This legislative session,” she continued, “it is vital that we continue the momentum to address the mental health solutions Texas still needs.”

Earlier that morning before the rally, participants representing NAMI Affiliates and allied organizations from around the state assembled at the Schmidt Jones Family Life Center a short walk from the Capitol to receive a briefing from Mental Health America Texas’ Gyl Switzer and me regarding mental health workforce concerns and other priority issues. This was followed by a talk from Eric Woomer, of the Federation of Texas Psychiatry, on the topic of effective communication with members of the Texas Legislature and their staff.

At two o’clock, as the rally ended and the assembled legislators returned to their committee meetings and other pressing work, the large group broke into teams of 3-4 members each and entered the Capitol to begin a busy and productive afternoon of visits with their individual legislators. Overall, the feedback from a
cross section of participants closely mirrored my own impressions gained as a member of teams visiting several offices of having found interested and concerned ears among the staff and members spoken with.

This session marked a particular opportunity to educate on the importance of mental health services in our state as the ranks of freshmen (eight new members of the thirty-one seat Texas Senate alone) make up a rather significant portion of the 84th Texas Legislature. Attendees were well equipped to deliver the message and did so with great success.

Going forward we must strive to continue the “momentum” of our cause, following up and staying in touch with those legislators and staff we had the pleasure of meeting near the beginning of the present legislative session as it continues to its conclusion May 30th. We must ensure our voices continue to be heard through calls, letters, emails and further visits, exemplifying this timeless quote from the poet Dante (1265-1321), “the secret of getting things done is to act!”

Great thanks and congratulations on a job well done to all who participated (and are continuing the ongoing effort) this year. To quote another great historical figure, Yogi Berra, “It ain’t over ‘til it’s over.”

**NAMI Texas appreciates our 2015 Capitol Day sponsors!**
Legislative Updates

There are less than two months left in the 84th regular session of the Texas Legislature. We’ve seen significant progress on several important mental health reform proposals, and a number of others have the potential to advance in this session. Your voice is critically important in this process – during the session, legislators rely on people like us who are personally affected by mental health policy to share our stories, identify opportunities for system improvement, and carry their proposals forward. There is time remaining in this legislative session for us to make an impact. Please see below for a status update on key bills of support for NAMI Texas and our affiliates. Remember, there are many rapidly moving parts in this process, so it’s likely that status of some of these bills has changed since the date of this newsletter’s publication. I send almost daily updates to the Advocacy Lead of each Affiliate, so you should be able to get current updates and action alerts from your Affiliate. You can also contact Greg Hansch directly at ghansch@gmail.com.

Bills that have passed a chamber:

HB 1 - General Appropriations Act. This is state’s budget bill, on the House side. Funding is perennially a top policy priority for NAMI Texas and our affiliates. There are many items of interest for mental health advocates like us. This bill is in a state of change as the Senate considers it. A full analysis will be provided after the legislative session. We are working to ensure that key mental health budget items – such as community-based services, inpatient care, Clubhouses, and peer services - are included and adequately funded. As it stands now, the House has passed the budget and the Senate has offered a committee substitute to HB 1. The Senate committee substitute, as it stands now, would increase funding for mental health services by just under $250 million.

SB 18 - Relating to measures to support or enhance graduate medical education in this state.
SB 133 - Relating to mental health first aid training for school district employees and school resource officers.
SB 1117 - Relating to housing services provided through the transitional living services program to certain children in the conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services.

Advanced out of committee:

HB 1430 - Relating to the inclusion of mental health in the public services endorsement on a public school diploma and in information about health science career pathways.
HB 2216 - Relating to information required of an applicant for a driver’s license.
SB 55 - Relating to the creation of a grant program to support community mental health programs for veterans with mental illness.
SB 125 - Relating to certain assessments for children in the conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services.
SB 359 - Relating to the authority of a peace officer to apprehend a person for emergency detention and the authority of certain facilities to temporarily detain a person with mental illness.
SB 578 - Relating to providing inmates of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice with information regarding reentry and reintegration resources.
SB 1664 - Relating to the establishment of the Texas Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Program; authorizing the imposition of fees.
SB 1888 - Relating to a requirement that a county report the number of certain persons with mental illness detained in that county's jail.
Heard in committee:

