



## **Re: H.B. 6636 An Act Concerning COVID-19 and Enhanced Federal Medicaid Funding**

Testimony of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Connecticut  
By Lisa Winjum  
Human Services Committee  
March 25, 2021

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, and members of the Human Services Committee, as the Executive Director of the Connecticut State office of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI Connecticut), I am writing today regarding H.B. 6636 An Act Concerning COVID-19 and Enhanced Federal Medicaid Funding.

NAMI is the nation's largest mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all people affected by mental health conditions. NAMI Connecticut and its nine local affiliates provide support groups and educational programs for people with mental health conditions and their loved ones and advocates for policies to improve the lives of people affected by mental health conditions.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B. 6636 An Act Concerning COVID-19 and Enhanced Federal Medicaid Funding. The American Rescue Plan is expected to bring \$10 billion into Connecticut, with over \$4 billion going directly to state and local governments. Connecticut is set to receive a significant increase in federal matching funds for Medicaid, including a 10% increase for Home and Community Based Services as well as the continuation of the 6.2% increase that began in the Spring of 2020. While nonprofit providers were allocated a portion of the Coronavirus Relief Fund, those funds were spent months ago, and the State has not used the increased federal Medicaid match to increase rates or otherwise compensate providers.

Community nonprofits have been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many never closed their doors and have been meeting the needs of the communities they serve despite the risks. COVID-19 brought unanticipated and unbudgeted costs and operational challenges for community providers, and for many, Medicaid is a primary or significant source of funding.

Since March 2020, NAMI CT has responded to more than 925 calls and emails from people looking for mental health resources and referrals for themselves or a loved one—nearly double the amount we handle in an average year. We are not alone in this surge in calls from people seeking help. Nearly half of 93 call centers in a recent survey reported an increase in call volume, and almost as many said their workforce was overwhelmed<sup>1</sup>. Some of these are people who have recovered from COVID-19—twenty percent of people diagnosed with COVID develop mental illness within ninety days<sup>2</sup>. But many of these callers are COVID-19-negative people

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experiencing mental health conditions for the first time because of the stress, anxiety, isolation, and economic insecurity accompanying the pandemic.

As you may know, community nonprofits have requested that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over the next five years for community nonprofits. Since 2007, community nonprofits have lost at least \$461 million in state funding that has not kept pace with inflation or adequately covered increased costs and demand for services over the last thirteen years. COVID-19 has only exacerbated those challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the existing mental health crisis in Connecticut and across the country. People with mental health issues have shared with us that their conditions have been exacerbated by the pandemic. The need to respond to people experiencing mental health issues has never been greater. The stress, uncertainty, and isolation of the pandemic is taking a toll on all of our mental health and the media attention to the crisis is raising awareness about maintaining mental wellness, increasing the demand for the support groups and education programs NAMI CT and other nonprofits provide. A strong mental health system and available services and supports for everyone who needs them is critical to the state's response to the COVID-19 crisis and its recovery because the pandemic is likely to have long lasting mental health impact.

Because a substantial portion of the \$461 million restoration for community nonprofits will be to provide increased Medicaid rates, the enhanced FMAP is a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the Connecticut General Assembly to address these needs. This influx of federal funding combined with the state's strong Rainy-Day Fund, and more than \$400 million in unexpended Medicaid funds, puts the state in the unique position to use those funds to directly support nonprofit programs and fulfill their needs without complicating the state budget process.

Congress intended for the American Rescue Plan to help Americans across the country get to the other side of COVID-19, and this bill would provide significant support to help community nonprofits emerge from COVID-19 stronger and more ready to meet the needs of our communities.

We urge the Committee to support H.B. 6636.

1 - <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2020/06/15/crisis-hotline-call-volume-spikes-straining-social-workers/5266072002/>

2 - Bargaining for the Common Good

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