



Bringing Mental Health Care to the Ballot

Ten Simple Ways to Make a Difference

NAMI, as a non-profit organization, is non-partisan and does not endorse or imply support of candidates. However, we do provide accurate information to **educate candidates on mental health issues**. And, we provide information on **how members can impact political campaigns**. This is important because it is by speaking out and getting involved that we can shape how America treats people with mental illness. Here are **ten simple ways NAMI friends and members can make a difference**:

1. **Vote.** Only six in ten voters cast their ballot in the 2008 Presidential Election and only four in ten voted in the 2006 Election. One of the most important ways you can make a difference is to exercise your right to vote. To register, visit www.vote411.org.
2. **Ask questions.** Attend Town Hall meetings, internet forums, debates, house parties, and other events where candidates can be questioned. Post questions and comments on Web sites and blogs. See NAMI's Candidate Questions for some good options. Pick one and **ask your question**.
3. **Educate candidates.** Raise mental health issues with candidates and their staff and let them know that you would be happy to serve as a resource for information. Develop a relationship. Provide them with NAMI materials. *Thank candidates who take your materials or meet with you and send a follow-up note.*
4. **Spread the word.** Your family, friends, and co-workers care about what you have to say. Let them know that mental illness impacts you and 57 million Americans.
5. **Be prepared.** Anytime a pollster, political party, or campaign calls or knocks on your door, emphasize your concern for mental health care issues.

One example: "Mental illness affects the lives of 57 million Americans, including my family, yet many struggle to get the treatment they need. **All Americans should have coverage for and access to the mental health and addictions treatment they need to experience recovery.**"

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*“Knowing is not enough; we must apply.
Willing is not enough; we must do.” —Goethe*

6. **Be informed.** Track local and internet forums for opportunities to hear candidates and ask questions. Check candidate Web sites for positions on relevant issues. Inform fellow members of opportunities to make a difference. Post accurate, useful information on the web. Highlight issues in newsletters.
7. **Write letters.** Writing letters to the editor and op-eds both informs the public and influences candidates. Add your comments to newspaper blogs. Candidates pay close attention to letters, op-eds and blogs because they reflect the pulse of voters.
8. **Meet the press.** Ask to meet with editorial boards, reporters, and radio announcers. Provide them facts, give them a real story (a consumer or family member who is willing to share), and let them know what you want from elected officials (feel free to use our Policy Action Agenda).
9. **Volunteer your time.** NAMI members can volunteer as individuals (independent of NAMI affiliation) to work on campaigns, if they wish. People who donate time are valued—and so are their opinions. Campaign volunteers are in a unique position to talk about the importance of mental health care.
10. **Wear your issue.** Wear a “Mental Health Care Gets My Vote” sticker or pin. Put a bumper sticker on your car or bike. Grab attention and send an important message to elected officials—even if you don't get a chance to talk. Download artwork from our Website at www.nami.org/election (click on Wear a Button) and order a batch through your local printer or our national vendor.