HB 19 - Relating to mental health and preventive services programs for veterans' and military families.
HB 39 - Relating to guardianships for incapacitated persons.
HB 867 - Relating to the establishment and operation of the Texas Women Veterans Program.
HB 1338 - Relating to training for peace officers and first responders on acquired and traumatic brain injuries.
HB 1429 - Relating to the creation of a grant program to support community mental health programs for veterans with mental illness.
HB 1762 - Relating to the creation of a health care advocacy program for veterans.
HB 1855 - Relating to training, continuing education, and weapons proficiency standards for correctional officers employed by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.
HB 2023 - Relating to the appointment of a forensic medical director responsible for statewide coordination and oversight of forensic mental health services provided by the Department of State Health Services.
HB 3025 - Relating to health benefit coverage for prescription drug synchronization.
HB 3115 - Relating to coverage for certain services relating to postpartum depression under the medical assistance and CHIP perinatal programs.
HB 3404 - Relating to a study on providing care to veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.
HB 3726 - Relating to establishing a veterans reentry program for certain inmates and state jail defendants confined by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.
SB 133 - Relating to student loan repayment assistance for certain mental health professionals.
SB 1507 - Relating to the appointment of a forensic medical director responsible for statewide coordination and oversight of forensic mental health services provided by the Department of State Health Services.
SB 1889 - Relating to the disclosure and use of certain information in the Department of Family and Protective Services central registry of child abuse or neglect cases and the report of certain information regarding those cases to the legislature.
NAMI Texas Launches New Website

NAMI Texas was proud to announce the launch of our new and improved website at this year’s Capitol Day event in late February. The new website replaces the former site at www.namitexas.org.

Its release signals a shift toward enhanced communications efforts with more modern, interactive features. The new website was developed through the NAMI EasySite program, which utilizes a content management system to enable NAMI State Organization and NAMI Affiliate leaders to bring communication efforts in house.

“The main goals of NAMIEasySite are to provide a way for our NAMI offices to fully utilize the NAMI brand in their online presence and create an easy way to maintain attractive, efficient websites for our incredibly busy NAMI State Organizations and NAMI Affiliates,” said Amanda Roberts, Information Services Coordinator at NAMI. “Everyone at NAMI is truly thrilled to see NAMI Texas’ new website, as it will be a wonderful way to promote and grow NAMI Texas and the NAMI Affiliates in Texas.”

NAMI Affiliate leaders who are interested in exploring the full features of the NAMI EasySite program can visit the following website for more information: www.namieasysite.com

NAMI Texas will also be providing a service to our NAMI Affiliates that wish to have a website presence but do not have the capacity at this time to maintain a larger site. NAMI Texas will host these Affiliate webpages within our broader site.

Together, we can continue to get the word out about the important work being done at NAMI Texas and NAMI Affiliates throughout our state.

Features of the New NAMI Texas Website

Sleek Design - The design is based on a template specifically geared toward NAMI State Organizations and NAMI Affiliates. It corresponds with the new NAMI website design at the national level.

Search Bar - For those times when you need to find that elusive information quickly.

Rotating Announcements - Get connected with upcoming events and opportunities by clicking on links that take you directly to the relevant information.
Updated Navigation Menu - Content from our previous site was re-organized and mixed with new content in our new navigation menu.

Resources for Affiliate Leaders - NAMI Affiliate Leaders can access useful information in this section about Affiliate Service Areas, Operational Models, Standards of Excellence, the Affiliate Leader Training Schedule, and links to nonprofit best practices.

Color-Coded Calendar - Easily find upcoming event listings including conferences, Affiliate leader trainings, and NAMIWalks events around the state.

Online Event Registration - See complete event details and a map of the location. Sign up for events.

Photo Albums - View pictures from recent events.

Sharing Options - These buttons appear on most pages and allow you to print, create a PDF, or share the content via a variety of social media sites.

