



Southwestern
Pennsylvania

Contact: Darcey Garda
dgarda@namiswpa.org
(412) 366-3788

For Immediate Release

**NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania Executive Director Wins Newspaper Op-Ed of the Year
*3rd Annual Media & Mental Health Awards Honor Best Media Coverage on Mental Illness***

Pittsburgh, Pa., Oct. 25—Christine Michaels, Executive Director of NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania, was honored last night at the 3rd Annual Media & Mental Health Awards in Southwestern Pa. for her newspaper editorial defending people with serious mental illness who receive SSI disability benefits. She won the award for Newspaper Op-Ed of the Year.

The editorial, first published on August 13, 2012 in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, was written in response to another op-ed by Dr. Marnin E. Fishbach, who suggested that people with mental illness were abusing the social services disability system.

"Claiming that many people apply fraudulently for disability benefits, malingering with symptoms and are able to will symptoms away once disability is granted is an unconscionable way of explaining serious mental illness to a public audience," Ms. Michaels wrote.

She explains the application process and the maximum amount of a Social Security Income disability benefit, which is \$8,376 per year, stating, "Persons with mental illness receiving SSI are not living the high life on Social Security checks, but are in fact surviving on incomes below the poverty line."

Michaels continues, "In these tough economic times, when mental health funding is being cut at both the state and federal levels, a negatively inaccurate and grossly generalized portrayal of the Social Security disability process can be very damaging." Read the full editorial at <http://tinyurl.com/MichaelsOpEd>.

Presented by the Entertainment Industries Council with regional support from the Staunton Farm Foundation, the Media & Mental Health Awards in Southwestern Pa. recognize accurate and responsible portrayals and coverage of mental illness in the news media.

Last night's other winners include Mark Roth's five-part series on schizophrenia in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and *Rose's Garden*, a WQED documentary that tells the story of a woman who expresses her family story of mental illness through urban gardens. *Rose's Garden* also features footage of a NAMI Family-to-Family class.

###

NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania is dedicated to improving the lives of individuals and families affected by mental illness through recovery focused support, education and advocacy. More information is available at www.namiswpa.org or by calling (412) 366-3788.