

NAMI California Youth Mental Health Advocacy Toolkit

Contents

Educate yourself and your community	3
• NAMI Family and Community Education Programs.....	3
• NAMI School Programs.....	4
• Bring Others into the Movement	5
• Why you should bring NAMI On Campus High School (NCHS) to your school.....	5
• How to get started.....	5
Creating a Stigma Free Campus	7
• Talking to your peers and teachers.....	7
• Talking with your school administration.....	7
• Petitioning for more mental health resources on campus.....	8
Learn How to Tell Your Story	9
• 5 Parts on how to tell your story.....	9
Expanding your reach to local policy makers	10
• Sending a Letter to Congressional Representatives.....	10
• Calling Decision Makers.....	10
• Meeting with Representatives.....	11

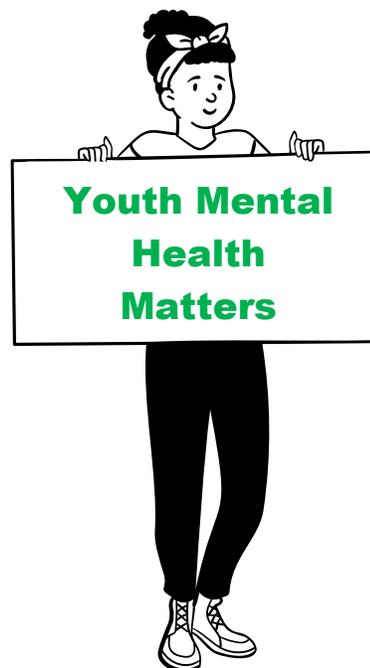
Welcome,

NAMI California is a strong believer in providing a seat at the table for young mental health advocates to voice their views and opinions on their mental health and wellness needs. We have put together this toolkit to provide a guide for youth to navigate how to advocate in their communities and beyond.

Our mission: NAMI California is a grassroots organization of families and individuals whose lives have been affected by serious mental illness. We advocate for lives of quality and respect, without discrimination and stigma, for all our constituents. We provide leadership in advocacy, legislation, policy development, education and support throughout California.

Throughout this toolkit you will learn:

- How to collaborate with your local NAMI Affiliate who can provide educational classes and presentations to your schools and community
- How to bring NAMI On Campus High School to your club to gather like-minded young advocates together to create a stigma free campus and awareness to the importance of mental health and wellness
- How to communicate to policy makers to make them aware of youth mental health needs in education and/or services



Educate yourself and your community

There are many resources available to you in your community and statewide. The first step to becoming a mental health advocate is to educate yourself. You can learn so much from NAMI programs and resources.

Here are a few places to start:

- [Learn about different mental health conditions](#)
- [Learn about facts and statistics relating to mental health](#)
- [Find out what resources are available to youth and families](#)

Once you learn more about mental health, it's time to educate others. There are many ways you can do this. NAMI California's local NAMI Affiliates provide classes and presentations that will educate your community on the importance of mental health and the effects of stigma. Talk with your local NAMI Affiliate to see how you can get involved with their programs.

NAMI Family and Community Education Programs

NAMI Family to Family

A free, 8-week course for families, partners, and friends of individuals with serious mental illness taught by more than 3,500 trained NAMI family members and caregivers of individuals living with mental illness. The course addresses the emotional responses families have to the reality of mental illness: many family members describe their experience in the program as life changing. It is also an evidence-based program. The Spanish version is called De Familia a Familia.

NAMI Basics

A free, six-week, peer-directed education program developed specifically for parents and other family caregivers of children and adolescents who have either been diagnosed with serious mental illness/serious emotional disturbance or are experiencing symptoms but have not yet been diagnosed.

NAMI In Our Own Voice

A unique public education program in which two trained speakers share compelling personal stories about living with mental illness and achieving recovery. IOOV presentations are given to peer groups, students, law enforcement officials, educators, providers, faith community members, politicians, professionals, inmates, and civic groups as well as the general public. These presentations offer insight into the hope and recovery possible for people living with mental illness.

NAMI CA Mental Health 101

A 60-to-90-minute presentation program designed for diverse audiences for use with general audiences and targeted attention to cultural responsiveness. The program is devoted to giving individuals an opportunity to learn about mental illness through an informative presentation, short videos, and personal testimonies that represent a variety of cultures, beliefs, and values. Participants will learn symptoms and indicators of mental illness and are given ideas about how to help themselves, friends, or family members who may be in need of support through the lens of their own cultural experience.

NAMI School Education Programs

NAMI On Campus High School

NAMI On Campus High School (NCHS) Clubs are student-led clubs that raise mental health awareness and reduce stigma on campus through peer-led activities and education. Student Leaders will be empowered with toolkits, materials, templates, and resources to make running the club a fun and educational process. The Club is open to all students – those with mental health conditions, those with family members with a condition, or students who are interested in the field or in advocacy. It is not a support or therapy group.

NAMI Ending the Silence

A is a free, 50-minute presentation designed to give students an opportunity to learn about mental illness through an informative PowerPoint and short videos. Through the presentation, students learn symptoms and indicators of mental illness and are given ideas about how to help themselves, friends, or family members who may be in need of support. Additionally, the presentation includes personal testimony from a young adult living with a mental health condition about their journey to recovery. NAMI Ending the Silence is available in three different versions for students, teachers, or family members.

