Advocacy Guide
State Policy Advocacy 101
How to engage in advocacy

Developed by NAMI Texas Public Policy Team

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NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is the nation’s largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.

What started as a small group of families gathered around a kitchen table in 1979 has blossomed into the nation’s leading voice on mental health. Today, we are an association of more than 500 local affiliates who work in your community to raise awareness and provide support and education that was not previously available to those in need.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness of Texas (NAMI Texas) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization founded by volunteers in 1984. NAMI Texas is affiliated with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and has 27 local Affiliates throughout Texas. NAMI Texas has nearly 2,000 members made up of individuals living with mental illness, family members, friends, and professionals. Its purpose is to help improve the lives of people affected by mental illness through education, support, and advocacy.

NAMI Texas has a variety of education and support programs directed to individuals living with mental illness, family members, friends, professionals, other stakeholders, and the community at large to address the mental health needs of Texans. NAMI Texas works to inform the public about mental illness by distributing information about mental illness through every means of communication. Interviews are produced on television, stories are featured in newspapers, brochures are produced and distributed, referrals are provided, and newsletters and other publications are utilized.

**Purpose of Guide #1: Doing Advocacy**

This guide is intended to be a comprehensive resource for mental health advocates, specifically NAMI members, in navigating different ways to engage in policy advocacy. This guide will specifically discuss advocacy as it relates to Texas policies and state structures. The guide is largely intended to target those who are new to the advocacy realm but may also be a helpful reference for those who have engaged in advocacy for years.

This guide will cover the importance of advocacy, how to use your lived experience around mental health issues in advocacy, how to interact with your lawmaker, and how to navigate different legislative entities.
This guide helps reinforce learnings from the NAMI SMARTS for Advocacy program but does not replace the experience of practicing telling your story or roleplaying interactions with lawmakers.

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Chapter 1: What is advocacy?

Advocacy means “to support or argue for (a cause, policy, etc.)”1. Advocacy can involve a wide range of activities intended to change or maintain an outcome for a cause. This may involve trying to raise awareness for a cause, taking actions intended to reach a specific outcome, or building a larger movement to serve a specific cause and rally your base.

You have probably already engaged in some form of mental health advocacy. If you or a loved one have had to argue for a certain treatment or medication, to get into a certain program, or to improve the quality of care received, you have engaged in mental health advocacy.

Policy advocacy involves changing systems to help others, which may or may not include yourself, through interactions with stakeholders, policymakers, and those in other influential leadership positions.

Examples
Not advocacy - Teaching students how to read
Advocacy - Asking the school district to support reading programs

Types of Advocacy activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of activity</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizing</td>
<td>Gathering supporters and unifying them as one coherent voice to effectively enact change.</td>
<td>During the Texas legislative session, NAMI Texas hosts a Mental Health Rally Day at the State Capitol to organize NAMI members and mental health allies across the state to rally and visit their legislators.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating</td>
<td>Raising awareness and providing information for your cause to key stakeholders.</td>
<td>NAMI Texas hosts informational meetings for legislative stakeholders to learn about key priority issues, such as First Episode Psychosis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobbying</td>
<td>Advocating for or against specific legislation</td>
<td>NAMI Texas championed and urged legislators to pass more than 20 state bills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litigating</td>
<td>Using the civil or criminal justice system to create change for your cause.</td>
<td>NAMI joined a patient advocates healthcare group a lawsuit against the presidential administration for a recent rule allowing short-term health plans.4</td>
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Grassroots advocacy

The majority of people reading this will be engaging in grassroots advocacy. Grassroots advocacy focuses on empowering members of the general public, including individuals impacted by the issue, to advocate for change, as opposed to paid professional advocates. Grassroots advocates bring their lived experience and understanding local issues to their lawmakers, and can often be more effective than paid advocates and lobbyists at changing hearts and minds. They focus on telling their stories and providing the perspective of individuals and communities impacted by an issue. This handbook is designed to help individuals and NAMI affiliates engage in grassroots advocacy.
Chapter 2: Why do we need advocacy?

You might assume that you have to be an expert on policy and research to enact change. However, people with lived experience can have significant influence on policy, especially at the local and state levels. Advocacy on critical policies can have a serious impact on what services people receive and how programs are funded. Your voice is needed to bring more resources and better policies to the mental health arena.

Stories matter

Research shows that stories that evoke emotion and empathy are far more powerful than facts and figures in shaping the opinions of others. Hearing real stories is one of the quickest and surest ways to promote support for mental health care and increase understanding and acceptance of people who live with mental illness.

Lawmakers care about what their constituents think

Constituents decide whether or not lawmakers are re-elected. Lawmakers want to make their constituents happy in order to become re-elected, and they want to be able to tie their accomplishments to the needs of their district. When a lawmaker can say that an idea or issue was brought to them by a constituent, it helps them appear attuned to their constituents and districts and lends credibility to their issue.

Relationships matter

When having to make many decisions around votes and passing legislation, lawmakers look to individuals and organizations they trust for advice on how they should see certain issues and solutions. Building that positive relationship with your lawmaker through advocacy and rapport-building builds credibility for your perspective and for the overall movement.

Mental health issues are prevalent

One in five people will experience a mental health condition at some point in their lives. This issue touches the lives of almost every person you will meet in government in some way or another. The lawmaker may have a mental health condition or have a family member or friend who does. The lawmaker also has countless constituents who have a mental health condition and are impacted by policy decisions.

