National Alliance on Mental Illness

An Open Message from the NAMI Board of Directors

January 2011

Dear NAMI Members and Leaders:

Among a governing board's most important tasks is ensuring its own succession. With an eye toward building an ever-stronger NAMI board, we want to articulate the experience, skills and expertise we think we need on this national board. We offer these thoughts in hopes that they will prove useful both to those who are considering seeking election and to those who must cast their votes to select our new colleagues.

NAMI Board service demands experience, knowledge, commitment, and time to help others. Board members must be passionate about NAMI's goals, values, and beliefs. But beyond that critical passion, Board members should have some high-level decision-making experience and knowledge in one or more of the following areas: public policy, fund raising, nonprofit legal oversight, outreach and educational programs, technology and communications, marketing, membership development, business, investments, finance, or volunteerism. Service on the board of a large nonprofit organization and understanding of the complex and varied legal and fiduciary decisions a board struggles with on a routine basis are also critical to good NAMI Board service.

Board members are elected for a three year term and may serve two consecutive terms. Board members should be prepared to dedicate between 6 – 10 hours/week to their NAMI Board service, including service on 3 – 4 standing committees, frequent conference calls, other work groups as may be needed, in addition to Board and other meeting travel. NAMI Board members represent the organization before the general public, NAMI members, professional service providers, and public officials.

To know what specific skills and expertise we need on the Board, we first had to know what we already have. In collecting this information we noticed some important things:

- While among our most important roles as a governing board is fiscal management, we have very few members with specific training in this area.
- While fund raising is critically important as a board function – and an expectation of us all – we have relatively few members who really relish this role.
- While NAMI represents mental illness across the life span, we have <u>no</u> members with younger children or elderly family members who live with mental illness now, and just a few whose adult children became ill when very young.
- While NAMI seeks to represent the communities in which we live all across the country, our board still lacks substantial diversity (NAMI defines "diversity" broadly, including but not limited to race and ethnicity, as well as representation across the life-span, regionally, urban/rural/frontier, sexual orientation, and lived experience, among others.) Although we think we've made great progress in our diversity in recent years, we know we need to do more!

This year, five candidates will be elected to serve for a three-year term. Five current Board members' regular terms will expire and their seats come up for general election; three have served ably and with great dedication for two terms and cannot seek re-election; two have served a single term and may or may not seek re-election.

The NAMI Board is a working board whose members play active and important roles in setting policy for the success of the national organization. NAMI is best served by Board members who are team players, who keep the big picture in mind, and who know that as Board members they represent the membership and not any other organization with which they may be associated. Service on the National Board challenges us all to rise above our local and state concerns, or single areas of particular interest, to see the scope of our national needs. To best serve in the Board role, members are expected to:

- Attend and participate fully in quarterly Board meetings, Annual Conventions, and other organizational functions
- Understand and protect the fiduciary health of the organization
- Understand and adhere to the legal and fiduciary responsibilities of a non-profit board
- Understand and support NAMI's programs and public policies
- Be NAMI members in good standing, and
- Make what feels to the individual to be a significant financial contribution to NAMI National, on an annual basis.

The NAMI bylaws require that a minimum of 75% of the board be comprised of persons who have or have had mental illness, or parents or their relatives, including civil and domestic partners. In order to ensure compliance with this requirement, all board candidates are asked to identify if they have had a lived experience of serious mental illness. (Candidates' statements to this effect will be published in the special election mailing along with their campaign statements.) We currently have no board members who do not self-identify under this definition.

Service on the NAMI Board is a fulfilling experience. We are honored and humbled to represent the members who elected us and we want only to do the best job possible for NAMI and its vital mission. We invite able and experienced leaders from all walks of life to join us in this remarkable journey—and we thank the thousands of NAMI members who inspire and focus us in our work.

We encourage those who are considering seeking election to contact us. Thank you for all that you do, every day, to support NAMI!

Sincerely, *Your NAMI Board of Directors*

P.S. If you have questions about the election process, please write to us at Governance@nami.org.