



National Alliance on Mental Illness

nami | New York State

Official Position on New York State Psychiatric Hospital Closures

The National Alliance on Mental illness-New York State (NAMI-NYS) is the state chapter of NAMI, the nation's largest grassroots family and consumer movement dedicated to improving the lives of those with mental illness.

"Mental illness" is not a single illness. There are many mental illnesses. There are anxiety disorders, mood disorders, substance-related disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, trauma and stress-related disorders, and psychotic disorders, among others. Most people with "mental illness" are nonviolent, exercise good judgment, move about freely in the community, and are willingly treated in office settings. Some persons with "mental illness", however, experience hallucinations and delusions. They may not attribute their unusual beliefs, experiences, and behavior to a mental disorder and, therefore, believe "nothing is wrong". This group of persons with serious mental illness does not endorse the benefits of treatment. Their high risk behaviors are informed by their voices and false beliefs. Use of alcohol and other drugs of abuse compounds their impaired judgment. They do not want to be symptomatic, but a brain disease affects them in ways that leads to impaired ability to care for themselves safely in the community.

Our society fails to meet the needs of these people. They need and will benefit from intensive, state-of-the-art treatment that is available only in hospital settings. Medications are effective in controlling symptoms, improving quality of life, and protecting against relapse. On becoming less symptomatic and more able to live safely in the community, they can then move to a less restrictive setting. Even then, a small number will benefit from Assisted Outpatient Treatment that is court-ordered (known as Kendra's Law).

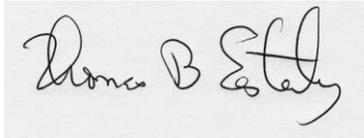
If we are committed to doing the best for persons with serious mental illness, we need to offer an array of services that range from in-patient to outpatient, that includes effective medications and therapy, that offers safe, supported housing, that provides vocational and socialization opportunities, and that offers improved quality of life.

In the best of all worlds treatment will be non-coercive and informed. Rarely, though, society will need to overcome a person's failure to acknowledge his/her mental illness and offer treatment in an environment that preserves both the safety and the dignity of an impaired individual. Anything less is inhumane and risky.

As it is, there are currently not enough psychiatric beds available for those with serious mental illness requiring in-patient hospitalization. What will happen to our relatives when even more beds are eliminated? Will they wind up homeless or in jails or prisons? When psychiatric beds go

down, incarceration goes up. Will families with small children living in rural areas have the hardship of having to travel hours to see their relatives because psychiatric hospital beds in their area have been eliminated? We believe that no one should have to travel more than one hour to have access to a psychiatric emergency room or crisis service unit.

Our loved ones suffering with serious mental illness need their families; they need appropriate treatments and intervention, and, yes, sometimes they need hospitalization. New York State has a moral and legal responsibility to meet those needs.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray background. The signature reads "Thomas B. Easterly" in a cursive script.

Thomas B. Easterly, President
NAMI-NYS

A handwritten signature in black ink. The signature reads "Sherry Grenz" in a cursive script.

Sherry Janowitz Grenz, President
NAMI Albany Relatives