Strengths in Numbers

Each individual’s story is critical in changing a lawmaker’s perspective on mental illness, but multiple stories strengthen the narrative and reinforce that these issues are not anecdotes, but trends that cannot be ignored. Your voice is needed to normalize conversations on mental health and send a message to your lawmaker that people in their community care about mental health.
Persistence is key

Changing hearts and minds around mental health and creating a mental health system that ensures every person receives the care they deserve does not happen in a single legislative visit. Mental health advocacy requires many people to continue staying engaged and talking about their experiences to break the stigma and improve our mental health systems. Issues are often forgotten if advocates are not persistent in promoting their issue.

Texans often don’t get the help they need

- Texas is ranked second to last nationally in access to mental health care.
- Twelve million Texans live in areas designated as mental health care health professional shortage areas.

Lack of adequate mental health care has severe personal and societal consequences.

- 37% of students with a mental health condition age 14 and older drop out of school.
- The unemployment rate for individuals receiving services through the public mental health system in Texas was 85.6% in 2012.
- Nearly 22% of individuals in Texas who are homeless have a severe mental illness (over 5,100), and half of those individuals are unsheltered.
- Over half of all adults who are incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails have at least one mental health condition.
- 1 out of every 8 Texas students reported having attempted suicide in the past year, which is almost twice the national average.
- People with serious mental illness die up to 20 years younger because of preventable physical disorders.

As people whose lives have been affected by mental illness, we need to speak up about the things that matter. We need to speak up…
  - To protect public mental health funding,
  - To expand access to mental health coverage and
  - To ensure that effective mental health services are available.

The next chapter discusses how you can effectively tell your story to persuade lawmakers.
Chapter 3: Telling your story

Although it is clear that telling your story is a powerful tool in changing minds and advocating for better mental health policy, it may seem overwhelming to know what to say and how to say it. There may be many different aspects to your story worth discussing, or it may feel challenging to know where to start.

Before you speak to a policymaker, know what you are going to say. Write down your story and practice until you feel comfortable. NAMI has developed steps to structure your story and make it easier to tell your story in a succinct, but powerful, fashion.

**Seven Steps to Telling Your Story**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</table>
| 1.   | Introduce Yourself  
- Give your name and city or town, including local affiliate  
- Share how you are affected by mental illness.  
- State your issue and position. |
| 2.   | Explain What Happened Before You or Your Loved OneReceived Help.  
- Keep this brief. |
| 3.   | What Helped?  
- Explain what helped or would have helped with recovery. |
| 4.   | How is Your Situation Different Today?  
- Share what is going right in your life or how you are experiencing recovery.  
- Try to end story on hopeful note if possible. |
| 5.   | What is the Need or Problem?  
- Transition to the challenge your story presented. |
| 6.   | What Will Help Others?  
- Talk about what would help you/your loved one or could help others like you. |
| 7.   | Make Your “Ask”.  
- Ask your policymaker to support or oppose a specific bill, budget item, or policy proposal  
- Thank your policymaker or staff for their time. |
Some stories are more effective than others in changing hearts and minds. Here are a few tips NAMI has developed to strengthen your story.

- **Keep it brief - develop a two minute story.** – Practice what you will say ahead of time and try to keep your story short. They can ask for more details if needed.
- **Leave out irrelevant details.** – All of our stories are complex, but the audience might become confused or distracted if you share aspects of your life that are not needed to tell this story.
- **Don’t overwhelm your audience.** – These stories can often be difficult to tell or hear. If you find your story brings up tears or trembling in you, focus on the aspects that don’t bring up as much pain or use language that allows you to maintain composure.
- **Use a message of hope.** – People usually like to root for those who make it through adversity—use this to your advantage.
- **Have a clear ask of your audience.** – They want to know what you would like for them to do with this information. The ask may vary based on how specific the need is, but there should be some kind of action they can take.
- **Stay positive.** – If your message is too negative, your audience may feel hopeless or defensive. Relationship building is key.
- **Avoid making assumptions.** – Don’t assume your audience’s opinion based on party affiliation, past experiences, or even a noncommittal response. A legislator or staffer may need multiple interactions to be ready to take action on an issue.
Chapter 4: Contacting your lawmakers

There are a lot of different ways to contact your lawmakers. While face-to-face visits are the most helpful in developing a connection with your lawmaker, using long-distance communication methods can maintain that relationship or forge one when a visit is not possible.

Why do emails, phone calls, and mail matter?

These calls, emails, and letters are often processed by staff members, but it’s not forgotten. Stories and information you share may have an impact on that staff, and can lead to further inquiry and relationship-building. It shows what constituents value, and can help that office direct their work. Follow-up after visits with lawmakers shows that you are interested in continuing the conversation and holding the lawmaker accountable on your issue.

Steps for writing an effective email

Once you have found the appropriate email address to contact your lawmaker, use this structure to make the email easy for your lawmaker and their staff to understand. Make sure to be polite and avoid strong or hostile language. Electronic communications can be misconstrued because of a lack of tone, so make sure to use professional and friendly language in correspondence.

- Use the subject line to identify a bill or issue and specify your support, opposition, or request for action.
- Properly address your policy maker - “Dear [Elected Title] [Last Name].”
- Indicate why you are writing and what you would like them to do.
- Ask your policymaker if you can count on their support (or opposition).
- Be specific about the action or position desired. Include a bill number, if possible.
- Thank your policymaker for their time or for their attention to your issue.
- Follow with your name, address, phone number, and email address. This allows your policymaker to respond to your request and confirm you live in their district.

