

Executive Summary: Proceedings Document: NAMI's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Listening Session

NAMI's 2007-2010 Strategic Plan calls for NAMI to move from good to great. One of the key strategies to achieve this vision is to embrace and empower NAMI leaders and members from diverse communities. Recognizing that the NAMI family includes Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) individuals and allies and that the needs of this community are unique, NAMI organized a GLBT Listening Session, held on June 26, 2007, as part of its Annual National Convention.

NAMI general leadership, NAMI GLBT leadership, allies, and other collaborators, along with representatives of partner organizations, came together for a three-hour meeting to discuss mental health in this community and how the mental health system could better serve it, and to identify ways NAMI could become a welcoming and supportive environment for GLBT consumers and family members.

Participants highlighted a variety of issues and recommendations for the mental health system as a whole that boiled down to two issues:

1. GLBT families as defined by GLBT individuals and communities
2. Mental health treatment for GLBT individuals and families

Additionally, the group provided recommendations for NAMI in the following areas:

1. Setting Standards of GLBT Inclusion
2. Establishing GLBT-inclusive education and programs
3. Including GLBT mental health issues in NAMI's Policy Platform
4. Collaborating with other groups and allies to address stigma and increase allies.

Moving Forward

Based on the GLBT Listening Session and follow-up dialogues between the NAMI GLBT Leaders Group and NAMI leadership, NAMI has established long- and short-term goals to move forward with GLBT inclusion. These priorities are based on NAMI's reality and current capacity and reflect the organization's strong commitment for moving forward in a strategic and sound manner.

Long-term priorities

1. Launch an internal education/awareness/sensitivity campaign to help all levels of NAMI welcome and value GLBT consumers and families and help NAMI leadership better understand specific issues related to GLBT mental health. Education and understanding will help NAMI better welcome and value GLBT consumers and families.
2. Create a safe space for GLBT members to feel welcomed, affirmed, and honored, and authentically welcome GLBT consumers and families into the NAMI family. GLBT members are looking to NAMI to assertively and proactively create safe space for GLBT members to come out, remain out, and be proud of their identities. Creation of safe space is a two-way street. GLBT members are looking for NAMI to take the lead, but are willing to become co-creators in this endeavor.

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3. Demonstrate commitment to GLBT members and issues by developing internal standards that include policies and procedures that are GLBT-supportive, -inclusive, and -welcoming at all levels of the organization.

Short-term priorities

While building an inclusive environment is a long-term commitment that requires a concerted effort, NAMI has identified the following short-term priorities, which can be accomplished in the next 12 months. Each of these tasks can be undertaken within NAMI's larger program and policy context and will help move the long-term priorities forward.

1. Conduct a language/content and policy assessment at all levels of NAMI (national, state, local) to assess inclusion of GLBT issues and experiences. Also, ensure that there is a GLBT-specific section in the cultural competence assessment currently being administered at NAMI.
2. Update and revamp NAMI cultural competency efforts to reflect GLBT cultural issues.
3. Develop GLBT-specific educational, policy, and research materials (e.g., fact sheets, white papers, and marketing materials) that highlight GLBT issues concerning mental health and illness. Include this information in NAMI general publications and materials that are distributed within NAMI and to the greater community. Prioritize development of a fact sheet on GLBT peer support and the promotion of recovery from mental illness in GLBT individuals and communities.
4. Create a GLBT-specific page for the NAMI Web site. Include community links, literature, fact sheets, and issues.
5. Make NAMI conferences and conventions GLBT-welcoming by highlighting GLBT leaders and issues in multicultural plenary sessions (not just workshops) and including information about GLBT resources in the host city.
6. Propose an explicit policy statement against 'reparative therapy.'
7. Build relationships and develop partnerships with GLBT institutions, organizations, and groups.

For more information please contact macenter@nami.org.