



New York State

2013 Legislative Action Agenda Expansion of Crisis Intervention Training and Mental Health Courts

The points of contact between the criminal justice system and persons suffering from mental illness can be dangerous and/or result in poor outcomes. NAMI-NYS supports the expansion of two important innovations, Crisis Intervention Teams and mental health courts, which can significantly improve the odds for a safe and beneficial outcome.

As we are all too aware, contacts between law enforcement personnel and the mentally ill are often dangerous, and sometimes deadly. There is an alternative: Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT). The CIT model was developed in Memphis, Tennessee to address the special challenges to law enforcement posed by persons with mental illness, and to better serve the community.

The Memphis CIT model has three key components:

- Forty hour training program for law enforcement officers that includes information about mental illnesses and how to recognize them, information about the local mental health system, learning first-hand from consumers and family members about their experiences, and verbal de-escalation training.
- Community collaboration between mental health providers, law enforcement and family and consumer advocates. This group examines local systems to determine the community's needs and agree on strategies to meet these needs.
- Consumer and family involvement in decision-making, planning and leader training.

CIT works. There have been studies that document that CIT significantly reduces the arrests of people with serious mental illnesses, and also reduces the numbers of re-arrests. Individuals diverted receive more counseling, medication and other forms of treatment than individuals not diverted. CIT also reduces the number of injuries to consumers and law enforcement personnel.

CIT now functions successfully in a number of jurisdictions, and this is an alternative that needs to be expanded to serve communities across New York State.

In addition to CIT, another important innovation in addressing the issue of mentally ill offenders in New York State has been the implementation of mental health courts. These specialized courts link defendants suffering from mental illness to court-supervised, community-based treatment as an alternative to incarceration. Maintaining people in the community, rather than in jail, is not only a better treatment option, but is also significantly less costly than incarceration.

NAMI-NYS strongly supports maintaining the current mental health courts in New York State, and expanding this initiative so that this option is available to all New Yorkers.