



2020 Legislative Action Agenda

Support the Mental Health Workforce and Caregivers

It is impossible to deliver appropriate sustained care without a robust mental health workforce. For years the New York State has failed to appropriately invest in the dedicated and compassionate workers who provide care for people living with mental illness. This lack of investment has led to difficulty in mental health providers' ability to hire and retain staff. **NAMI-NYS is alarmed by the high turnover and vacancy rates among providers. This is why we are part of the 3 for 5 Campaign calling for a commitment of 3% increase for the human service workforce for the next five years, which is in line with Governor Cuomo's budget statement that a 3 percent growth rate is projected and reasonable for Medicaid and education. Human services should be included in that projection, and this 3for5 investment is crucial to shoring up lifesaving services in New York.**

Many people living with a serious mental illness live with a family member(s) who are their primary caregivers. NAMI-NYS has long detailed how **the myriad of fractures in the systems designed to deliver psychiatric services have placed an increased burden on families and caretakers.** This is a major issue for many of our members who serve as caregivers, as their responsibilities continue to expand with the downsizing of psychiatric hospital beds in both the public and private sector, the difficulty of locating community-based mental health services and the quarter-century of flat-funding of mental health housing programs.

Being a caregiver of someone living with a serious and debilitating psychiatric disorder is often an arduous task. **As accessing appropriate psychiatric services becomes a more daunting task, families and caregivers are being increasingly called upon to ensure our loved ones are safe and healthy.** NAMI-NYS often talks about the negative outcomes such as homelessness, substance abuse, suicide and entry into the criminal justice system that disproportionately befalls those living with a mental illness. **In most cases, families and caretakers are the last line of defense in preventing these avoidable tragedies.**

This is a responsibility many of members gladly take on, but it comes at a steep price. Being a caregiver of someone living with a serious mental illness can be very financially challenging. Often times caregivers either has their adult loved one(s) living with them or they shoulder the expense of providing their housing. Finding and sustaining employment is also difficult for many living with a mental illness; this also increases their financial dependency on their caregivers.

A.7209/S.5100 would address would help ease the financial sacrifices made by caregivers, by providing them with a much-needed tax credit.