

Where We Stand:

NAMI believes that all people with mental health conditions deserve access to supports that promote wellness. NAMI supports public policies and laws that help address social determinants of health, including supporting employment for individuals with mental health conditions.

Why We Care:

Employment is a critical social determinant of health, whether it provides a source of income, health insurance coverage, social connections or sense of pride. However, a variety of barriers can make finding and maintaining a job more difficult for people with mental illness, and these may be further compounded by aspects of race, gender, and age. For example, many people are concerned that disclosing their mental illness has a negative effect on hiring and career advancement. Symptoms of mental illness may put certain kinds of jobs or minimum work hours out of reach, and people with mental illness have an increased risk of employment termination and both voluntary and involuntary job loss. Fewer than 7% of adults with schizophrenia who receive community mental health services are competitively employed. Another concern is that additional income from employment can jeopardize eligibility for other vital income supports and medical benefits, which are critical tools for maintaining wellness.

Employment opportunities may be even more limited for people with mental illness who are justice-involved or who enter the workforce without necessary supports. About two in five people who are incarcerated have a history of mental illness — including 37% in state and federal prisons and 44% held in local jails. People who are formerly incarcerated and have convictions are subject to many laws and statutes that impact opportunities for basic employment, housing, education, and other life needs. Previous state work requirements for Medicaid coverage have led to a loss of health coverage with no increases in employment.

Employment is a critical part of a person's identify and sense of pride. People with mental health conditions deserve the opportunity to work, especially as

employment is associated with improved self-esteem and reductions in outpatient psychiatric treatment. Like anyone else, people with mental health conditions value paid employment opportunities for reasons like income, financial security, socializing and sense of achievement. Consequently, we need policies that support both the health and employment needs of people with mental illness. Research shows that supported employment programs can help people with mental illness find competitive employment, put in more time on the job and earn higher wages.

NAMI supports public policies and laws that help address social determinants of health, including employment for individuals with mental health conditions.

Supported employment programs have proven benefits for people with mental illness. However, limited expansion or lack of funding sources means they serve just a fraction of individuals with mental illness who are willing and able to join the workforce. When we invest in programs that work, we are also investing in success and recovery. NAMI supports public policies and laws that fund and implement effective supported employment programs to provide employment options for people with mental health needs.

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