Optional steps for writing an effective email

- Describe why this legislation matters to you personally.
- Add a brief highlight of your story. In one to three sentences, describe an important part of your story that is relevant to the issue.
- Make one to three brief points. Talk about the impact of the issue or bill and/or why the bill is needed.
- Politely ask your policymaker to tell you how he/she intends to vote.
**Steps for calling your lawmaker**

- Provide a greeting, identify yourself by name and town, and note that you are a constituent.
- Be prepared to provide your address and phone number.
- Ask to speak to the lawmaker. If this is not an option, ask to speak with the staff that specializes in the issue or bill you need to discuss.
- Indicate why you are calling and what you would like them to do.
- Be specific about the action or position desired. Include a bill number, if possible.
- Ask your policymaker if you can count on their support (or opposition).
- Thank your policymaker for their time or for their attention to your issue.

**Optional steps for calling your lawmaker**

- Describe why this legislation matters to you personally.
- Add a brief highlight of your story. In one to three sentences, describe an important part of your story that is relevant to the issue.
- Make one to three brief points. Talk about the impact of the issue or bill and/or why the bill is needed.
- Politely ask your policymaker to tell you how he/she intends to vote.

**Steps for leaving a voice mail**

If the office does not answer the phone, you should still leave a voice mail to receive contact in the future. The format is similar to the phone call. You will have about a minute, so keep the voice mail brief but make it clear why you called and how you can be reached.

- Provide a greeting, identify yourself by name and town, and note that you are a constituent.
- Provide your address and phone number.
- Indicate why you are calling and what you would like them to do. Include the bill number, if applicable.
- Thank your policymaker for their time or for their attention to your issue.

**Optional steps for leaving a voice mail**

- Describe why this legislation matters to you personally.
- Add a brief highlight of your story. In one to three sentences, describe an important part of your story that is relevant to the issue.
- Make one to three brief points. Talk about the impact of the issue or bill and/or why the bill is needed.
• Specifically ask for the office to call you back if you are interested in discussing this further with them.

### Sending a letter or postcard

Writing a letter will follow a similar format to the e-mail. Make sure to include your return address as well as your phone number and e-mail. It may be easier for offices to respond to this letter through other means if they have a question.

Writing a postcard is usually a short message of 1-3 sentences, or just a few words. These messages usually thank a lawmaker for their support or urge them to take a position on a specific bill or budget item. Sending a postcard, especially as part of a group effort, can be a quick way to show you are paying attention to an issue.

### Greetings

The following tips that will help you properly address elected officials in communications.

• Refer to a lawmaker by their official title and last name when greeting or speaking to them.

• If you know that a legislator has a special role within the legislative body, use that title instead. For example, refer to legislators who serve as committee chairs as “Chair [Last name].”

• When sending mail, make sure to address your mail to the “the Honorable” [Official’s title] [Official’s full name] and address it to their district or state office.
Chapter 5: Meeting your lawmaker

Meeting a lawmaker can feel intimidating, but it can also feel like a very exciting opportunity to change the way they see mental illness. Sometimes you will only have an opportunity to speak with the lawmaker’s staff, but don’t take this opportunity for granted. Staff can often serve as your issue’s strongest champion when a lawmaker may be reluctant or have little information.

Preparing for the meeting

Make sure you are ready for the meeting ahead of time. For most meetings, this may only require a few minutes of prep work.

Know your issue.

- Identify your issue, describe the problem, your talking points, your story, the solution and your “ask.”
- Use a briefing sheet to organize info.

Know your policymaker.

- Read your policymaker’s online biography, press releases, or newsletter.
- Find out what committees they are on and their interests.

Plan your meeting.

- If meeting as part of a group, identify roles and coordinate what you will say.
- A group of two is often the most effective.

Use person-first language.

- Emphasize the person, not the illness (e.g., person living with schizophrenia).
- Avoid negative terms like “suffering.”
- Use positive concepts, like recovery, to promote empathy.

Manage spin. Don’t get caught up in side issues.

- Practice bringing the focus back to where it belongs—on people living with mental illness.

Expect resistance.

- Don’t argue.
- Anticipate challenging comments and questions and practice positive responses.
- Use facts to support your statements, if possible.
Meeting as a Group

Before your group meeting, determine which role each participant will play. Here are some suggestions on how to divide and conquer. Depending on the size of your group, one member may take on more than one role, or divide their role amongst multiple people.

**Lead**
- Introduces self or the group
- Introduces issue and position
- Makes the "ask"
- Closes the meeting

**Messenger**
- Gives talking points
- Describes the need or problem
- Describes the solution
- Gives legislative packet at meeting close

**Storyteller**
- Adds highlights of personal story or local perspective of issue's impact

**Briefing sheet**

A "briefing sheet" is a tool to prep for meetings with policymakers; **it is not appropriate to leave behind**. Provide elected officials or staff with separate fact sheets or materials outlining legislative priorities.

This may include information on the bill number, a quick summary for reference, where it is in the legislative process, what your “Ask” is, then bullet points on the need for your ask, talking points to support your arguments, and a proposed solution.

**Steps for Meeting Your Policymaker**

Here are some steps to help structure your meeting once you have prepared for the meeting and are ready to meet.

