

House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

Testimony of Luke Russell, Executive Director
National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio
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Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, my name is Luke Russell and I am the Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio often referred to as NAMI Ohio.

NAMI Ohio is proud to be the largest mental health advocacy organization in the country representing over 500,000 Ohio citizens whose lives have been impacted by mental illness. NAMI Ohio has 39 affiliates throughout Ohio representing all 88 counties. Each of you have constituents with mental illness and their families who are desperately asking for your support.

The Governor's Budget is historic for individuals with mental illness and their families. NAMI Ohio fully endorses the Governor's 2024/2025 mental health budget as presented. The commitment to key priorities reveals support never seen before and not being discussed at this level anywhere else in the Country. In the last budget, Governor DeWine and the General Assembly took a step forward in addressing the needs of those with serious and persistent mental illness. The Budget Governor DeWine has put forth is a leap forward toward a more person-centered approach to mental health care that looks at both treatment and support for those overly represented in Ohio's prisons (the largest mental health provider in the State), local jails, homeless shelters and on the streets throughout Ohio.

Those living with mental illness and their families rely on Ohio's mental health system to provide the care they need. NAMI Ohio at times is critical of the system of care, but we are never critical of the individuals working on behalf of those with serious mental illness. This includes our partner groups with me here today, mental health boards and providers, local law enforcement agencies and those in other systems serving our brothers, sisters, uncles, parents, children, in-laws, and neighbors. These servants are our heroes. However, make no mistake, families living with mental illness in their home provide 80% of all caregiving. They have not been served with the same urgency of those with other healthcare needs. The positive note it is now widely accepted and acknowledged that the demand for treatment and support services is beyond our current capacity.

As the Governor has so clearly outlined, with the closing of six state psychiatric hospitals in the 80's the promise of a community support system for those who for years lived in our hospitals has not been kept. As many of you know and have heard from local Sheriffs and Mothers, we too often find those with serious mental illness in prisons, jails, homeless, and in sub-standard housing. The fact is Ohioans with chronic and disabling serious mental illness are disproportionately found in inappropriate places in our communities. To quote Governor DeWine, "the system isn't broke, it was just never built".

NAMI Ohio believes this budget recognizes serious and persistent mental illness (SPMI) is often times disabling, as well as the need to address quality of life for individuals currently in the system. Several years ago, NAMI Ohio began presenting recommendations to develop an individualized plan of care for every adult with serious mental illness and every child with serious emotional disturbance. The goal encompassed not simply addressing clinical issues and managing symptoms but enabling people to cope successfully with life's challenges and to promote community living and meaningful choice. This budget has a focus on services for those with serious and persistent mental illness beyond the typical community mental health treatment model which we believe will save lives by increasing access to much needed supporting services such as housing, day services, and care coordination.

The Governor's Budget for 2024 and 2025 is not just a step, but a major leap to a more Person-Centered Mental Health system for those most in need. NAMI Ohio over the last year has engaged with hundreds of stakeholders to better understand our families and communities' pressing needs. Through all conversations, we heard: "Now is the time to prioritize and support the development, and funding of the needed foundational services for people with Severe and Persistent Mental Illnesses in all communities across Ohio". We believe Governor DeWine has heard and acted upon this message.

NAMI Ohio's priorities in this budget have been recognized. Such as the following:

- Housing is the greatest need, and this budget provides funding for individuals with mental illness who receive residential state supplement for living in adult care facilities (\$48 million). This budget also provides quality improvement grants, landlord incentives, and help to reenter the community upon release from Ohio's prisons. (\$62 million).
- The need for inpatient beds at the state hospital and private psychiatric hospitals is critical, and this budget addresses that need by adding 75 new inpatient beds (\$32 million).
- Access to Wellness funds for those most in need of support and wrap-around services like housing, transportation, medication, and employment. These are services not funded by Medicaid but vital in keeping individuals out of more acute and costly care settings. (\$18 million).

- Clubhouses and Peer Recovery Organizations that increase life-skills training and social connectedness with meaningful day service programs (\$7.5 million).
- Funding to the local ADAMH Boards (\$20 million) for prevention, early intervention, and suicide prevention.
- 988 crisis hotline services operating funds to get an appropriate local response to crisis situations and to build out the infrastructure for gaps to meet crisis needs (\$86.5 million).
- Promote mental health awareness and interventions by focusing on the priorities laid out in the 2020 Ohio Suicide Prevention Plan. Also, increase early childhood interventions and supports aimed at children, parents, and caregivers for a healthy and successful start to life. (\$66.3 million).
- Workforce collaboratives continued outreach to Ohio’s Centers of Excellence and reimbursement strategies are addressed to help alleviate the shortage of workers in Ohio’s mental health system (\$14.5 million).

We must ensure crisis infrastructure includes long term residential options once someone is discharged from a crisis stabilization unit, inpatient hospital, jail, and/or prison. The time has come to prioritize the development of a defined and fully funded continuum of housing and support services for people with SPMI. A person-centered approach to mental health will need to address accountability within the system. Support services will need to be developed to reduce law enforcement intervention and revolving short-term stays in psychiatric hospitals. We must also increase options for navigation to support services for individuals discharged from a jail or hospital.

NAMI Ohio is committed to increasing access for young people to basic mental health treatment, prevention, and awareness. Mental health services delivered to young people in the schools must be achieved through the Student Wellness and Success Fund (50% of the funding for mental health services). Likewise, OhioRISE needs to be fully implemented for multisystem youth who need intensive services, as well as enhancing peer support services.

We need to help families gain better access to care and support initiatives to strengthen the behavioral health workforce continuum (including Certified Youth Peer Support). The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry labels Ohio with a “severe shortage” of just 11 psychiatrists for every 100,000 Ohio children.

NAMI Ohio believes in collaboration among key stakeholders at every level is critical to ensure services are available and accessible to those most in need. Together, we can improve the lives of individuals and families living with mental illness and create a mental health system that is person-centered and focused on meeting the needs of everyone served.

NAMI Ohio applauds the Governor and Ohio's General Assembly for their ongoing work to improve our behavioral health system. While we have made great gains in services and supports for children served in multiple systems (OhioRise), and people struggling with addiction, now the time has come to prioritize and fully support the basic needs for adults who struggle with severe mental illnesses (SPMI) such as Schizophrenia, Bipolar Disorder and Major Depression. We are asking you to support the budget submitted by Governor DeWine for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services that prioritizes services and supports to those most in need.

Thank you and I'll answer any questions you have.