Bring Others into the Movement

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much”

- Hellen Keller

Educating others is a large part of advocating for mental health. One way you can bring others into the movement is by creating a NAMI On Campus High School Club (NCHS) at your high school.



NAMI On Campus High School (NCHS) Clubs are student-led clubs that raise mental health awareness and reduce stigma on campus through peer-led activities and education. Student Leaders will be empowered with toolkits, materials, templates, and resources to make running the club a fun and educational process. The Club is open to all students – those with mental health conditions, those with family members with a condition, or students who are interested in the field or in advocacy. It is not a support or therapy group.

The purpose of NCHS Clubs is to:

- Be supportive of students who are living with mental illness
- Provide information on school and community resources
- Encourage people to recognize early signs of mental illness
- Encourage students who are having mental health issues to get help
- Work to end the stigma that surrounds mental illness
- Create an inclusive, safe, and supportive school environment
- Let students know there is help available if they need it

NCHS has many benefits for both students and faculty!

- **Benefits to students** of having NCHS Clubs on their campus can bring awareness of mental health and wellness to their school campus while learning about various mental health conditions. Working together with teachers, administration, and their peers to reduce stigma and discrimination against mental illness. Students will develop leadership skills by running meetings, preparing agendas, promoting campus activities, and events. Creating a safe, supportive school environment for students with mental health conditions or who have family or friends with mental health conditions
- **Benefits to faculty** of having NCHS Clubs on campus are the opportunities to gain access to a network of volunteers and resources, on a national and local level, to help with projects, classroom presentations and education regarding mental health awareness. Faculty will have access to the full NCHS curriculum and manuals along with having personal contacts at NAMI who can help and provide direction with additional mental health resources. Creating a safe, supportive school environment for students with mental health conditions or who have family or friends with mental health conditions.

To bring NCHS to your high school campus, follow these steps:

Step 1: Click here to download the [NCHS Information Packet](#)

Step 2: Once you've reviewed the NCHS Info Packet, complete the [Online Interest Form](#) to let NAMI CA know you would like to form a club!

Step 3: NAMI CA will receive your completed Interest Form and connect you to your local affiliate. Clubs must attend an Orientation Webinar prior to submitting their Online Club Application.

Things needed to before completing the Online Application

- A group of at least 4 students (with at least 50% being in class levels besides senior)
- An adult Advisor that is committed to helping lead the club, is comfortable talking about mental health and is on-campus during school hours
- The approval of your school principal, local NAMI Affiliate (we will help connect you during this process)
- Register for NCHS Training- you can attend after applying
- Confirmation that your school has distributed the Parent Mental Health Awareness Letter (enclosed in the Info Packet)

Step 4: Once your Online Club Application is completed, then send a notification when a club has been approved and provides Advisor and Student Manuals.

Step 5: After you have attended NCHS Training, we will send you the NCHS Certificate recognizing your club as an official NCHS Club!

Once you have established your club, you can recruit more people from your school to participate in activities from the provided NCHS Activity Guide as well as develop your own educational and fun activities that others will enjoy!

Creating a Stigma Free Campus

A good place to start creating less stigma in your community is your school. There are many different ways you can begin educating your campus. You could begin educating your friends and peers through casual conversations, ask your school administration if you could bring a presenter to talk about mental health, or you could start a NCHS Club to create a space on campus where you can openly talk about mental health and teach others.

Talking to Your Peers and Teachers

The easiest place to start talking about mental health are those you see every day. People may be reluctant to open up to the conversation or have misinformation that prevents them from wanting to listen. NCHS helps create a stigma free campus among students and teachers by bringing awareness to what stigma is, different types of stigma, learning ways to speak out against stigma, and getting to know others with their own personal experiences with mental health. Clubs are provided with curriculum and guidance from local affiliates that support their campus with resources. We provide materials that are centered about the language we use when talking about mental health relating to reduction of stigma. Whether you have an established club or not, you can reach out to your local NAMI Affiliate to send over [Ending the Silence](#) (ETS) Presenters. ETS is a great way to get the conversation started and make more people aware of the importance of managing one mental health and wellness. The great thing about this presentation is that you can request a presentation based on your audience (students, teachers, or family members).

NCHS Clubs can do more than presentation, they put on activities and events throughout the school year to promote their club and educate their campus.

NCHS Clubs' Ideas and Examples of Hosted Events:

- Mental Health Trivia
- Positive Affirmations on the Sidewalk
- Stress Reduction Activities- painting, stress ball making, meditation
- Creating a relaxing or fun song playlist
- Talking about Healthy v. Toxic Relationships
- Discussing Mental Health and Cultural Stigma

Talking with Your School Administration

Your school administration is a great place to implement more mental health support and education on campus. Some schools are already set up with school counselors or wellness centers, but for other there may be a need for this. It is important to educate your administration on how this will best benefit the students' productivity and wellness. If your teachers haven't already, you can also ask you administration to bring in more training for faculty to help support student mental health and wellness.

