



National Alliance on Mental Illness

The Voice

The Newsletter of NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania

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Changing Times Ahead

NAMI Southwestern PA's Education and Advocacy Efforts Address Evolving Issues in Our Mental Health System

"We are on the threshold of a variety of possible changes in leadership and direction that could significantly impact mental health care in our region and beyond," says Christine Michaels, the Executive Director of NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Michaels is referring to the "perfect storm" that the mental health system in southwestern Pennsylvania is currently facing. "We don't yet know specifically what these changes will be,

but we do know that now is the perfect time for NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania, our community partners and all stakeholders to act."

Many circumstances have the potential to influence changes in the coming months:

- National health care reform efforts.
- New leadership in state government due to the outgoing Rendell administration, including a new governor, a new secretary at the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) and a new deputy for the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS).
- Pennsylvania state budget, which is forecast to demand cuts in a variety of services.
- A review of the behavioral health services under Health Choices, Pennsylvania managed care Medicaid program.

"We need to be analyzing the issues of high importance to our constituents and developing a message to influence the process in ways that will continue to advance our mental health system," explains Michaels.



NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania has always been committed to legislative action and public policy, and is now dedicating greater resources in these areas. The organization has re-activated its Public Policy Committee, a collaborative effort including many community partners. NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania is also collaborating with the Pennsylvania Community Providers Association as a member of its Legislative Affairs Committee, in addition to educating constituents and demonstrating how advocacy can affect positive change.

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NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania, 2008-2009 Annual Report



From the Desk of the Executive Director...

Looking back on last summer, I realize we almost didn't hear the call to rally about the state budget impasse. We had become de-sensitized to late budgets over the past several years. At first, we appeared complacent and somewhat comfortable with not having a state budget approved by June 30 for the new fiscal year beginning July 1. It was summertime, warm and slower paced than other times of the year. Resigned to the budget impasse as "business as usual," we were accepting it as the status quo.

Fortunately, we awakened from our contentment, the comforting lull of the status quo. NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania organized one of the first regional rallies in the state, in front of the State Office Building in downtown Pittsburgh, calling for immediate passage of an appropriate state budget with mental health cuts restored.

The budget impasse was our wake-up call: our call to action. NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania must never get "caught looking." This is an old-time Chris Michaels' motto. Never get caught looking. Never remain quiet with knowledge and never be passive. Never not act.

Now it is Spring, a natural time of re-awakening and new beginnings. In our cover story article, we are attempting to wake up everyone, to re-awaken the community to the needs of the mental health system.

We do not need to be alarmed or fearful of our uncertain future lying ahead. But, we do need to be paying attention, asking questions, studying the issues, looking forward and always participating in the process. No one believes we will have another 100 day budget impasse this year. This state budget may not become a main issue this year. However, as I write, federal health care reform is teetering and, for certain, a new administration will take charge in Harrisburg.

In order to keep the transformation of our mental health system focused on recovery, we must be advocacy ready. It is not enough to just protect what we have; we must not settle for maintaining the status quo. We must rally against the status quo, ever vigilant in advocating for an end to stigma and discrimination against persons with mental illness.

Many of our NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania team meetings end in our realization that we must do something, we must act. And Dick Jevon reminds us of Goethe, "Knowing is not enough, we must apply. Willing is not enough, we must do." And from Michaels, "Don't get caught looking! We must keep moving forward."

Come out to our conference, and we will re-energize your enthusiasm for advocacy! I hope to see you there!

Take care,

Christine Michaels, MSHSA
Executive Director, NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania

NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania MISSION STATEMENT

NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania is a regional grassroots organization dedicated to helping families and individuals affected by mental illness achieve lives of quality and respect, through education and advocacy that supports recovery.

News Around the Region

Updates on Legislation and Policy Impacting the Mental Health Community
Sharon A. Miller, Director of Education and Community Relations, NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania



Through ongoing collaboration with others in our mental health community we at NAMI are in the midst of increasing our impact on policymakers and legislators. In March we held the first meeting of the newly reorganized and reenergized public policy committee. Look for upcoming technology enhancements to the legislative affairs page on our website that will provide members with needed analysis and connections to legislators and members of Congress. And we continue to expand our membership in our Email Action Alert recipient list. Through our collective efforts we aim to have a positive impact on the development, funding and availability of recovery oriented treatment and supports throughout our communities. We invite all readers of *The Voice* to consider lending your voice to ours in our advocacy efforts. Contact me at the NAMI office to learn about the many ways you can become involved.