- Address your policymaker by their elected title and last name.
- Give your name and city or town. Include your organization, including your local affiliate.
- Thank your policymaker for his or her time.
- Indicate the position or action you would like your policymaker to take.
- Mention the problem or need you want addressed. Transition to the challenge(s) faced by people living with mental illness.
- Make your points. Talk concisely about the impact of the issue or bill and/or why the bill is needed.
- Share your story. Describe how you are affected by mental illness. Briefly add highlights of your story that are relevant to the issue.
- Propose a solution. Let your policymaker know what will help address the need or problem you described.
- Ask your policymaker if you can count on their support (or opposition).
• Be specific about the action or position you want them to take. Include a bill number, if possible.
• **Thank your policymaker.** Let your policymaker know you appreciate their time and attention.

**Optional steps for meeting with your lawmaker (if time allows)**

• Mention something positive your policymaker has done. For example, this can be his or her length of service, leadership on an issue, or a previous vote.
• Touch on a shared interest or connection.
• Repeat the process of giving talking points for other issues, describing the need or problem, the solution and your “ask.” Focus on no more than three issues in a meeting.
• If possible, provide a fact sheet, legislative packet or summary of your issue(s) or bill(s).
• Provide information on your organization and its programs.
• Let your policymaker know you are willing to serve as a resource on mental health issues.
• Request a picture or extend an invitation. Ask your policymaker to pose for a group photo or ask him/her to visit a local program or event, like the NAMI Walk.

**Follow up after the meeting**

• Send a thank you note. A hand-written thank you note is not only polite, it will leave a positive impression and allows you to repeat your ask.
• Check back regarding position. Write, call or email a polite inquiry a week or two after your meeting.
• If your policymaker asks for addition information, follow up immediately. If you do not have the answer, ask NAMI Texas for assistance.
Chapter 6: Other advocacy activities

We have discussed some key traditional strategies for engaging in advocacy, but these are not the only ways in engage in advocacy. Here are some other options for engaging in policy advocacy.

**Social media and blogging**

You can use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or any other forms of social media to communicate about mental health, issues impacting mental health access, bills or laws that could impact mental health, and ask others to take action. You can find more information to share through social media through NAMI Texas’ social media: Twitter at www.twitter.com/namitexas and Facebook at http://facebook.com/namitexas. You can also find more social media on national mental health policy at https://twitter.com/NAMIAdvocacy.

You can also read, share, and write your own blog posts on mental health, including telling your story. NAMI has its own blog for raising awareness on mental health issues that takes submissions: https://www.nami.org/blogs/nami-blog.

**Action alerts**

NAMI Texas and other advocacy organizations will send out emails or links to action campaigns asking advocates to take specific actions to promote a bill, budget item, or issue. These action alerts are usually time-sensitive and provide information on how to take this information. NAMI Texas uses Quorum to send out action alerts, which is grassroots advocacy software that makes it easier to contact your legislators.

**Letters to the editor**

You can raise awareness for mental health issues and policy needs by writing a letter to the editor. These are usually short statements (200 words or fewer) reacting to a new articles or major issue in the media, but can provide a channel for providing brief facts and stories on mental health to the general public, including policymakers.

**Attending advocacy days**

NAMI Texas organizes a Mental Health Advocacy Day every other year at the Texas State Capitol, a day that involves educating advocates on key mental health priorities, a rally on the steps of the Capitol, and scheduled legislative visits. Advocates can sign up to attend.

**NAMI SMARTS**

NAMI offers training on how to engage in advocacy, including how to tell your story and contact policymakers. The training includes information you have found in this guide as well as in-person demonstrations, practice, and feedback on storytelling. You can find more information on this training and how to sign up here: https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/NAMI-Programs/NAMI-Smarts-for-Advocacy.
Chapter 7: State Legislative Process

The Texas State legislature is a part-time legislature that meets every odd-numbered year from January until June.

How a bill becomes a law

In order for a new law to pass, it has to be drafted into a bill. A bill includes language on what part of the Texas state government codes will be changed in order for the state government or an entity regulated by the state government to either be permitted or required to take a certain action, or prohibited from taking a certain action. This bill will have to make it through the legislative process in both the House and the Senate before it can become law.

A bill is filed

Before a bill is filed, it has to be drafted. Legislators receive ideas for bills from every possible source, including colleagues, local and state advocates, constituents, their personal and professional experience, and news articles. Legislators take these ideas and potential language offered by stakeholders, and submit a Legislative Draft Request to the Legislative Council, and wait for an official draft to be returned.

If the draft matches what they would like see, the legislator submits the bill for filing (with the chief clerk in the House, secretary of state in the Senate) and the bill is assigned a bill number shortly afterward. These bills are usually marked by the chamber in which it came out and order
in which it was filed. Example – HB 432 would be the 432nd bill filed in the House. Bills can also have companion bills, which means that a legislator in the other chamber filed an identical bill and identified it as that bill’s companion bill. This increases the opportunity for a bill to pass, because it can still survive even if it stops moving in one chamber.

The legislature also handles resolutions and constitutional amendments in a similar fashion – usually found under the acronyms HCR/SCR, HJR/SJR. HR/ SRs are usually items intended to honor specific individuals or groups on the House or Senate floor, and do not need to go through the full legislative process to be enacted. The rest of this section will focus on HB/SBs.

