Advocates,

Y’all may have heard that a special session started shortly after the July 4th holiday. Governor’s Abbott’s call included several important issues related to the mental health and wellbeing of Texans, including bail reform, voter rights, youth sports, and primary and secondary school social studies curriculum. However, the following week, House Democrats broke quorum and effectively stopped any of the filed bills from enactment. Considering uncertainty about what will happen next, the NAMI Texas Policy Team thought this would be a good opportunity to discuss recent Federal legislation related to mental health.

First, the PEOPLE'S RESPONSE ACT, introduced by Representative Cori Bush (D-Mo.) establishes a Division of Community Safety within Health & Human Services to fund and coordinate a grant program focused on “non-carceral, health-centered investment in public safety.” In other words, this bill will provide states and communities the opportunity to develop and implement models for mental health crisis response that utilize social workers, mental health counselors, substance use counselors, and peer support specialists as emergency first responders. Over 70 ORGANIZATIONS have endorsed the legislation, including Texas Appleseed, Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund, and Human Rights Watch. Representative Bush produced a ONE-PAGER with a brief summary of the legislation.

Another exciting piece of Federal legislation is the proposed Fiscal Year 2022 Appropriation, which doubles the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (MHBG), increases the Mental Health Block Grant crisis services set-aside to 10% (~$160 million), provides states and municipalities opportunities to access a $100 million pot of funds to establish or improve mobile crisis teams, and grows the investment in National Institute of Health research initiatives by $6.5 billion to $49 billion. The House Committee on Appropriations published a THOROUGH ANALYSIS of all the funds allocated to Health & Human Services as well as a number of other federal agencies. If you would like to share your support for this funding, NAMI National is conducting an CAMPAIGN to provide advocates an opportunity to share their support for the legislation with their U.S. Representatives.

Lastly, in conjunction with the much-discussed bipartisan INFRASTRUCTURE BILL, Senate Democrats are developing a $3.5 trillion RECONCILIATION PACKAGE that includes several key measures to reduce the costs associated with prescription medications, plugs a significant Medicaid coverage gap in expansion holdout states like Texas, and reduces the age of eligibility to receive Medicare. Although the details of the package have not been completely ironed out, it provides funding for essential "human infrastructure" that is needed to promote the health and well-being of underserved, vulnerable individuals, families, and communities in the United States.
In the same vein, **GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT** recently announced that Texas HHSC will receive roughly $210 million in COVID-19 emergency Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) funding for mental health and substance use services. HHSC will use the funds on 2 dozen initiatives, including expanded access to virtual and in-person treatment and recovery support services, housing options, peer support services, jail diversion, and early interventions to prevent the onset of behavioral health concerns. With respect to early intervention, HHSC Deputy Commission Sonja Gaines previously shared that these funds would be used to improve access to Coordinated Specialty Care for First Episode Psychosis—a significant policy priority for NAMI Texas. Win!

Summarily, major things are happening in the world of mental health policy despite legislative gridlock at the Texas Capitol. Thank you for your time and attention. Please review additional policy advocacy opportunities below and let us know if you have any questions. Thanks!

- The NAMI Texas Policy Team

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**NAMI Urges Swift Action to Reimagine Crisis Response Ahead of 988 Launch Next Year**

In one year, people in mental health crisis will be able to access help by dialing 988. But what help will be available when they make that call? NAMI calls upon policymakers at all levels to ensure the necessary resources are in place before July 16, 2022, when the three-digit number, 988, must be available for suicidal and mental health crises. A mental health crisis can happen to anyone, and no one should live in fear of the response they will receive when they call for help. Read the full [PRESS RELEASE](#) and participate in NAMI's [CALL TO ACTION](#).

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**Uninsured? Check Healthcare.gov for Coverage Options!**

Nearly 4 million people live without any realistic access to health coverage in the 12 states that have not yet expanded Medicaid. Those states who have expanded Medicaid have improved the financial performance of hospitals and other health care providers. More entrepreneurs and small-business employees have health coverage because of Medicaid expansion.

Check your options and eligibility for Medicaid health insurance! Visit [healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov) or call 1-800-318-2596

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**The Texas Rent Relief Program is Here to Help Those in Need**

Due to COVID-19, the Texas Rent Relief program was created by the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) to provide Texas tenants with financial assistance for rent and utility bills.
(including past due rent and utilities). TDHCA began accepting applications from landlords and tenants on February 15, 2021.

The Texas Rent Relief Program can help renters with the following costs starting as far back as March 13, 2020:

- Past due, current and up to two months of expected rent costs;
- Past due, current and up to two months of expected utility and home energy expenses; and
- After the initial three months of forward assistance, renters can apply for three additional months of assistance if funds are still available.

If you or someone you love is in need of rental assistance, visit [TEXAS RENT RELIEF](#).

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**Check Out NAMI Texas' Comprehensive Recap of the 87th Legislature**

The NAMI Texas Policy Team recently completed a [COMPREHENSIVE RECAP](#) of the 87th Legislature, providing information on bills and budget items that impact the quality and timeliness of care provided to Texans living with mental illness. The information presented in the recap is separated into the issue areas identified in the NAMI Texas [POLICY PLATFORM](#) to provide additional context on progress made during the 87th and opportunities for the 88th. Check it out!

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**NAMI SMARTS for ADVOCACY**

Register for NAMI Smarts Module 1 on September 11th @ 1pm

NAMI Texas is kicking off another round of the "core" NAMI Smarts for Advocacy classes this fall, beginning with Module 1 on 9/11 at 1pm. [REGISTER TODAY!](#)

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If you have anything you would like to share with NAMI Texas advocates in these emails, please send the information to peerpolicy.fellow@namitexas.org.

- Matthew Lovitt and the NAMI Texas Public Policy Team
Mental Health Policy in the Media

In a Murky Sea of Mental Health Apps, Consumers Left Adrift
Venture capital firms invested more than $2.4 billion in digital behavioral health apps in 2020.

No Vacancy: How a Shortage of Mental Health Beds Keeps Kids Trapped Inside ERs
Parents and advocates for kids’ mental health say that the ER can’t provide appropriate care and that the warehousing of kids in crisis can become an emergency itself.

Mental health toll from isolation affecting kids on reentry
After two suicidal crises during pandemic isolation, 16-year-old Zach Sampson feels stronger but worries his social skills have gone stale.

8-Year-Olds in Despair: The Mental Health Crisis Is Getting Younger
The number of children who need urgent mental health care has been on the rise for years, and spiked during the pandemic.

Women Say California Insurer Makes It Too Hard To Get Drug For Postpartum Depression
In clinical trials, 75% of women who got brexanolone started to feel better immediately after the 3-day treatment.

Simone Biles, Ginny Fuchs and more Olympians talk about prioritizing mental health
Athletes are sharing the importance of keeping their mental health in check while training for Olympic gold ahead of the games in Tokyo.

NAMI Texas is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of all individuals living with mental illness and their families. Please visit our website at NAMI Texas.org for more information. Help support our advocacy efforts by donating to NAMI Texas at https://namitexas.networkforgood.com/

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