The following are identified priority areas which will require our attention, possible analysis and action:

- *Preparing for the Transition:* As the Rendell Administration comes to a close with PA Gubernatorial, Legislative & Congressional Mid-Term Elections looming, NAMI is developing position papers on matters of most importance to the mental health community.
- *Funding: FY 2010-11 State Budget and look to the future:* We are providing ongoing analysis of proposed funding to Mental Health and Community Services

and other relevant line items coupled with extensive legislative outreach to do all we can to safeguard funds while attempting to avoid another budget impasse.

- *Preparing for the review of the behavioral health services under Health Choices, Pennsylvania's Medicaid managed care program.*
- *Continued Advocacy Related to the Disposition of Mayview Property and Safeguarding the Proceeds of Sale:* We continue to provide updates on the status of the property and the DGS Call for Bids on the land sale while closely monitoring and advocating for passage of legislation that would safeguard the funds from any real-estate transaction.
- *Ensuring for Timely Access to Quality Recovery Based MH Treatment and Supports throughout our Communities:* This may include but are not limited to focusing on advocating for a continuum of housing options that are appropriate to a person's needs/choice, safety and affordability; enhanced peer employment initiatives, monitoring the capacity of community inpatient units; enhanced use of mental health advance directives, consistent and informed use of existing involuntary commitment protocol under MH Procedures Act, and ongoing advocacy to advance open med formularies.
- *Neuro-ethical Considerations in Research*

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You can find all of these on the NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania website, www.namiswpa.org

NAMI Honors Volunteers at 2nd Annual *Breakfast of Champions*

On Saturday, Jan. 30, NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania honored its dedicated volunteers with the 2nd Annual *Breakfast of Champions* at The Chadwick in Wexford, Pa.

Executive Director Christine Michaels led the program, highlighting NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania's different programs and activities and emphasizing how essential volunteers are to their existence and success.

NAMI volunteers help fulfill our mission of support, education and advocacy. The *Breakfast of Champions*

enabled NAMI to gather with volunteers to say thank you for helping to:

- Direct the organization through strong board involvement
- Offer high quality educational programming
- Facilitate meaningful support group activity
- And help ensure the success of major events like the NAMI Walk

According to Michaels, "Volunteers are the heart of our regional grassroots effort to help families and individuals affected by mental illness." 🌐



Volunteer Leslie Gill, a Family-to-Family teacher in Washington County, receives a door prize.



NAMI Connections and Walk volunteer Carol Kirk is the third door prize winner.

Our enthusiastic NAMI Walk volunteers—the Girl Scouts—pose with NAMI's Darcey Garda and Chris Michaels.

A founding member Anne Handler, also a volunteer Affiliate Leader, is the winner of a door prize.



In the Spotlight...



Joan Erney, JD, *Deputy Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare*

What is your role with the Department of Public Welfare, and why is it soon changing?

I was appointed by Governor Edward Rendell in April 2003. Governor Rendell has reached his term limit and will soon be leaving office. Pennsylvania will elect a new governor who will take office in January 2011, and with this transition, that person will be appointing new individuals to many jobs in state government, including the one I currently hold.

What affect will this transition have on consumers, family members and providers of mental health services in southwestern Pennsylvania?

Change is certainly coming, and we are in the midst of challenging economic times, but people don't have to worry that these changes will be bad. During both the Ridge and Rendell administrations, Pennsylvania has seen significant advances in mental health services, and I see no reason to believe that improvements to our mental health system will lose ground under a new administration, whether it is Democratic or Republican. Government can work to make a positive difference in people's lives, and the passion, commitment and confidence of outspoken, educated consumers and family members certainly won't be ignored by our future leaders.

What are the greatest accomplishments toward transforming our mental health system during your tenure as Deputy Secretary?

Great strides have been made in the closure of three state hospitals and the re-integration of many people into community-based recovery. There has also been significant growth in the effective utilization of certified peer specialists and consumer satisfaction teams and great success with the offering of behavioral health services through Health Choices. I think the most important evolution has been in the area of advocacy, now that consumers and family members have become so energized about affecting changes in mental health. They are gaining confidence in their willingness to speak out, and they have an expectation that their voices will be heard. In addition, organizations like NAMI Southwestern

Pennsylvania are holding elected officials accountable to effectively address identified issues.

You've had a long-standing relationship with NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania. Will that continue?

It has been a privilege for me to speak at NAMI's annual conference as a representative of the state to provide an honest assessment of how advancements are being accomplished and why some issues are not being adequately addressed. I will be speaking this year about the upcoming transition process and to reassure attendees that there are many opportunities in the coming days to influence the candidates and ensure our mental health system continues to advance into the future. In my new role with Community Care Behavioral Health of UPMC Health System, a position I start May 17, I will be focusing my energy on the way behavioral health services are delivered in the community. I will also be involved with influencing public policy related to health care reform, parity, and the integration of physical and mental health services. Because we still have many goals in common, I anticipate a strong future relationship with NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania.