**Designated Abbreviations for Texas State Legislation**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HB</td>
<td>House Bill</td>
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<tr>
<td>SB</td>
<td>Senate Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCR</td>
<td>House Concurrent Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCR</td>
<td>Senate Concurrent Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HJR</td>
<td>House Joint Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJR</td>
<td>Senate Joint Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSHB</td>
<td>Committee Substitute House Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSSB</td>
<td>Committee Substitute Senate Bill</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Legislators can start pre-filing legislation in November after the elections and have until the 60th day (first week of March) of the legislature to file bills and joint resolutions. After 60 days, the only bills that may be introduced are local bills (bills that only impact specific areas of the state), emergency appropriation bills, bills to address emergency items submitted by the governor, or bills introduced with the consent of four-fifths of legislators in the originating chamber. Since it takes time for a bill to be drafted by the Legislative Council, a Legislative Draft Request should be submitted by the legislator by mid-February.

**A bill goes to committee**

Shortly after the bill is filed and its caption is read on the House or Senate floor for the first time, it is sent to a topic-specific legislative committee that is determined by the appropriate leadership office. Committees consist of legislators appointed by the Lieutenant Governor (Senate) or the Speaker of the House (House) to serve on that committee. Legislators are allowed to designate preferences, based on interest and seniority, of which committees they would like to join, but they do not make the ultimate decision. These committees hold public hearings and votes on legislation through the session, hold hearings on specific issues related to their committee (interim charges) after the legislative session.

Most mental health bills go through the Health & Human Services committee on the Senate side or the Public Health committee on the House side, but these bills may be referred to other committees depending on their content.

After it is referred to committee, the committee chair may choose to schedule the bill for a hearing. Not all bills will receive hearings, and they are not necessarily heard in order. Some bills filed early may never receive a hearing, while other bills filed on the deadline may immediately be scheduled for a hearing.

The House committee is required to provide public notice for a hearing at least five calendar days in advance, but these requirements can be waived. Senate committees only have to provide
24 hours notice. Although the Senate is required to take public testimony in hearings, the House
is not required to hear public testimony in a committee hearing on a bill.

Prior to the bill being heard in the committee, the Legislative Budget Board should have composed a fiscal note that informs legislators on the financial cost the state would pay if the bill became law in its current form. Advocates will sometimes say that a bill “does not have a fiscal note” when the Legislative Budget Board decides that a bill is cost neutral. If the bill has a financial cost involved, there are steps the legislator should take to make sure this is addressed in the state budget process. Bills may also be amended during this time through a “committee substitute”, which may help address any pending concerns legislators or stakeholders have on passing the bill.

The committee is allowed to vote on a bill after hearing public testimony, but committees often wait at least a week to vote on a bill to provide time for further consideration and public input. If the bill is voted out of committee, it moves on to the Calendars committees. If the bill is voted down, it stays in committee until it is voted out of committee. The committee may choose to revisit these bills or any other bills they table in committee, but most bills “die” in committee.

**A bill goes to the Calendars committee**

The House and Senate have two unique processes to schedule a bill for a floor debate and vote. When the bill passes out of the committee, a committee report is generated by the committee clerk, with a bill analysis that includes background information and the purpose of the legislation, if the bill changes criminal justice code, if the bill grants any state entity additional rulemaking authority, and an analysis of how the bill changes code.

In the House, a bill that has been voted out of committee may be referred to either the Calendars committee or the Local & Consent Calendar Committee. Bills that are cost neutral and were voted unanimously out of their committee, and bills that are specific to certain counties or areas of the state, qualify to be placed on the Local & Consent Calendar. Most bills sent to this committee reach the House floor and bills on this calendar tend to be approved quickly, so there are distinct advantages to having a bill placed on the Local & Consent Calendar.

For bills that incur a fiscal cost or are not voted unanimously out of their committee, they are sent to the Calendars committee. The Calendars committee sets the daily House floor calendar for which bills will be debated. With a large volume of bills reaching this committee, only a portion of bills that reach the Calendars committee will be scheduled for a House floor debate. Members of the Calendars committee may choose to speed up a certain bill or prevent a bill from ever moving forward, so this is another place in which bills often go to “die”.

The senate side does not have a Calendars committee, but local and uncontested bills may be referred to the Administration committee for scheduling on the Local and Uncontested Calendar.
A bill goes to the floor

A bill that survives this process is scheduled for floor debate. Bills are required to be read on the floor on three separate days prior to passage, but this rule is often waived in the Senate. Bills are placed on a Calendar for floor debate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Calendar</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily House Calendar</td>
<td>A list of new bills and resolutions scheduled by the Committee on Calendars for consideration by the house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplemental House Calendar</td>
<td>May contain: (a) bills passed to third reading on the previous day (b) bills on the Daily House Calendar for a previous calendar day that were not reached for consideration; (c) postponed business from a previous calendar day; (d) bills that were tabled on a previous legislative day; and (e) bills from a daily house calendar that will be eligible for consideration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local, Consent, and Resolutions Calendar</td>
<td>Contains a list of local or noncontroversial bills scheduled by the Committee on Local and Consent Calendars for consideration by the house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congratulatory and Memorial Calendar</td>
<td>Contains a list of congratulatory and memorial resolutions scheduled by the Committee on Rules and Resolutions for consideration by the house.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Floor consideration of a bill begins on second reading, when the bill is first subject to debate and amendment by the entire membership of a chamber. A bill may be amended on second reading by a simple majority of those members present and voting, and a separate vote is taken on each amendment proposed. After the bill is debated and amended, if applicable, the members vote on the bill for passage to third reading, where the bill is then considered for final passage.

