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Governor Gavin Newsom
California State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom,

Thank you for your outstanding leadership in the face of the unprecedented crisis faced by our state. In developing a proactive and strategic response to this crisis, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, California (NAMI CA) is urging state and local government leaders to continue to honor the values outlined in the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) during this critical time for those living with mental illnesses and their families. NAMI CA represents 62 Affiliates across California who work every day to serve their communities as well as our more than 60,000 active advocates in California who care deeply about fixing the broken mental health care system in our great state.

We have recently reviewed ideas about how MHSA funds can be used as we meet the COVID-19 crisis head on while continuing to ensure services are getting to those in need. Some suggestions including eliminating stakeholder involvement, having flexibility in utilizing the “components” of funding, and extending the 3-year plan requirements, among others. We must be strategic in how we utilize MHSA funds. Therefore, NAMI CA suggests the following as strategies to be used:

- **Prudent Reserve Funds as a Spending Priority**

Any changes to funding streams or services must follow the use of the Prudent Reserve set-aside monies. When NAMI CA helped create and pass the original Prop 63, part of the intention was to ensure there were mechanisms in place to address crises and anticipate changes to funding levels. One of the ways we anticipated dealing with those changes was through the Prudent Reserves in which all counties hold up to 33% of funds in reserves. We must ensure that counties are able to access their prudent reserves immediately and any barriers to doing so must be eliminated.

We suggest that counties that need flexibility in MHSA component availability, first use their prudent reserves before making changes to the Act by allowing flexibility of funds used between categories. We fought for set asides to bend the cost curve through prevention and early intervention for example. We would hate to see the focus shift, albeit temporarily, away from programs that aim to intervene when a mental illness is first beginning to manifest.

- **Unspent Funds as a spending priority**

In your 2020 State of the State address, you prescribed there to be a significant amount among in unspent MHSA funds. In the times of uncertainty and as a way of utilizing those funds accordingly, NAMI CA suggests counties utilizing this source of funding to offset any funds needed during the COVID-19 crisis.

- **Flexibility must come with documentation**

Any use of MHSA funds outside their original purpose or designation must be documented and posted for public comment. Transparency from governmental leaders is critical in maintaining public confidence in the processes by which we are governed. This documentation should be robust and clearly connect to how the COVID-19 crisis requires changes to programming and service requirements under the current law.

- **Changes must be time limited**

In addition to robust documentation, any changes to funding streams must be time limited with 60-90 day limit with the sole purpose of meeting this moment for Californians. As we continue to adjust to this new reality as a state, we expect our processes and funding will do the same, but we cannot overreach and destroy the systems of care that families depend on in order to do so.

- **Encourage innovation in both county and state processes**

Public processes must evolve to meet this moment in California. Part of that evolution must incorporate the use of online platforms by government entities to communicate with stakeholders, including broadcast of accessible meeting and hearings as well as methods by which stakeholders can provide public comment to our government officials. Some counties such as San Bernardino have exemplified how to work with

stakeholders remotely to ensure all voices can be on the record. We can no longer rely on antiquated models of engagement where resident must come to one location for information and public engagement. Further, to best serve the needs of our great and diverse state, we must adapt to and embrace available technologies designed to enhance and support better health outcomes for all residents. Exploring how technology can serve to increase access could be an excellent MHS Innovation project for example, and NAMI CA would like to work and support counties in this endeavor.

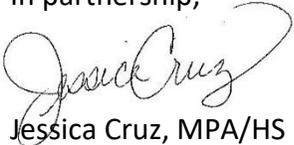
Stay true to our core values, listen to stakeholders including families and consumers first.

It is important that we do not let this crisis deter us from the core values we've set forth as a state. Crisis must be a time that we cling closer to our values, not abandon them. MHS has a strong core value in being driven by those it serves, which includes families and consumers. We must put partnerships above politics as we move through this time. Those partnerships must include the stakeholders that are most impacted by the policy decisions being made.

Our core values exist to guide us in uncertain situations and serve as a north star to light our path forward. The core values of the MHS tell us that in this critical moment, it is of utmost importance to be led by the voices of the families and individuals we serve. We must increase all efforts to provide transparency and trust in order to truly meet this moment as a state for all Californians.

We stand ready to help do our part, our fervent hope is that families won't be left behind in this time of greatest need.

In partnership,



Jessica Cruz, MPA/HS
Chief Executive Officer
NAMI California

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