

**House and Senate Appropriations Committee Hearing on
Governor's FY 2020 Budget
February 25, 2019, Springfield, VT**

I want to thank the committee members for being here tonight.

I am Phil Blackburn, President of the Board of the National Alliance on Mental Illness Vermont.

I have two key points to make: one, the need to raise awareness of NAMI Vermont to all those whose lives are impacted by mental illness.

And, two—to emphasize the need for continued State funding of NAMI Vermont.

We are a state chapter of NAMI national and support, educate and advocate so that all communities, families, and individuals affected by mental illness or mental health challenges can build better lives.

I invite you and all in the audience to visit our website for information on all of our programs, but will make mention of the three that have the most direct impact on Vermonters:

Family Support Groups empower and educate family members and close friends of individuals with persistent mental health challenges. This support group is directed toward caregivers—not unlike AL anon.

NAMI Connection Recovery Support Group Meetings are free, 90-minute recovery support groups for people living with mental illness where people learn from one another's experiences, share coping strategies and offer mutual encouragement and understanding. The groups provide an ongoing opportunity to discuss the challenges of living with mental illness and the techniques for maintaining wellness.

The NAMI Family-to-Family Education Program is a *FREE* 12-week course structured to help families and friends of individuals with mental illness understand and support their loved ones while maintaining their own well-being.

This course includes current information about schizophrenia, major depression, bipolar disorder (manic depression), and other diagnoses and up-to-date information about treatment, wellness and recovery.

In short, something of a boot camp for those who need or want to know more about mental illness. There's a f2f starting March 7 in Brattleboro.

In FY2018:

- 1350 = Connection Support Group Attendees
- 725 = Family Support Group Attendees
- 850 = Resource Guidebooks distributed
- 358 = In Our Own Voice participants
- 36 = Mental Illness and Recovery Workshop participants
- 57 = Family-to-Family Class graduates

There's not another organization that does what we do.

People tend to find us when a crisis hits their lives. We succeed in making lives better for people impacted by mental illness. It's very common to hear people say that NAMI saved a loved one's life or provided a framework to go forward in managing the impacts of mental illness—both as a peer and caregiver.

NAMI Vermont receives an annual grant from the Department of Mental Health that comprises about two-thirds of our budget. It's imperative that we at least maintain level funding and ask for consideration of increasing our level of funding, which has remained flat for a half decade.

We are a highly cost-effective organization that delivers our free programs through volunteers and a small headquarters staff. We need level funding to continue to do what we do. An increase in funding would enable us to be more competitive in compensating staff and expanding awareness of our services in Vermont.

In closing, I urge everyone to tell a neighbor or friend about NAMI Vermont if you think the person would benefit from our free education and support services. And, again ask the committee to advocate on our behalf for funding through the budgetary process.

Thank you.