

Where We Stand:

NAMI believes that all people with mental health conditions deserve access to effective medication and treatment options. NAMI opposes public policies and laws that limit access to prescription mental health medications as prescribed by their provider.

Why We Care:

Access to effective prescription medications is essential for many people with mental illness to successfully manage their condition and get on a path of recovery. [Mental health medications](#) — also called psychiatric medications — influence the brain chemicals and metabolic processes that regulate emotions, thought patterns, the structure and function of the brain and other key organs and physiologic processes, and are commonly used to treat an array of mental health conditions. In 2020, nearly [1 in 6](#) adults had taken prescribed medication in the last year for their mental health. While medication may not be part of every individual's treatment plan, it can be an important tool for managing symptoms, allowing an individual to stay engaged in or return to daily life activities or increase their engagement in psychotherapy.

All medications carry some level of risk. However, when used as clinically directed, mental health medications are [safe](#), effective, and often lifesaving, helping [improve](#) a person's quality of life. Together, individuals and their health care providers should work to discuss symptoms and treatment history before carefully considering the benefits and risks of a particular medication, as well as monitoring for any side effects. Decisions on what — if any — medication a person takes for their mental health condition should be based on clinical need, evidence, and the informed decision-making process between an individual and their provider.

When medications are restricted — either by policy or by cost — it can jeopardize the health and well-being of a person with mental illness. Policies that restrict mental health medications, such as

prescribing restrictions or utilization management insurance barriers (like [step therapy](#) and [therapeutic substitution](#)), increase stigma around mental health conditions, which in turn may [discourage](#) people from seeking mental health resources. [High costs](#) may cause people to not start or to discontinue taking their medication as directed, which can lead to poor outcomes and increased use of health care services.

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Lack of access to mental health medications can worsen symptoms and lead to a [greater likelihood](#) of emergency room visits, hospitalizations, suicidal ideation, homelessness, and incarceration. In the long term, untreated mental illness can [impact](#) educational and employment opportunities, as well as a person's family and social connections.

NAMI opposes policies that jeopardize access to prescription psychiatric medications without clinical or evidence-based justification. Instead, by removing arbitrary barriers to medications, we can ensure access to the full range of treatment options that can improve mental health outcomes for millions of people affected by mental illness.

To learn more about NAMI's work on this issue, visit www.nami.org/Advocacy/Policy-Priorities