Donate Button - Now featured prominently on our home page to connect donors with our PayPal-integrated online donation form.
Site Map for the Main Navigation Menu

About Us
- Mission
- History
- Our Staff
- Board Leadership
  - Board Members
  - Board Meeting Schedule
  - Meeting Minutes
- Public Documents
  - Bylaws
  - Board Operating Policies & Procedures
  - Strategic Plan
  - Annual Reports
  - IRS 990 Forms
- Corporate Partners
- Employment Opportunities

About Mental Illness
- Facts & Figures
- Recovery
- Success Stories

Affiliates
- Find Your Local Affiliate
- Start a New Affiliate
- Resources for Affiliate Leaders
  - Affiliate Service Areas
  - Operational Models
  - Standards of Excellence
    - General Information
    - Getting Started
    - Required Documentation
  - Templates & Sample Documents
  - Profile Center
  - Progress Reports
  - Common Questions About SOE
- Useful Resources
- Training Schedule

Education & Support
- All Programs & Services
  - Family-to-Family
  - Family Support Group
  - Connection
  - Peer-to-Peer
  - In Our Own Voice

Partnerships
- Basics
- Parents and Teachers as Allies
- Ending the Silence
- Provider Education
- For Individuals with Mental Illness
- For Families
- For Professionals
- For Veterans
- For Students
- For Everyone

Advocacy
- Advocacy Basics
- Public Policy Platform
- Legislative Alerts
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- Contact Your Representatives
- Advocacy Links

Events
- Annual State Conference
- Capitol Day
- NAMIWalks
- Photo Album
- Calendar

Newsletter
- Current Issue
- Archives

Resources
- If in Crisis
- Medications & Treatments
- Family Member Arrested
- Supported Housing
- Job Resources
- Other Links

Get Involved
- Join NAMI
- Participate in Events
- Advocate for the Cause
- Volunteer
- Donate
NAMI Texas Office Has Moved!

Our office is now located at:

Austin State Hospital Campus
Building 781, Room 428

Our new mailing address is:

NAMI Texas
PO Box 300817
Austin, Texas 78703

Contact us at:

Phone: (512) 693-2000
Email: kjeschke@namitexas.org
Dear NAMI members and friends;

As I settle into the role as NAMI Texas President, I thank you for the work you do in your communities and the faith you have in NAMI Texas. We have gone through rough times, but we are coming out of those times as a better organization that is becoming more stream-lined, more focused, and more in tune with the grassroots beginnings of NAMI.

Sometimes we need a reminder of who and what we are to better adjust to this changing world of technology, instant gratification and selfies. NAMI is about people who care, programs that make a difference, and leaders who realize that they only lead at the discretion of their fellow members. We don’t follow what is trendy – we follow what is right. Please join in the fight to make mental health first a common slogan in the schools, churches, and businesses in the State of Texas.

All my best,

John Dornheim
President, NAMI Texas
Affiliate Spotlight: NAMI El Paso

At the 2014 NAMI Texas Annual Conference, NAMI El Paso was awarded the distinction of “Affiliate of the Year” for its outstanding work in reaching out to the community through its mental health programming. NAMI El Paso is the only Affiliate in the state providing a full spectrum of services and programming in both English and Spanish.

Since close to 80 percent of the population of El Paso speaks Spanish, the demand for Spanish language services is very high.

“El Paso County is under served in the area of mental health,” explained Patti Fernandez, Ph.D., M.P.H., C.H.E.S., Director of Programs at NAMI El Paso. “We have few psychiatrists, psychiatric nurse practitioners or psychologists per capita. An even smaller number of these providers speak Spanish.”

That is where NAMI El Paso comes in. They offer De Familia a Familia (Family-to-Family in Spanish), hold regular support groups for Spanish-speaking individuals, and have In Our Own Voice presenters who have adapted their presentations into Spanish. Calls and emails in Spanish are answered and re-routed to the two Spanish-speaking staff members. In addition, newsletters and other written materials are published in both English and Spanish.

Sukie Saenz, NAMI El Paso Board member, Health Fairs Coordinator and De Familia a Familia Teacher, also attends many of the health fairs that are focused on the under insured and uninsured population, which is mostly Spanish-speaking. According to Ms. Saenz, compassion and patience are key. Many feel frustrated and lost, so offering educational programs such as De Familia a Familia helps them move forward and take a more proactive role.

