Message From Your President

My name is Karen Henry, and I'm your new President of NAMI California. I'm a consumer, a family member, and an attorney. I've been on the NAMI California Board for five years, and have chaired the Government Affairs Committee and the Consumer Participation and Leadership Committee. I am honored to be able to represent you and NAMI California, and to work on your behalf.

I've heard some persons ask, "What does NAMI California do?" To me this means that we can do more to communicate to our members our ongoing activities at the state level, and how they advance our NAMI California goals and our work with affiliates and individual members.

NAMI California is a very active organization with many programs and activities that contribute to our common mission, and I'd like to describe some of them. Please remember that our NAMI California Board consists of 12 members, each of them a member of a local affiliate. This composition ensures that the viewpoints and needs of local affiliates are kept in mind as the Board conducts its work. The Board also has more than 10 committees, and each Board member serves on at least two of them; their Committee work is in addition to their Board responsibilities. This also ensures that the perspective of Board members, based upon their work with their own affiliates, is part of the decision-making process.

(Continued on page 2)

A Recap of our "Celebrating Recovery" Conference and the Affiliate Leadership Institute

Approximately 600 persons attended this year's Annual Conference, the 30th anniversary celebration of NAMI California, but we want to provide some information for those who missed it. How wonderful that the theme of the Conference was "Celebrating Recovery." NAMI California has come so far in these past 30 years. Next year's Conference is in Torrance, and we hope to see you there in August 2009.

Every year, Affiliate Presidents and Leadership are invited to the Affiliate Leadership Institute, traditionally held the day before the Conference. This year, the sessions offered "Front Line," a collaborative, educational outreach and networking program that can serve the veterans in your community. This effort helps service members transition to civilian life, provides support to friends, family members and Veterans; and is fast becoming a model that many affiliates are implementing in their communities. (Continued on page 4)

Past President Ralph E. Nelson, Jr., MD, and current President Karen H. Henry, JD

www.namicalifornia.org
This last year, the Adult and Children/TAY Committees worked on and completed a policy platform (which went to affiliates for comment) on a wide spectrum of policies that would guide our work and serve as a template for affiliates who might be working on their own platform. The NAMI California Criminal Justice Committee created the Mental Health, Criminal Justice, Community Collaboration Project (which now has been completed) that led to establishing additional mental health courts as well as starting many CIT programs; the committee is working on an Inmate Medication Form with the goal of securing its use by all county jails, and on a criminal justice link for NAMI California’s existing web site.

The Government Affairs Committee is responsible for legislative and regulatory activity at the state level. Of the 3,000–4,000 bills filed in the state legislature, we pick the bills of the most interest to those with mental illness and their families. The Committee member assigned to a particular bill drafts a position paper, and keeps in touch with the author and other interested organizations as it goes through the various legislative committees.

The Consumer Participation and Leadership Committee over the last several years has increased the presence of consumers, created the Consumer Leadership Institute for the Conference, and is now working on a Recovery section for the NAMI California website. The Board also wishes to reach out to veterans and families that need support and assistance, and its Veterans Committee will be working on program development.

The NAMI California Board also is responsible for the operations of NAMI California, and NAMI California staff is directly involved in implementing programs and activities. These include presenting Peer-to-Peer training programs and assisting affiliates with their own training, conducting Family-to-Family teacher training, working on In Your Own Voice and commencing the Connection support program for consumers.

In addition, the Department of Mental Health selected NAMI California, along with two other organizations, to work on the implementation of MHSA. With the Department’s assistance we have a full-time staff person who works with the Department, the Oversight and Accountability Commission, and other organizations to advance the interests of those with serious mental illness and their families. An MHSA Advocacy Pool has been created, of willing and interested NAMI California members, to assist in our MHSA work.

If you are interested in participating on a NAMI California Committee or project, contact Heidi Grether at heidi.grether@namicalifornia.org for an application. More help is always needed and it ensures a breadth of perspective.

One of my priorities in addition to normal president duties is to develop personal relationships with members and affiliates. If you have an event, function, member meeting, etc. that you would like me to attend, just let me know. My email address is kareisme@earthlink.net.

— Karen H. Henry, JD, NAMI California Board President
CONGRESS TAKES ACTION ON MENTAL HEALTH PARITY — FINALLY

Something interesting happened on the way to the $700 billion financial bailout measure in Congress: a stalled mental health parity act was added to the package. The action was described as "just a bit of Congressional housekeeping," but to a lot of us it was a milestone.

The new law ensures that group health plans do not charge higher co-payments, coinsurance, or deductibles for mental health and substance abuse disorders than they do for medical and surgical benefits.

The new measure is the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, which permanently authorizes and expands the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996. The new law ensures that group health plans do not charge higher co-payments, coinsurance, or deductibles for mental health and substance abuse disorders than they do for medical and surgical benefits.