After a bill has been read a third time, a vote is taken for final passage. If the bill receives a simple majority vote, it is considered passed. When the bill is passed in the originating chamber, the bill is engrossed (all corrections and amendments are incorporated into it) and an exact and accurate copy of the engrossed bill is prepared and sent to the opposite chamber for consideration.

A bill starts the process all over again on the other side

Once a bill has passed its originating chamber, it goes through the same process on the other side. By this point, a bill should have a legislator in this chamber who is known as the sponsor of
the bill. The bill has to make it through both the House and the Senate in order to become law. A bill that passes one chamber may not even receive a hearing in the other chamber.

**A bill passed both chambers – now what?**

A bill that passes both chambers is returned to the floor of the originating chamber. If the bill was amended in the second chamber after it passed the first chamber, then the bill author has to decide if they accept the changes or request a conference committee be assembled. If the bill author accepts the changes, the bill is enrolled and signed by both presiding officers in their respective chambers and sent to the governor to sign. If the bill has a fiscal note, then the bill must be certified by the comptroller of public accounts before being sent to the governor. If a conference committee is requested for a bill, then the presiding officers choose five legislators, including the bill author and bill sponsor, to negotiate on only the changes between the House and Senate versions of the bill.

Even if a bill passes both chambers, the conference committee may not find a compromise in time or may be blocked by the presiding officer at this point. The originating chamber may also strike down the bill because the amendments added in this process were not considered “germane” to the original bill language.

**A bill heads to the governor’s desk**

If a bill makes it through the entire process, it is then sent to the governor’s desk for the governor to sign. The governor has 10 days (20 days after adjournment the bill is sent in the last 10 days of session) to either sign the bill into law, veto the bill, or allow the bill to become law without a signature. The governor does not need a signature for it to become law, but a signature may reflect their commitment to the bill. The legislature with a two-thirds majority in each chamber may override a governor’s veto if the legislature is still in session, but this is uncommon given the short timeframe of the legislative session.

**A bill becomes a law!**

For those small number of bills that become a law, the date in which the bill becomes effective may vary. If a bill does not specify an effective date, then it becomes effective on the 91st day after the session ends, typically September 1st of the same year. A bill that specifies an earlier date may take effect sooner if it receives a vote of two-thirds of all members in each of the chambers. A bill can also include multiple effective dates for different provisions of the legislation or may go into effect contingent on another event.
The Budget Process

While the legislative process is taking place with bills, the budget is moving through the legislature. The state budget bill determines how all state funds to government agencies and partnering organizations will be distributed for the next two years. The 86th legislative session, for example, determined the budget for 2020-2021.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Key Budget Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 2018</td>
<td>• HHSC submits Legislative Appropriations Request</td>
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<tr>
<td>September – November 2018</td>
<td>• Legislative Budget Board and Governor's Office of Budget, Planning and Policy hold joint public hearings to review LAR with agency officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2018</td>
<td>• Texas Comptroller publishes Texas Annual Cash Report (i.e., revenue estimates and expenditures of state funds from previous fiscal year)</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2019</td>
<td>• Comptroller presents the Biennial Revenue Estimate (BRE) to the Legislature. This document serves as the official estimate of funds available for budget adoption.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees each finalize their final recommendations and file their General Appropriations bills.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Governor submits his final budget recommendations to the Legislature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February – March 2019</td>
<td>• Senate Finance and House Appropriations each conduct public committee and subcommittee hearings to discuss budget proposals with agency representatives and stakeholders. This is the time period during which advocates have the most opportunity to impact budget decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April – May 2019</td>
<td>• Legislative hearings end and the process of budget “markup” begins.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Senate and House committees each revise their appropriations bills to reflect final committee decisions.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Revised bills are released as committee reports which are voted on by each chamber.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Committee reports likely will undergo hundreds of amendments during this process. Note that the House and Senate take turns on which chamber’s bill is passed first, which will then go to the other chamber for vote. The second chamber typically substitutes its own version of the budget bill, so the legislature ends up with two separate versions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid to late May 2019</td>
<td>• The Lt. Governor and Speaker of the House appoint a conference committee to reconcile differences between the two different budget proposals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late May 2019</td>
<td>• The conference committee drafts a budget that reconciles differences between the two different versions and files it as a conference committee report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o This process may take as little time as several days or a week or longer. The timing generally depends on how much time remains before the session ends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The final report is sent to both chambers for approval; at this point, no additional amendments are allowed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 27, 2019</td>
<td>• Deadline for both chambers to enact the final budget bill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o If they fail to do so, a special legislative session must be held to adopt a budget. Depending on the circumstances, special sessions are often held immediately following the closure of the regular session but may be scheduled later in the session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o The Governor determines when the special session will be held, how long it will last, and what issues will be considered (i.e., only the budget, or also other matters of interest to the Governor.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2019</td>
<td>• The budget conference committee report adopted by both the Senate and the House is sent to the Comptroller for certification that the budget bill does not exceed available revenue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Governor signs the bill as is, or may make line item vetoes. The Legislature is only able to overturn line item vetoes if they remain in session, which rarely happens since the budget is typically enacted during the last days – or hours – of the session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2019</td>
<td>• Fiscal year 2020 begins and the budget takes effect.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 8: State advocacy opportunities

In addition to the opportunities discussed in earlier chapters to become involved in advocacy, here are some actions you can take to be a strong mental health advocate in Texas.