“The mental health needs of the immigrant population are complex,” said Dr. Fernandez. “The trauma that is associated with grief, violence, displacement, abandonment, family separation and isolation needs to be addressed. [Although resources are available,] the Latino community may not seek them out due to cultural perceptions and the stigma associated with mental illness.”

NAMI El Paso understands these challenges, so their approach to Spanish-based programming has been effective. The more NAMI El Paso presents Signature programs in Spanish, the more they have a demand for services. Furthermore, NAMIWalks El Paso has also been well-received by the Spanish speaking community since it provides an opportunity for them to join the rest of the community to help eliminate the stigma associated with mental illness.

“The Latino community in general likes to ‘convivir’ to share in their happiness and struggles,” said Dr. Fernandez, “so sharing personal stories helps in knowing that they are not alone.”

If your Affiliate is interested in reaching out to your local Spanish-speaking community, NAMI El Paso suggests starting by identifying a community representative. This way, you can ensure that your efforts are culturally appropriate. When you are ready to advertise and offer services in Spanish, make sure you have identified qualified individuals. For example, when it comes to translations of materials, Dr. Fernandez recommends that translators are either professional or experienced in order to avoid literal translations that don’t make any sense.

“There is very strong resistance and shame about [mental illness in our Hispanic/Latino community],” said Dr. Fernandez. “However,...if we are able to educate a handful, we are happy, because we know they will go and share it with their community. After that, it is a domino effect that keeps on going.”
Q: What are the different ways Texans can advocate to advance mental health issues?

A: One does not need to be an attorney, registered lobbyist, or Austinite to be an effective advocate for mental health reform in Texas. Some of us do have one or more of those identities, but the majority of the NAMI people that I’ve met are busy people who make or want to make time in their lives for meaningful change. Advocates like us need good information (not an overwhelming amount), credibility (which often stems from having good information and a personal connection to mental illness), and effective methods of telling our stories. When it comes to getting good information, let’s face it: few of us, except for maybe the select group who get paid to do it, have the time to sift through the thousands of bills introduced in the Texas Legislature every two years. The website Texas Legislature Online is a great resource for tracking bills/hearings and I strongly support NAMI members using it, but legislative proposals are often complex, dense, and interpretable only by people who are ‘in the weeds’ of state law. A core responsibility of NAMI Texas is to develop a policy platform using the input of affiliates, directly engage with lawmakers and the mental health advocacy community, and disseminate advocacy/legislative/policy information to affiliates (all of whom should have a designated ‘Advocacy Lead’ - the point person for receiving information from the state organization and mobilizing local members to act upon that information). Our Public Policy Committee is in regular communication about the many proposals and opportunities for reform in this 84th session of the Texas Legislature. Once good information is in our hands, we, as NAMI members who have a personal connection to mental illness, are primed to learn how to tell our stories and subsequently make direct contact with policymakers. The ‘NAMI SMARTS for Advocacy’ training is an incredibly powerful tool for us to utilize – if you ever get the chance, I strongly recommend doing the training. You’ll learn proven advocacy approaches (including in-person meetings, phone calls, letters, emails, ‘elevator pitches’ and more), practice them with your peers, and come out of it confident that you can use your voice to advance meaningful mental health reform at the local, state, and federal levels.

Q: How do I know what my representative stands for and cares about?

A: There is a great deal of value in doing background research on the legislators who represent you before making direct contact. Visit their website to read their bios and their policy/issues section. Use Texas Legislature Online to find out what they have introduced bills on in the past and in the current session. Attend community forums, both during the election season and afterwards, that give legislators and constituents a chance to connect. You’ll find as you start to do these things that questions may come up. My two cents? Don’t hesitate to ask! Legislators and their staff are there to serve Texans like us. Your legislators have both district and capitol offices. You can
easily email, call up, or visit either office and ask to speak with the Chief of Staff, the Legislative Director, or a Legislative Aide who can answer your question. A relationship between you and the office will start to develop and it will become increasingly easy to contact your legislators about what they stand for. And then, when it comes time to advocate for what WE stand for, the foundational relationship will already be in place.

