Advocates,

It’s beginning to feel like Groundhog Day in Austin. The third Special Session of the 87th Legislature is scheduled to begin on Monday, September 20, and Governor Abbott has carried over a couple priority issues from previous Specials—COVID-19 relief and transgender youth sports. With respect to COVID-19 relief, the legislature is set to discuss how to spend the roughly $16.5 billion the federal government sent to Texas for various relief initiatives, including education, health, human services, and housing. Although we don’t know exactly how the process will unfold, we are hopeful that advocates will have an opportunity to provide input on how Texas allocates funds to address the myriad impacts of COVID-19 pandemic (STAY TUNED!). Concerning legislation that bans transgender youth from participating in team sports associated with their gender identity, NAMI Texas intends to continue to share our concerns for the policy’s potential mental health implications.

Redistricting is also on the call for the upcoming Special, which is sure to ratchet up the partisan divide. At stake are two additional U.S. House of Representative seats and, perhaps more relevant to our work, a shakeup of the current composition of the Texas Legislature. The courts are sure to be involved. In fact, at least one lawsuit has already been filed. It’ll be interesting to see how the various factions in each party approach the process.

Looking to Washington D.C., we’re optimistic about recent conversations concerning crisis services and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL). In preparation for the rollout of 9-8-8 in July, 2022, Senator John Cornyn (R-Texas) has partnered with Senator Michael Bennet (D-Colo.) on a white paper that calls for a unified strategy in federal spending to address workforce shortages, promote innovative models of care delivery, and address existing unmet needs. Senators Cornyn and Bennet, as well as Senators Mark Warner (D-Va.) and Joni Ernst (R-Iowa), also recently introduced the Suicide and Crisis Outreach Prevention Enhancement Act that proposed to triple funding for NSPL to conduct outreach and education campaigns, improve data collection and reporting, and increase Lifeline and crisis center program capacity.

Staying at the federal level, House Democrats recently unveiled a plan to close the Medicaid coverage gap in the 12 states (including Texas) that have opted not to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. According to the Leadership Conference of Civil and Human Rights, roughly 60% of individuals who fall into the coverage gap are people of color, despite making up only 41% of the adult population in the 12 hold-out states. They assert that improving access to insurance coverage would help to address health inequities experienced by vulnerable communities. The legislation also proposes a way in which to lower drug prices—a priority for both parties.
Last but not least, **National Voter Registration Day** is just around the corner--Tuesday, September 28. As alluded to above, Texas has seen significant population growth over the past several years and it's important to ensure that new residents (and residents who have recently moved in-state) are ready to exercise their civic duty during the next election cycle in 2022. NAMI Texas encourages all affiliates, affiliate members, and advocates to verify their voter registration status and encourage their friends and loved ones to do the same. There are opportunities for individuals to become a **National Voter Registration Day Partner**, too, if you would like to champion the event in your local community. Of course, NAMI Texas will share opportunities to #Vote4MentalHealth as elections near, so that we can improve the mental health care system in Texas together. Goooo team!

That about covers the major policy happenings in our state and beyond, but we've included an additional item for your consideration below. If you know someone who may enjoy this newsletter, we encourage you to forward them this newsletter and direct them to the [NAMI Texas policy newsletter registration page](https://www.namitexas.org/policynewsletter).

Thanks!

-The NAMI Texas Policy Team

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**Review Documentation of Reductions to Authorized Levels of Care at LMHAs (OIG Report)**

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) recently published a [REPORT](https://www.oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/oei-05-10-00150.pdf) to explore why LMHA clients eligible for Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) services often receive services associated with a lower level of care. Although the report identifies various shortcomings in the services provided to individuals living with SMI, its publication provides an opportunity for advocates to share their concerns with local and state leaders. NAMI Texas certainly plans on using the report in our interim work and we would be happy to support a affiliate-led advocacy push. Take a peek at the report and let us know if you would like assistance in legislative outreach.

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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

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**Mental Health Policy in the Media**

**More Americans Are Reaching Out For Mental Health Support — But Can't Get It**
The survey also revealed that many people don't even know how to find mental health support.

**US Open offering tennis players access to mental health pros**
The USTA said it seeks to “ensure that a comprehensive and holistic approach will be taken with all aspects of player health, including mental health.”

**Pandemic Unveils Growing Suicide Crisis for Communities of Color**
Overall suicide rates in the U.S. decreased in 2019 and 2020. Meanwhile, rates for Black, Hispanic and Asian Americans — though lower than their white peers — continued to climb in many states.

**Venus Williams: The Thing That Has Really Made Me Tough**
Managing physical ailments is always difficult, but it’s part of a professional athlete’s job. I have always understood this. But my body is only half of it.
Exercise reduces long-term risk of anxiety disorders in men and women, study finds
A physically active lifestyle was associated with a 62% lower risk of anxiety disorder diagnoses among men and women in a study with the largest population size to date, researchers said.

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 NAMITexas.org for more information. Help support our advocacy efforts by donating to NAMI Texas at https://namitexas.networkforgood.com/

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