



## **Primary Care Doctors are Critical to Detecting Mental Illness in Children;**

### **NAMI Family Survey Includes "Top Five" Most Helpful Things a Doctor Can Say**

ARLINGTON, Va., May 11, 2011 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The National Alliance on Mental Illness ([NAMI](#)) has released a survey on family experiences with primary care doctors in treating children and adolescents living with serious mental illness—exposing a broad gap between family needs and practitioner knowledge and resources.

"Most Americans rely on family doctors and pediatricians for early detection of mental illness and in many cases treatment," said NAMI executive director Michael Fitzpatrick. "We also know there is a critical shortage of more than 20,000 child and adolescent psychiatrists nationwide."

"Family dependence on primary care for mental health needs is especially great in smaller communities and rural regions. Primary care professionals need to be prepared to meet the challenge."

The 15-page survey report can be read at [www.nami.org/primarycare](http://www.nami.org/primarycare), along with a brochure for doctors and staff on how to communicate and partner with families. Findings include:

- Sixty-three percent of families reported their child first exhibited behavioral or emotional problems at 7 years or younger.
- Only 34 percent of families said their primary care doctors were "knowledgeable" about mental illness; 17 percent said "somewhat."
- Fifty-nine percent said their primary care doctors were not knowledgeable about mental health treatment.
- Sixty-four percent said their primary care doctors were not knowledgeable about [local resources and supports](#) for families

The report also summarizes comments made by doctors that families have found most helpful in addressing concerns.

#### **Five Most Helpful Things a Doctor Can Say**

- There is hope
- You are not alone
- It's not your fault
- I understand
- Your child has many strengths

The report outlines "ideal action steps" for primary care professionals when mental health concerns are raised:

- Listen
- Ask questions
- Screen
- Evaluate
- Refer
- Follow-up
- Provide treatment
- Encourage

Follow-up should include a coordinated, collaborative care plan with other health care providers.

Families also want handouts, fact sheets, and brochures, lists of books and websites, and lists of local support groups or education workshops.

NAMI's [Child and Adolescent Action Center](#) conducted the survey between June 3 and July 1, 2009, using NAMI state and local networks and the assistance of several other child-oriented colleague organizations. The 554 respondents were parents whose children were diagnosed with mental illness before age 18. This is the first time results and analysis have been released.

### **About NAMI**

NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals and families affected by [mental illness](#). NAMI has over 1,100 state and local affiliates engaged in research, education, support and advocacy.

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