The law takes effect on January 1, 2010. It does not preempt state parity laws with more stringent requirements — which means California's laws on parity will remain in effect. The main impact in this state is to expand parity to all employers — specifically, to large "self-funded" employers, those that cover financial costs themselves and contract with an insurer or health maintenance organization (HMO) to manage the benefits. These employers are regulated only by federal law.

Importantly, the new federal law does not require group health plans to provide mental health coverage. However, if a plan does offer mental health coverage, then this legislation requires:

- that the plan or coverage ensure that any financial requirements applied to mental health and substance use are no more restrictive or costly than the financial requirements applied to the predominant requirement on comparable medical and surgical benefits that the plan covers. Financial requirements include deductibles, co-payments, coinsurance, and out-of-pocket expenses.

- that the plan or coverage ensure that any treatment limitations applied to mental health and substance use disorders are no more restrictive than the treatment limitations applied to the predominant limitation on comparable medical and surgical benefits that the plan covers. Treatment limitations include caps on the frequency or number of visits, limits on days of coverage, or other similar limits on the scope and duration of treatment.

- that if the plan or coverage offers out-of-network benefits for medical and surgical benefits under the plan, then it must also offer coverage for out-of-network benefits for mental health and substance use disorders on similar terms and conditions.

The federal law does not apply to employers with fewer than 50 employees, or to individual plans. But state laws do, and with passage of the federal parity law we can look forward to attempts to increase the impact of the state laws.

Senators Wellstone and Domenici wrote the first parity law. Senator Wellstone, whose brother was severely mentally ill, was killed in a 2002 plane crash; since then, his son, David, has lobbied for an expanded law. Senator Domenici has a daughter with schizophrenia. Others leading the effort to expand the act were Senator Edward Kennedy and his son, Rhode Island Congressman Patrick Kennedy; the younger Kennedy has been treated for depression and substance abuse.

Implementing this measure, like most federal laws, will depend on regulations and judicial interpretations; so it will be a while before we feel its total impact. But it is a big step forward. And long overdue.

— Grace McAndrews, NAMI California Executive Director
“Celebrating Recovery” Conference (Continued from page 1)

There was a session on interviewing and screening teachers and mentors for our NAMI Signature programs, which gave the affiliates suggestions on how to support volunteers and to ensure the continued success of our programs. We had a session on Directors and Officers Liability Insurance, which is recommended for all non-profit organizations.

We had a discussion on MHSA and the emerging Two Tier System, which gave us county and state perspectives on this issue. Suggestions from the audience were welcomed and there were many comments — not surprising, given the large size of our state and the many challenges in respective areas.

We had an informative session on how to obtain MHSA funds from local Mental Health Departments to fund affiliate programs. There was a sample proposal for "NAMI Provider Education" in Ventura County, sample proposals from NAMI San Diego which included a Mental Health Family Education proposal, and a workforce, Education and Training/Consumer/Family Academy/Tay/Adult/ Older Adult Peer and Family Education proposal. NAMI Sonoma County also provided a sample proposal for MHSA funding for NAMI programs. There also was a grant application for Peer to Peer Mental Health Recovery Education provided by NAMI San Luis Obispo County, which was awarded to them by that county's Mental Health Department. NAMI San Diego provided a set of sample by-laws which are an excellent example to our NAMI organization. There was information on the 2008 Internal Revenue Service 990 changes along with an IRS 990 checklist. These are best practices and beneficial to have from an operational standpoint.

All of the NAMI California Board of Directors were present to talk about the various Committees they are working on, and they gave reports on the Committee Priority Goals. This Leadership Institute occurs the day before the Conference and is for the Affiliate Presidents and Executive Directors. If you are able to attend, we encourage you to do so. The Committee asked for affiliate input in the months preceding the Conference, and many of you had important suggestions. Thank you for helping to make this a successful day; we encourage you to continue giving us your ideas to help strengthen future workshops.

The theme of the Conference itself was "Celebrating Recovery." One of the main speakers was Lori Ashcraft, PhD. Her vision for the future is to continue teaching recovery principles and practices, assuring people that they can recover. She has developed curriculum to help consumers move beyond recovery by finding their own purpose, making their unique contribution, and using their experiences to help others grow.

The Conference also heard speakers like Judge Mary C. Morgan of the San Francisco Superior Court. She had previously served as Supervising Judge of the Criminal Division, which includes a comprehensive mental health court for all criminal cases. She is heavily involved in judicial education programs and is the recipient of the 2008 Council on Mentally Ill Offenders 2008 "Best Practices" Award.

Comedian Brian Wetzel used his sense of humor and experiences to take us on a journey of lots of laughter, painful truth and hope. We appreciate Brian's ability to have a wonderful sense of humor in his journey with mental illness.

