Coping with and Combating the Coronavirus in Texas

Many people are worried about the coronavirus (also known as COVID-19). Yesterday, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic, which means it is a new disease for which people do not have immunity and that it is spreading around the world beyond expectations. While this sounds frightening, it's important to remember that it was done in the interest of safety and precaution as the public health response builds momentum.

Having confirmed cases in Texas adds to the stress of the situation and makes us susceptible to fear and misinformation. While NAMI Texas is taking the COVID-19 seriously, we also want to make sure the people whom we serve, those who live with mental illness and those who love them, don't miss out on the information and support that we and the local NAMI Affiliates have to offer.

Our top priority is the health and safety of our staff and their loved ones, as well as the many people we serve and support. With several confirmed COVID-19 cases in Texas, we know that circumstances will evolve and we will keep you updated with any new information or decisions regarding closures or cancellations of classes or support groups.

**Here are some considerations to take into account:**

**Following the Basics:**

- Wash your hands, regularly and thoroughly.
- Cover your cough (with a Kleenex or by coughing into your sleeve/arm).
- Try to use your sleeve or knuckles to open doors, turn on light switches, touch elevator buttons.
- Know the symptoms: Mild to severe respiratory illness, fever, cough, shortness of breath.
- Don’t shake hands – elbow bumps, fist bumps.
- Don’t touch your face.
- Stay home when you are sick – if you have a fever or bad cough.
- Find out about your employer’s plans if an outbreak of flu or another illness occurs and whether flu vaccinations are offered on-site.
- Routinely clean frequently touched objects and surfaces, including doorknobs, keyboards and phones, to help remove germs.
- Make sure your home and workplace have an adequate supply of tissues, soap, paper towels, alcohol-based hand rubs and disposable wipes.
- Train others on how to do your job so they can cover for you in case you or a family member gets sick and you must stay home.
What to do if you have symptoms:

- If you develop symptoms, call your healthcare provider and tell them about your symptoms. Do not go into the doctor's office or hospital unless your healthcare provider asks you to.
- If your symptoms are mild and you are not sick enough to be hospitalized, stay home and report your situation to others with whom you have been in contact, including as applicable, your affiliate and NAMI Texas.
- If your symptoms are severe or life-threatening, call 911.
- Please follow the CDC guidance to reduce your risk of spreading it to others.

Supporting the Affiliates:

- On March 9th, NAMI National CEO Dan Gillison sent to NAMI State Organizations, NAMI Affiliates, and Program Leaders a communication about the coronavirus. The communication contained, among other items, guidance to Affiliate leadership on responding to the coronavirus and promoting safety. We made sure that every Affiliate and start-up group leader in Texas received this communication.
- Additionally, the NAMI HelpLine is at the forefront of people with mental health conditions and their families and loved ones seeking help. The HelpLine, with the assistance of NAMI Medical Officer Dr. Ken Duckworth, has put together an up-to-the-minute guide to COVID-19 frequently asked questions and links to additional resources.

Guidance for Mental Health:

- For anyone who is unsure about attending therapy sessions outside the home, especially those who the CDC has described as being at higher risk, you can ask your health care provider about tele-therapy or mental health services online.
- For anyone who is worried about access to prescribed medications, you can ask your health care provider about getting 90-day supplies vs. a 60 or 30-day supply. If this is not possible, we encourage you to refill your medications as soon as they are allowed. Note: If healthcare providers deny/decline making accommodations, challenge the decisions at least three times. Decision-makers on making health plan adjustments may change if/as conditions worsen.
- Listen to and follow your local public healthcare provider expectations.
- Provide self-care, especially if in the higher risk population as defined by the CDC. Pay attention to emerging symptoms. Reach out to family and friends.
- CDC: Mental Health and Coping During COVID-19
- NAMI: Updates On The Coronavirus
- NAMI: Memo sent to NAMI brand and corporate partners re: COVID19 and work from home, mental health considerations

The coronavirus is a rapidly-evolving situation. It's important to stay updated on the latest information, to not panic, and to follow the advice/direction of public health officials and experts. We recommend checking the following webpages daily: CDC, DSHS, and your local public health department.

Please reach out to NAMI Texas directly if we may be able to
help with anything or point you in the right direction.
We will get through this together!

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]
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