

## 2016 Advocacy Tool Kit



**Make Your Voice Heard!  
Create a More Mentally  
Healthy New York**

### **Letters to the Editor and OP/ED Pieces**

Along with meeting with your legislators there are other ways for you to project your advocacy voice. Letters to the editors of local newspapers can have a powerful impact and create more support in your community on behalf of the issues so important to NAMI-NYS. We are supplying you with templates for letters to editors on the behalf of the top four bills we support. Feel free to edit and personalize these letters to explain why they are important to you and your community. Please remember though these letters should not exceed 250 words.

#### **Regulate Step Therapy:**

Decisions on a person's medical care should be made by themselves and their doctor, based on what is believed to be most appropriate in advancing their recovery. Someone paying for medical insurance should expect their coverage to honor and subsidize the medication their doctor prescribed. However, too often decisions on what medications to cover are based on profit margins and not sound medical recommendations.

Many patients have been betrayed by their insurance providers who only approve to pay for less expensive options and making the patient demonstrate the failure of the covered medication before the providers allow them to "step-up" to the prescription their doctor originally wrote. This practice is both amoral and hazardous.

**As a person living with a mental illness**

**(or)**

**As a family member of someone living with a mental illness,**

I am particularly worried about this practice. People who have psychiatric disorders need to have access to the medications their doctor believes are the most appropriate for them. Anti-psychotic

and anti-depressants are not interchangeable and prescribing someone with severe mental illness the wrong medication can be very dangerous. Improper use of medication can lead to negative and expensive outcomes such as emergency room visits, hospitalizations and possible entry into the criminal justice system. The most tragic results can include suicide.

A bill before the New York State Legislature S-3419A/A-2834A, would regulate the practice by making it easier for doctors to override insurance company's decision not to approve prescribed medication. I urge our representatives to support this bill.

### **Mental Health Education in Schools:**

As parents, we expect schools to be able to provide our children with tools to be happy, educated and healthy young adults. Sadly, our schools are failing our kids by not giving them mental health education. Mental health and mental illnesses are misunderstood by the public in general and especially in adolescents. While twenty percent of Americans will experience a diagnosable mental illness, everyone will experience mental health challenges such as depression, anger and stress, these are all more frequent in adolescents.

Education, early recognition and intervention are keys to minimizing mental health issues that are common in adolescents. It is vital that New York's education system does a better job of creating a true comprehension of mental illness and mental health issues.

Including mental health education will save lives as early recognition can prevent our children from suffering the most debilitating long-term effects of serious and persistent mental illnesses. Integrating the proper supports can also lead to a better awareness of body image issues and a reduction in harassment and bullying both of which can contribute to suicide rates in adolescents.

Schools are mandated to teach health but mental health education is not included. This is preposterous as you cannot have physical health without mental health, which is why mental health education is necessary.

A bill before the New York State Legislature A3887/S2585 would address this glaring omission by calling for mental health education. I urge our representatives to support this bill.

### **Paid Family Leave Act:**

Medical emergencies and chronic long-term illnesses, whether they be physical or psychiatric are traumatic both for the patient and their family. No one should have to face an illness or travel the road of recovery alone. The strength and support of family members play a crucial in overcoming an illness.

I firmly believe there should not be any barriers preventing family involvement in the recovery process. Obviously, finances and employment are important, but family should always come first.

As a person living with a mental illness, I have experienced dark days caused by my illness. I cannot imagine getting through these difficult times if my family didn't play a role in my recovery team. Without their love and support, I don't know if I would be here today to write this letter. (*Feel free to give more personal detail*)

Or

As a family member of someone living with a mental illness, it is important to me that I am by my loved one's (*Feel free to state which relative*) side if they are in an emergency situation or hospitalized due to their illness.

This is why I was enthused to learn that there is a bill that has been passed by the New York State Assembly and is currently before the Senate which would create a *family leave insurance* allowing employees to take up to twelve paid weeks off from work to tend to a new born child, care for a sick relative or be with a loved one before being deployed in the military. This program is similar to an initiative which has been successful in California.

I urge Senator \_\_\_\_\_ to support S3004.

### **Make Kendra's Law Permanent:**

There is a lot of debate about how to best generate positive recovery outcomes for people with mental illness. The fundamental problem with this debate is it lumps all people with mental illness under one umbrella. The truth is, there are many types of psychiatric disorders and even within each specific disease there is a wide spectrum of severity. Many people living with a mental illness can maintain their recovery through adherence to treatment (such as seeing a therapist and taking medications) and live productive fulfilling lives.

However, for people who have the most serious and persistent forms of mental illnesses, self-maintenance can be all but impossible. These people often fall through the cracks of the mental hygiene system and find themselves in emergency rooms, jails or the streets. They should have the same chances for recovery as those able to manage their illness.

In the most extreme cases Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) should be made available. Assisting the most at risk people with mental illness with treatment adherence will help reduce the use of emergency rooms and entry into the criminal justice system. Both of which are more expensive to tax payers and can worsen a person's mental illness.

New York has one of the nation's most successful versions of AOT, *Kendra's Law* which has significantly reduced homelessness, suicide attempts, hospitalizations, arrests and incarceration. Assembly bill A1275 would improve the law and make it permanent. I urge Assemblymember \_\_\_\_\_ to support this bill.