**Q: How do I convince my legislators to care about this cause?**

**A:** It’s entirely possible, and maybe even likely, that your legislator already cares about the cause. Many people, even legislators, have a personal connection to mental illness, or are at least aware of the need for reform. It’s best to feel out any common ground that may already exist, and if there doesn’t seem to be much initial interest, we can try different approaches. For one, there is always interest from the Legislature in saving money. Any way you can show that your proposal will save the state money is probably worth putting towards the forefront of your argument. Secondly, it helps to tell a personal narrative about your connection to mental illness. Maybe it’s a friend, a family member, an acquaintance, or you yourself who lives with a mental illness. There is no better way to instill a ‘responsibility to act’ in a legislator’s conscience than to show how the status quo is detrimental to the person directly in front of them. Our stories are absolutely essential to our goal of advancing meaningful mental health reform – the policymakers who represent us want, need, and expect to hear our stories. Lastly – give them facts, figures, and data that support your case! A legislative staffer recently told me – ‘we’re a shop that runs on data’. Having hard evidence and studies that illustrate why change is needed is an important ingredient of our advocacy efforts.

**Q: What if I don’t know the answer to a question they ask about mental health?**

**A:** I’ve been in plenty of meetings and hearings where I’ve been asked a question about mental health that I didn’t know the answer to. It’s ok, we’ve all been there! Through watching this happen to my peers and colleagues, I learned that the last thing you want to do is make something up. We’re much better off telling them that we don’t know the answer and that we’d like to follow up with them on their question later than spinning a potential falsity. Earlier in this Q&A I mentioned credibility as being an essential building block of effective advocacy – lying or making things up is credibility’s worst enemy. Respectfully stating that you don’t know the answer but that you’d like to follow up with them later is your best course of action when this comes up and can actually be a good thing, as it gives you a reason to contact an office and further the relationship.

**Q: Do my advocacy efforts truly matter?**

**A:** Absolutely. We already have a cause that is on the Legislature’s sights. Looking at the 2013 legislative session – mental health was one of THE big issues addressed by the Legislature. A major reason that happened is that we mobilized and advocated as a community. Volunteer advocates give us strength in numbers, as well as unique experiences and perspective that can tip the scales in one way or another. One poignant, revealing, and/or convincing testimony from a NAMI member can make all the difference – I’ve seen it happen more than once. Even if you cannot physically be at the Capitol to testify, your phone calls, letters, and traditional/social media outreachs are critical to this effort. Legislative offices will often record the calls they receive and literally make a Yes/No tally of who supports a bill and who doesn’t. If you hear from your affiliate asking you to contact your legislative office regarding a bill, please act. We are NAMI, we are a grassroots organization, and we derive our strength from us, the members. Meaningful change is within our reach.
Journey of Hope: Billie McInturff

When I lost my brother to suicide, I was so angry at the disease which had caused him so much suffering, and had taken him from our family that I could not cope with my loss. Volunteering with NAMI has given me a way to fight back, and to use my experience to help other people caught in a similar situation.

My brother and I lived in separate towns and kept in touch by having long telephone conversations. I noticed a certain amount of depression in his conversations, but dismissed it as a period he was going through, and I convinced myself he would snap out of it. He chose to kill himself instead. He had been my big brother, my friend, and a confidant. I was devastated to lose him.

After a period of searching, I found NAMI and became involved with the monthly meetings. The availability of curriculum and class that taught families about mental illness seemed a wonderful answer to my search, but there was no one here locally who taught it. I signed up for training and began to teach the Family-to-Family class shortly thereafter. That was in 2006, and I have taught two classes each year since then.

Each class brings a different group of people trying to cope with things that are unknown, in a reality they could never have imagined. They are deserted by most friends. They are lost. As we begin to work our way through the curriculum, they begin to share and find answers in our book and support from their classmates. The dynamics of each group is different, but the groups all bond at about the same place in the curriculum.

Teaching this class has been one of the most rewarding and joyful experiences of my life. I have met wonderful people, made many new friends, and gained a different perspective about my own problem.