Find your legislators

Knowing who represents you is the critical first step in becoming involved in state policy advocacy.

You can find information on who represents you here: https://wrm.capitol.texas.gov/home.

State vs. US

You have both state and federal senators and representatives. U.S. Senators and Representatives represent you in Congress, while State Senators and State Representatives represent you in the State Legislature. If a bill begins with H.R. or S., it is a U.S. Congress bill. If a bill begins with H.B. or S.B., it is a state legislative bill. Make sure to reach out to the appropriate official when advocating for specific bills or policy ideas.

Learn more about your legislators

Once you know who your legislators are, get to know them and their priorities.

You can find more information on House members here: https://house.texas.gov/members/ and Senate members here: https://senate.texas.gov/members.php.

Their page includes biographical information, their address, bills they have authored or sponsored, and the committees on which they serve. You may also search their name on social media, their campaign website, or through state news publications to learn about their accomplishments and priorities.

Texas Legislature Online

Texas Legislature Online is the best free online resource for finding information on what is happening at the Texas legislature, and can be found here: https://capitol.texas.gov/.

Find bills

Texas Legislature Online has a variety of tools to search for bills, but in this guide we will focus on the basic search feature.
In the middle of the front page is a “Search Legislation” box. Choose the legislative session in which a bill was passed: click on “Bill Number” and enter the bill number (HB 3980, SB 11, HR 123, HJR 49, etc.)

On the bill’s main page, you can find information on what kinds of actions have been taken on the bill, who authored/sponsored the bill, what subjects the bill is about, the committees the bill has gone through. This tells you where the bill is in the process, or was when the session ended. The tabs shown can also show you the text of the bill, bill analysis, fiscal note, actions taken, companion bills (identical or similar bills), bill authors/sponsors, and where the bill is in the process.
Find committee meetings

You can also use TLO to find information on committee composition and scheduled meetings.

Upcoming meetings is the most useful section for information on upcoming hearings.

This page shows upcoming hearings in the Senate chamber, including the date, time, and location. You can click on the hearing notice listed to find more information on what will be discussed at the hearing.
This hearing notice tells you when and where the hearing takes place, what topics will be discussed, and how much time is being provided for testimony.

**Public testimony and position registration**

Legislators want to hear from individuals impacted by the issue. Signing up to testify on a bill or interim charge can have a significant influence on legislators, especially when you can share a personal story.

**Registering your position**

Registering your position, often referred to as “putting in a card”, means you submit on public record whether or not you support or oppose a bill. You may do this without providing written or oral testimony, but registering to provide testimony uses the same process. You have to be at the Texas State Capitol in order to register your position, and you are not supposed to register a position on behalf of another individual.

There are three ways to register your position and/or register to testify:

8. You may find registration kiosks in the Capitol Extension downstairs. These are touch screens that are mounted in hallways around either floor of the Extension.

9. If you have a laptop or tablet, you can sign onto the public wifi for the Capitol and use this link to register your position: [http://hwrs.house.state.tx.us](http://hwrs.house.state.tx.us) for the House.

10. Some hearings, especially in the Senate, use paper cards to register positions and/or register to testify. It will usually say on the registration kiosks or website if
that is the case. If a paper card is required, you enter the hearing room and request a registration card from a clerk at a desk near the front or near the dais.

Position registration will require you to select the committee hearing for your bill, which bill or bills in this committee you would like to register positions on, your position (for/against/neutral, and if you are or are not wanting to testify), if you are registering on behalf of yourself and/or an organization, and your contact information. You can create a profile in the online system to save time on future registrations.

**Public testimony process for bills**

During the legislative session, you can visit the Texas legislature and provide testimony for, against, or on a specific bill. Registering to testify involves the same system as registering a position, but you must indicate on the registration that you intend to testify.

Public testimony on a bill involves sitting at a table or standing at a podium in front of the legislators’ dais and speaking for several minutes on your thoughts on the bill. If you are testifying for or against a bill, you need to be able to clearly explain why you do or don’t want the bill to pass. Testifying “on” a bill is a neutral stance about if you do not support or oppose the bill, but want to provide information. This is a stance often taken by individuals representing government-funded entities, such as the Hogg Foundation.

You can use TLO to find information on when and where a bill is being heard. Most of the House and Senate hearings take place in the Capitol Extension hearing rooms on floors E1 and E2. You might want to set aside your day to testify if you plan to provide oral testimony.

**Oral Testimony**

Most of the committee hearings that hear mental health-related bills are crowded – they usually hear more than twenty bills in the hearing and can take the bulk of the day to finish. As a result, most committee hearings will only give you 2-3 minutes to speak and will be strict about the time limit. For NAMI members, we recommend you focus on briefly telling your personal story and tying it back to the bill’s contents, using the tools we provided earlier on telling your story. Legislators prefer for witnesses to not read off their papers, so make sure to practice your testimony ahead of time.

**Providing written testimony**

Written testimony is an opportunity to provide further information to legislators and their staff on a bill, budget item, or policy issue. If you provide oral testimony, you should turn in written testimony right before you testify. If you only plan to turn in written testimony, you may turn it in at any point during the committee hearing or to the committee clerk’s office on floor E2 of the Capitol. Turning it in early is preferable.