We said goodbye to Ralph E. Nelson, Jr., MD, who was our President for 3 years. The Board had its meeting the following Sunday after the Conference and Karen H. Henry, JD, was elected President; she is already doing an incredible job.

The Conference had many wonderful workshops and speakers and the membership gave the Conference very good reviews. We want to hear about what you want at the next Conference, so please let us know when the surveys are sent out. Or just send an email to the office and we will take all suggestions into consideration. Thank you to our speakers and presenters for making this such an informative Conference.

We look forward to seeing you at next year’s Conference at the Torrance Marriott, August 21-22. We appreciate all that you do for families and consumers in our State.

— Brenda Scott, NAMI California First Vice President
Our Criminal Justice Projects are Moving Ahead – but More Volunteers are Always Welcome

Your NAMI California Criminal Justice Committee has been hard at work. We have several projects going at the same time and I would like to summarize them for you.

In the fall of 2003, an Inmate Medication Information Form was introduced into the Los Angeles County Jail System. It was posted on the Los Angeles Sheriff’s website in conjunction with a guide entitled “My Family Member Has Been Arrested. What Do I Do?” It is also available in the public waiting rooms of the county jail to provide access for all persons, including those without online capability. Sheriff Deputies have found that using this form reduces conflicts with the public at the front desk.

Clinicians working inside the jail find previous treatment history an extremely helpful tool. NAMI California believes the policy of accepting medical and psychiatric information from families should be standard practice in every county jail in California.

This form enables family members to provide clinicians working inside the jail with an inmate’s family, psychiatrist, and physician contact information, psychiatric diagnosis, medication information, and details regarding safety and other medical problems. Several of California’s largest jails have implemented use of this form and adapted the guide for their county with the help of NAMI members across the state. Our goal is to provide access to every available form in the state as part of our NAMI California Website Project.

For the past year, I have submitted both the guide and the form to various state organizations in an attempt to expand its usage statewide. Earlier in the year, both were reviewed by the California State Sheriffs Association Board of Directors. Recently, our office emailed every jail clinical supervisor in the state regarding our project and our office followed up with a personal phone call. I also submitted it to the California Mental Health Directors Association (CMHDA) for review and received positive feedback.

This collaborative, top-down approach has provided results and there are several counties working on their adaptations. Many counties have expressed interest, but the time has come to coordinate our advocacy together. If you want this form used in your county, a personal meeting will be the necessary catalyst in expanding this program to every jail in California.

I suggest you set up a meeting with your local Sheriff, Correctional Supervisor, and Jail Mental Health Supervisor. These meetings also serve to create long-lasting, positive relationships with both clinical and law enforcement officials that will serve our members well for many years. Call the NAMI California office at 916-567-0163 and ask for Heidi Grether. She can provide you with an initial contact name for your county. I am happy to discuss this project with any interested affiliates and offer my assistance. I can be reached at mgale510@aol.com. Additionally, I have contacted the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation on this same subject. As of this writing, they are considering pilots in two reception prisons. Stay tuned.

Thanks to all of the dedicated NAMI members who volunteered for our Criminal Justice Advisory Pool. Ten dedicated individuals from the pool have volunteered their time to search for content for our NAMI California Criminal Justice Website Project. Over the next year we hope to create a “one-stop shopping” resource center for practical information regarding persons with serious mental illness and their families who are coping with criminal justice challenges.

The Website Project will post information under categories such as Jails, Prisons, State Hospitals, Glossary of Legal Terms, Statutes, and Crisis Resources. The first submissions of their work will be going up on our site in the near future.

NAMI California would also like to express its gratitude to AstraZeneca and special individual donors for making this work possible. And there is always room for more volunteers! If you would like to join our Advisory Pool, please contact Heidi at heidi.grether@namicalifornia.org for an application.

Thanks for all that you do, NAMI!

– Mark Gale, NAMI California Second Vice President & Chair, Criminal Justice Committee
A dismal legislative session has ended. A number of bills never made it through the committee process, and the Governor vetoed more bills than he signed. Adding to this was the inability of the Legislature and the Governor to reach agreement on a budget. The result was 80-plus days of negotiations and reductions in programs affecting our population, such as the COLA increases for those on SSI and decreases in provider reimbursement. It has been very clear that withholding COLA increases dramatically and adversely affects those on SSI, and that reducing provider reimbursement reduces access to services.

In sum, our state government did not do well by those who most need their aid.

Your NAMI California Government Affairs Committee spent numerous hours analyzing bills submitted in the state Assembly and Senate, preparing position papers, discussing bills with staff of legislators, and testifying for or against certain bills. The Governor, however, vetoed any bills he believed would result in cost increases.

Some of the most significant bills:

- **AB 1945**, designed to stop post-claims underwriting affecting insurance coverage, supported by NAMI California but vetoed by the Governor.

