

Outreach to diverse communities is imperative to assuring equal access to education and recovery to all Americans. The following steps may be utilized as guidelines to customizing your outreach plan:

**1. Identify the target group:** Be realistic and specific when choosing a community. Once you have identified the group, learn as much as you can about their characteristics and history in your area. Also research the group's beliefs about mental illness. Important questions to ask include:

- Is this community aware of mental illness?
- What are the levels of stigma about mental illness?
- Is there discrimination toward people with mental illness?
- Does the community have information about mental illness?
- Does the community see mental illness as an important issue?

The more you know about your targeted audience, the more successful you will be in engaging them in meaningful ways.

**2. Identify key community leaders:** Approach leaders from your targeted community group and ask them to partner with you. Cultivate relationships with them. It will take time to gain their trust, but it is essential to have their support—these leaders are your community experts. They will help you identify community needs and how to successfully reach the group. Because they are respected and recognized by the group, they will help you gain access, trust, and attention from this group.

**3. Identify key community organizations:** Resources are limited and we cannot alone fix everything. Partnering with local community organizations that work with your target group will provide a united front and increase outreach possibilities.

**4. Decide the major focus of your activities:** Traditionally, NAMI's focus areas include education programs, support groups, and advocacy. It is important to solicit the opinions of your community members to help you make a decision on what your activities should be. Some ideas include:

- Creation of culturally and linguistically appropriate pamphlets or videos about mental illness
- Establishment of a community-specific support group
- Setting a target of increasing diverse community membership by a specific percentage
- Lobbying state government officials to increase funding for mental health services to the target community

**5. Dissemination and Publicity:** Target local community organizations such as churches, racial/ethnic clubs, libraries, schools, grocery stores, clinics, and any other area where the group frequents. Health care professionals from targeted group will be especially helpful. Create press releases, public service announcements, and short newspaper articles detailing your efforts. Identify media outlets used by your target community; advertising your program in culturally appropriate media will ensure that information reaches the people you want to inform.