

Where We Stand:

NAMI believes that public policies and practices should promote greater awareness and early identification of mental health conditions. NAMI supports public policies and laws that enable all schools, public and private, to increase access to appropriate mental health services.

Why We Care:

People with mental illness deserve help, not handcuffs. Yet people with mental illness are overrepresented in our nation's jails and prisons. About two in five people who are incarcerated have a history of mental illness (37% in state and federal prisons and 44% held in local jails). This is twice the prevalence of mental illness within the overall adult population.

Given these rates, America's jails and prisons have become de-facto mental health providers, at great cost to the well-being of people with mental health conditions.

Despite court mandates, there is a significant lack of access to adequate mental health care in incarcerated settings. About three in five people (63%) with a history of mental illness do not receive mental health treatment while incarcerated in state and federal prisons. It is also challenging for people to remain on treatment regimens once incarcerated. In fact, more than 50% of individuals who were taking medication for mental health conditions at admission did not continue to receive their medication once in prison.

People with mental illness often face challenges to navigating life in a jail or prison. Behaviors related to their symptoms can put them at risk for consequences of violating facility rules, such as solitary confinement or being barred from participating in programming. This underscores the need for appropriate mental health treatment in incarcerated settings.

NAMI believes that all people with mental health conditions who are incarcerated deserve access to quality mental health treatment.

People with mental illness who are incarcerated deserve access to appropriate mental health treatment, including screening, regular and timely access to mental health providers, and access to medications and programs that support recovery.

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