- **SB 1429**, allowing psychologists to prescribe psychotropic drugs, which was opposed by NAMI California and did not get out of the committee.

- **AB 2614**, eliminating current provisions that required family members to pay cost of state hospitalizations, which failed to pass.

- **SB 1553**, designed to move towards implementation of parity, supported by NAMI California and signed into law.

A bill of particular interest was **SB 1651** which would have provided further implementation of mental health courts. This bill, unfortunately, did not make it out of the legislative committees.

The NAMI California Government Affairs Committee is an essential part of your state organization which is dedicated to legislative advocacy. This year’s Committee will be chaired by Frances Tibbets and vice-chaired by Mark Gale, NAMI California Board members.

New bills will be submitted starting in December, and at least 4000 bills are expected to be introduced. If you are interested in becoming part of the Government Affairs Committee, please contact the NAMI California office. Many committee members contribute their time in addition to extensive time spent on their local affiliate’s activities. If you willing to participate, please let us know.

— Karen H. Henry, JD  
NAMI California President & Chair,  
Government Affairs Committee
Community Foundations — an Important Resource for Affiliates

The Ventura County Executive Board became aware of the Ventura County Community Foundation (VCCF) roughly four years ago. It was amazing to me that none of us knew much, if anything, about this organization before.

Our President at the time, Ratan Bhavnani, and I began attending free quarterly luncheons hosted by VCCF. The topics that drew us to these luncheons were issues we were often facing — How to Enlist and Choose New Board Members, How to Fundraise, How to Network Your Non Profit Organization, just to name a few.

VCCF has classes on a regular basis on everything from computer technology to grant writing. The classes are either free or extremely reasonable, and most helpful. I personally try to take advantage of this education at all opportunities.

VCCF is a big fan of NAMI Ventura and really pleased with the work we are doing in our community for mentally ill individuals and their families. We had applied for a grant for criminal justice education money from them year before last, under their Social Justice Initiative, but we didn't receive it. Then last spring they called and said they again had grant money under a Mental Health Initiative, and would like to see us apply for these funds. We applied for and received this grant.

I wrote up and administered a 15-part, 8-hour class on mental illness from the family perspective for the criminal justice system. It was aimed at lawyers, bailiffs, judges and basically anyone who works with mentally ill folks and doesn't have time to take our 30-hour Provider Education Class. After applying to the State Bar, we received approval to give lawyers 8 MCLEs, or continuing education credits.

With the VCCF money, we trained a team of paid teachers; one family member, one consumer and one attorney. We taught our first class in June and another in September. So far the comments about the class are extremely positive. As a result, two other counties have asked for teacher training on this course.

Attending our recent class was the Director of the Ventura County Health Care Agency, which oversees our Mental Health Department. He liked the program so much that he wants us to teach it to all of his new intern and resident physicians rotating through the hospital system in the county. He is going to apply for MHSA monies to support this effort.

In conjunction with Pepperdine University, VCCF has helped us develop a 3-year strategic plan to grow our affiliate. Our next project is to partner with VCCF to develop an Endowment Fund as part of our funding initiatives.

The bottom line is that we could have never accomplished this without the funds from our local community foundation. There are community foundations or non profit resources in just about every county in California. Simply "Google" California community foundations and non profit resources. You should be able to find one in your area. I urge you to take advantage of these valuable resources. You just might be able to get criminal justice education grant money to bring this program or others to your county.

— By Candace Jackson, NAMI California Board Secretary

---

NAMI California’s Email Distribution List

NAMI California’s global e-mail distribution list provides members with the latest information from the NAMI California office. Signing up is easy! Please send your name and e-mail address to: advocacy@namicalifornia.org to be included.

---

NAMI California Vehicle Donation Program

Are you thinking of selling or trading in that unwanted car, truck, boat or RV? Why not donate it to NAMI California instead?

Your support will help NAMI California sustain its programs, and will be greatly appreciated.

To donate a car, truck, boat or RV, call the NAMI California office at (916) 567-0163 or log on to www.donateacar.com and follow the instructions.
A Unique Way to Celebrate an Anniversary

Theodora Kinder and George Murray celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary from 1957 to 2007, with a $500 purchase of a leaf on our Tree of Tribute. Thank you very much for your gift.

If you have any questions about the Tree of Tribute, please call Catherine Isidro, NAMI California (916) 567-0163.

Submission Requests: NAMI California wants to know what is going on in your affiliate, program, or your perspective on the mental health community. The Connection is making a continuous request to all recipients of this newsletter for submissions. Entries must be between 250 and 500 words and may be edited for length and content.

Please send submissions to catherine.isidro@namicalifornia.org by Tuesday, December 16, 2008, for the next newsletter.