Written testimony may include key facts, information, sources, relevant resources, or a lengthier account of your story. For bills, written testimony should be 1-2 pages: most offices do not have
time to read longer testimony during the legislative session. Make sure to include your name, contact information (and organization if applicable), the committee name, and bill number on the paper.

**The Interim**

Although the Texas legislature only meets for 140 days, there is still activity through the year in the timeframe between legislative sessions referred to as “the interim”. This time is slower and less activity takes place. Legislators are more likely to be in their home districts and working their non-legislative jobs.

**Interim visits**

The interim is the best time to meet with legislators and their staff on key policy issues. Staff and legislators have more time to meet with you and discuss the issues, and independently read and research the issue for themselves. It also provides time for follow-up and coalition-building. If you wait until the legislative session to discuss the issues with candidates, then they may have already set their priorities for the session.

Legislators outside of the Austin area usually have a district office and a Capitol office. You can find contact and address information on the House or Senate member’s page to set up a meeting, or drop in.

An “ask” during the interim may look like support for legislation, but it may even just look like broad interest in funding mental health or supporting mental health-friendly policies. Interim is a great time for broader education of staff and legislator education.

**Interim Charges**

Interim charges are detailed topics House and Senate committees are expected to study in-between legislative sessions. Interim charges are an opportunity to educate legislators on critical issues that need to be addressed in the following legislative session and in the implementation process of existing laws.

Within a few months of the legislative session ending, House and Senate members develop and send in recommendations to the Speaker of the House and Lieutenant Governor on what they would like to see the committees address in interim hearings. Near the end of the year, the Speaker’s and Lieutenant Governor’s offices release comprehensive documents of all of the interim charges assigned to the committees. Around this time, they may also create Select Committees, which are committees that exist solely during the legislative interim to study specific critical issues impacting Texas and make recommendations. The Texas legislature had a Select Committee on Mental Health in 2016 and a Select Committee on Substance Use Disorder in 2018.
Discussion on the next state budget begins as soon as the session ends, and there are a number of opportunities to provide feedback on what the state should fund throughout the budget process. Within a few months, the state agencies start developing ideas of what they will ask the legislature to fund in the following legislative session. Typically, NAMI Texas and affiliates focus on the budget process for Health and Human Services, but some other budget items of interest may be found under the Texas Education Agency or Texas Department of Criminal Justice. There are four major opportunities to weigh in on the state budget:

1. **Recommendations to State Agency** – Agencies will reach out for public input on what they should include in their Legislative Appropriation Requests.

2. **Legislative Budget Board hearings** – During the fall prior to session, the Legislative Budget Board releases the agencies’ Legislative Appropriation Requests and schedules public hearings for each agency. Members of the public can sign up to provide written and/or oral testimony and provide feedback on what should be funded.

3. **Finance and Appropriations Hearings** – During the legislative session, some of the earliest hearings to take place are on articles of the budget. This is another opportunity to testify on what you would like to see in the budget to legislators.

4. **Budget amendments** – When the budget finally reaches the floor of the House or Senate, you can advocate for legislators to offer budget amendments on the floor.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State Policy/Advocacy Organization</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Foundation for Suicide Prevention</td>
<td><a href="https://afsp.org/">https://afsp.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association of Substance Abuse Programs</td>
<td><a href="https://www.asaptx.org/">https://www.asaptx.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center for Public Policy Priorities</td>
<td><a href="https://forabettertx.org/">https://forabettertx.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's Defense Fund – Texas</td>
<td><a href="https://cdftexas.org/">https://cdftexas.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarity Child Guidance Center</td>
<td><a href="https://www.claritycgc.org/">https://www.claritycgc.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition for Healthy Minds</td>
<td><a href="http://www.coalitionhealthyminds.org/">http://www.coalitionhealthyminds.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition of Texans with Disabilities</td>
<td><a href="https://www.txdisabilities.org/">https://www.txdisabilities.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Communities for Recovery</td>
<td><a href="https://cforr.org/">https://cforr.org/</a></td>
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<td>Corporation for Supportive Housing</td>
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<td>Cover Texas Now</td>
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<td>Disability Rights Texas</td>
<td><a href="https://www.disabilityrightstx.org/en/home/">https://www.disabilityrightstx.org/en/home/</a></td>
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<td>Easter Seals of Central Texas</td>
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<td>Federation of Texas Psychiatry</td>
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<td>Hogg Foundation for Mental Health</td>
<td><a href="https://hogg.utexas.edu/">https://hogg.utexas.edu/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute</td>
<td><a href="https://www.texasstateofmind.org/">https://www.texasstateofmind.org/</a></td>
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<td>Mental Health America of Greater Houston</td>
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<td>Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas</td>
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<td>National Association of Social Workers - Texas</td>
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<td>National Alliance on Mental Illness - Texas</td>
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<td>RecoveryPeople</td>
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<td>Texans Care for Children</td>
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<td>Young Invincibles</td>
<td><a href="https://younginvincibles.org/location/texas/">https://younginvincibles.org/location/texas/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References

References Chapter 1


References Chapter 2

1. Most information in this chapter was paraphrased from the NAMI SMARTS Advocacy manual.
2. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2019). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health

References Chapters 3-5

Most of the information in these chapters was paraphrased from the NAMI SMARTS Advocacy manual. “NAMI Smarts for Advocacy” is a copyright of NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. NAMI.org.

References Chapter 7-8

12. Chart on budget comes from the Legislative Budget Board.