What do you consider NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania's role related to the coming transition?

During the closure of Mayview State Hospital, NAMI emerged as the key advocate for consumers, identifying issues and monitoring activities related to the closure and how it would affect patients who could only succeed in community-based recovery if appropriate treatments and supports were available. NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania's diligent oversight ensured that the needs of those in transition were met. I see that role continuing in the coming months. NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania is recognized as an expert and the voice of consumers and families, and I am confident the organization will hold future leaders accountable in continuing to transform our mental health system.

NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania



the power to ignite change *a personal call to action*

Join us for the 10th Annual Regional Education Conference
being held for the first time as a special TWO-DAY educational event!

Friday, April 23:

Growing the Grassroots: The Crucial Need for Advocacy

Saturday, April 24:

Confronting the Challenges in the Mental Health System

Held at the Pittsburgh Airport Marriott

For more information visit www.namiswpa.org

Changing Times Ahead *continued from page one*

Advocacy is the act of speaking or writing in support of a person or a cause. The mission of NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania is to advocate for lives of quality and respect, without discrimination and stigma, for all our constituents. Through the organization's history of striving to transform the mental health system in our region, these efforts have always been at the center of its work.

"We've been in the advocacy business for nearly 30 years now," recalls NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania Advocate Dick Jevon. "The precursor to NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania (called Advocates for the Mentally Ill in Transition, or ADMIT) incorporated in 1983 when a group of average citizens came together to find comfort, treatment and hope for their loved ones who were facing the challenges of living with serious mental illness."

"We have come a long way since those early years," continues Jevon, who joined ADMIT in 1987 and has served as a board member and past president of NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania. "Over time, grassroots advocacy efforts in our region have had a direct impact on our mental health system."

Some of the positive changes that have occurred because of advocacy include a major decrease in the state hospital populations, with most people now recovering in their communities. Advocating for an open formulary has led to better access to a wider range of medications. The gap is closing toward achieving parity in insurance coverage between physical and mental health care. People are talking about mental illness much more openly, a sign of reducing stigma. And, today's system is now focusing on recovery.

NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania continues to work diligently to be at the forefront of recognizing the challenges facing the current system and identifying effective solutions to these issues. Another goal is to empower consumers, family members and mental health professionals to lend their support through legislative alerts and by providing the tools and training so others can confidently share their personal stories with local legislators.

"It's actually more effective for legislators to hear from their constituents than it is to receive a message from an organization like NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania," Michaels explains. "Personal testimonies are very powerful tools in getting the attention of public policy makers and inspiring them to respond accordingly."

Individual advocates look to NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania as a trusted source of information, assistance and education. "We do the research, stay on top of the issues and craft messages that detail our expectations regarding the transformation of our mental health system," Michaels adds. "But our work is much more effective when it's supported by the personal voices of consumers, family members and providers that we have pledged to serve. What we ask of you—if you feel motivated to act—is to add your voice to ours. Collectively, we have the potential to profoundly impact the changing times ahead."

Advocacy is vital to affecting positive change, and NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania is committed to leading these efforts into a future of uncertainty. If you are ready to learn more about NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania's efforts to transform our mental health system through advocacy and how you can add your voice to the cause, please attend our 2010 Annual Conference:

The Power to Ignite Change: A Personal Call to Action April 23 & 24 at the Pittsburgh Airport Marriott

During this two-day event, participants will explore the complex challenges still facing our mental health system and will hear about innovative local solutions that are already making a positive impact on these issues. The conference will also provide tools and strategies for how to advocate, and will identify a current focus for our advocacy efforts. Please join us for one or both days:

Friday, April 23: Growing the Grassroots: The Crucial Need for Advocacy

Saturday, April 24: Confronting the Challenges in the Mental Health System

Engaging in advocacy activities is a natural progression in the recovery process, according to Sharon Miller, Director of Education and Outreach for NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania. "Upon diagnosis, people first need support, treatment and help from others. The second phase of recovery is when people choose to take responsibility for their own recovery by seeking information about their illness and the supports available to them."

Miller continues, "The next step is developing a passion to share that knowledge with others to have a positive impact on the mental health system and to encourage others in their recovery efforts. That's the heart of advocacy."

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- I am interested in receiving Call to Action alerts via email and participating in legislation and policy advocacy.
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Please make check payable and mail to: NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania, 105 Braunlich Drive,
McKnight Plaza, Suite 200, Pittsburgh, PA 15237

Membership is tax-deductible. Official registration and financial information of NAMI Southwestern PA may be obtained from the PA Department of State by calling toll-free within PA: 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.