

## School-Based Mental Health

### NAMI's Position

NAMI supports school-based mental health services and supports and the training of school personnel to better understand the early warning signs of emerging mental illness. The mission of schools is to educate students. Mental illness often interferes with learning and social and emotional development. Students living with undiagnosed, untreated and inadequately treated mental illness face major challenges in their ability to learn, grow and develop. Schools are where children spend most of their day and school personnel are in a key position to identify the early warning signs of emerging mental illness and to link students with effective services and supports.

NAMI's full [Public Policy Platform](#) on school-based mental health is available at [nami.org/policy](http://nami.org/policy).

### Overview

A national commitment is needed to create effective school-based and school-linked mental health services if we are to improve the lives of children, youth and young adults living with mental illness.

In our nation, we do a poor job of identifying children, youth and young adults living with mental illness. The latest research shows that 13 percent of youth aged eight to 15 live with a mental illness severe enough to cause serious impairment in their day-to-day lives. Yet, only about 20 percent are identified and receive services, leaving an alarming 80 percent behind. Fifty percent of lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and three-quarters by age 24.

Schools can play a key role in the early identification of mental illness and in linking students with effective services and supports. Children spend much of their day in school and thus schools are in an ideal position to identify emerging warning signs of mental illness in youth. School-based mental health programs are needed to reduce the pain and isolation all too often experienced by children and youth with undiagnosed and untreated mental illness and their families.

Schools require adequate funding to train school personnel and administrators on the early warning signs of emerging mental illness and to effectively link students with services and supports. Funding is also needed for school-based psychologists, counselors and social workers to help coordinate services and supports and to create effective links between schools and the community mental health system. The caseload of school-based mental health providers should be capped at a level that ensures that they can adequately address the needs of students and their families.

School-linked mental health programs involve bringing contract community mental health providers trained in effective clinical interventions into the school setting for the delivery of mental health care.

## Advocacy Priorities and Goals

- NAMI calls on Congress to pass the Mental Health in Schools Act (H.R. 628/S. 195), legislation that provides federal funding and support for training of school staff on mental health related issues, comprehensive school-based mental health services and building links between schools and the community mental health system.
- NAMI supports legislation that would provide federal funding and support for training programs that would help school professionals recognize the early warning signs of mental health conditions and would create effective programs to link students with needed mental health services and supports.
- NAMI calls on states to enact legislation that requires school personnel and administrators to be trained in the early warning signs of mental illness and that provides funding and support for training and for linking community mental health services to schools. State laws that require in-service training for school personnel currently exist in Minn. and Tenn. The NAMI Parents and Teachers as Allies in-service training program for school personnel is currently being delivered in 19 states.

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