

## **Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee**

Testimony of Luke Russell, Executive Director  
National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio  
March 15, 2023

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, 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.

NAMI Ohio is submitting written testimony in support of Senate Bill 60. We applaud Senator Gavarone for introducing legislation that begins to address the workforce shortage in mental health that negatively impacts those seeking services.

Late last year, I spoke with a grandfather whose grandson completed suicide. This occurred after the family became aware he was suicidal, and they attempted to make an appointment with a psychiatrist. They contacted 10 psychiatric practices to finally get an appointment on the 10<sup>th</sup> try and a 9 week wait. These wait times are not unusual for us that talk with individuals seeking treatment and their families.

NAMI Ohio believes Ohio needs more providers of mental health treatment. This legislation will not allow folks to diagnosis and will have trained practitioners under the supervision of a physician (like a Physician Assistant in a general practice setting). The more trained professionals able to follow up on the back end, the more time is opened up for the psychiatrist to take initial appoints and make a diagnosis and treatment plans. Ohio needs to be bold and take the initiative to help those most in need.

The demand for behavioral health services increased 353% from 2013 to 2019, while the workforce only increased 174% according to the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. The U.S. Department of Labor and Statistics notes that Ohio has about 1,200 practicing adult psychiatrists, approximately one for every 10,000 people. Ominously, 55% of Ohio psychiatrists are over 60 years of age and will be leaving the workforce in the near future.

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Because of an increasing demand for psychiatric services and an aging population of psychiatrists, by 2035 the US will have only 70% of the psychiatrists it needs.

The solution:

- Certified Mental Health Assistant (CMHA) - a two years of intensive didactic and clinical training focused solely on behavioral health, mental illness, and substance use disorders. The goal is to extend the care of the physician to free them up for more acute and severe cases. CMHAs will carry out the treatment plan the physician prescribes. Distinctive about the training
- CMHA students will be trained in a variety of health care systems alongside medicine and pharmacy students and psychiatry residents ensuring an interdisciplinary approach to mental health care.
- During CMHA training there will be an intense focus on clinical reasoning skills and the conduct of evidence-based practice and practice-based learning. The second year of the program, the students will be immersed in clinical settings focused on treating mental health and substance use. Including in-patient, out-patient, pediatrics and nonprofits ensuring all areas of mental health treatment are experienced by the student.
- CMHAs will work exclusively under the supervision of a physician. The physician will make the original diagnosis and to meet with the CMHA to discuss the treatment plan and care they are providing.
- CMHAs will have some limitations on their prescribing privileges.
- CMHA graduates will fit naturally into inpatient psychiatric units, outpatient mental health clinics, pediatric practices, and primary care clinics. In primary care and pediatric offices, they can supplement the expertise of the existing physicians.
- CMHA graduates will be unable to practice independently, they will function as true physician extenders.
- CMHA graduates (initially) will only be licensed in Ohio - ensuring the students we train here will stay and practice here.

Chairman Cirino, thank you for allowing me to share NAMI Ohio's support of Senate Bill 60 today. I am happy to address questions or comments via email ([Luke@NAMIOhio.org](mailto:Luke@NAMIOhio.org)) or phone (937-536-9235).