Here are some programs you can recommend to your administration:

- [Youth Mental Health First Aid](#)
- [LivingWorks Start](#)

Petitioning for More Mental Health Resources on Campus

Sometimes you will need more to convince and educate your administration of the importance of having more resources available on campus. Creating a petition backed by your peers and teachers is a great way to be heard by your school administration. Here are some tips to get you started:

- A petition should begin with a request, with well researched reasons for making this request, it should include links with documentation and facts that support the petition. You can pull national statistics or local statistics to back your claims.
- The petition should also be logical and written clearly to better understand the request. Have some friends help you outline what you want to say.
- The Call for Action should describe the situation clearly, including supportive research. Following should be the request, what is the need and why it is necessary.
- Do your best to not clutter your petition with information that is not relevant to the essential message to the main message.
- Make sure to proofread your work and have someone review before you make it public.
- Promote your petition amongst peers, staff, and local community leaders.

Learn How to Tell Your Story

Telling Your Story is an opportunity to share your experiences and help others through your life experiences. Telling your story can be scary and intimidating, so it is important that you practice and are fully ready to share your personal experience with others. Whether you had an experience of support and knowledge or an experience of confusion and lack of education, every story brings something different. When you feel comfortable to share your story, it's a great way to provide insight into why it is important to talk about mental health. You can share your story when educating school staff, peers, and policy makers.

It is important when sharing your story to use "I" statements so that participants understand and recognize that you are sharing your experience and beliefs. When crafting your story consider your listeners by making your story relatable. While it is important to keep the attention of your audience, make sure you take care of yourself and do not share anything that makes you feel uncomfortable or may cause re-traumatization or trigger additional issues for you. If you do start to feel triggered or overwhelmed when telling your story, it is okay to take a pause or switch gears and ask for support from someone you trust.

Some stories may include topics of suicide. This can be difficult to talk about if you were the person who considered taking their life, or the loved one of someone who considered this or when through with it. When speaking about suicide, discuss actions that people can take to seek help along with reminding them that suicide is preventable and that talk about suicide should always be taken seriously. Acknowledge negative coping methods but relate them to the need to move into recovery. When talking about suicide, trauma, or violence stay away from too many details.

When presenting your story use your time and words, wisely. You may have to change your story delivery based on the situation; who are you talking to and how long do you have?

Now you may be wondering, what do I say in my story? How do I know what is important and what is not necessary? Here are the 5 parts of telling your story based on how we prep our Mental Health 101 presenters:

Five Parts on How to Tell Your Story

1. Introduce yourself and share something about yourself unrelated to mental health but connected to the community you are sharing your story with.
2. Then share your first experience with mental illness, your first signs, and how it impacted you and those around you. You want the audience to have an idea of what it is like to have live with a mental health condition. Or you may be sharing your story in context of a loved one struggling with a mental health condition and will share how that impacted you. Depending on your audience you can share information on what it is like in the context of your generation, culture, customs, beliefs, and language.



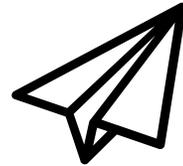
3. If you are sharing as someone with lived experience meaning you are the one who personally struggled with a mental health condition, you will discuss your mental health condition. Then, you will share the journey you went through to get to a place of accepting your mental health condition along with who supported you. If you are sharing as a loved one or relative of someone who has a mental health condition, you will discuss the mental their mental health condition. Then talk about the journey you went through while supporting your loved one to get to a place of acceptance along with the different support that was provided to you and your loved one.
4. After sharing your experience and journey of acceptance you will then share your journey of healing and recovery. It is important to share with the audience that there is life after being diagnosed, this is important for the listener to hear and understand. And if you are sharing your loved one's experience it is important to share your role and the impact on your loved one's journey to healing and recovery. It is important to note that everyone's recovery looks different and with mental health, it is a continuous recovery that may change over time.
5. After sharing your experiences as either the person with a mental health condition or supporting someone you love with a mental health condition you will then close with the reason to why telling your story is important to you and what it means to you. If others share that they can relate to your story personally consider encouraging them to share their story and share ideas on how they can help be an advocate in their own communities.

Expanding your reach to local policy makers

Getting involved in policy can sound intimidating, but policy makers are people too. They want to hear from people about what is important to the community and how they can better serve their constituents. By contacting representatives, you are providing a voice to others in your area who do not have the time or ability to speak up on important issues.

Sending a letter to Congressional Representatives

Sending a letter to Congressional Representatives can be overwhelming and may leave you feeling hopeless. Luckily, there are some ways to ensure that your voice is heard and that will help you get the attention of your local congressional representatives. Writing a letter or making a phone call to the district office (State) is more effective than attempting to directly contact anybody in Washington D.C.



Here are some tips to format your letter:

- Be courteous and respectful
- Say why you are writing and who you are. Include your background or credentials and where you are from. It also doesn't hurt to mention if you voted for or donated to them. If you want a response, you must include your name and address, even when using email.
- Provide more detail. State the facts and avoid using too much emotion to address your points. Provide specific rather than general information about how the topic affects you and others. If a certain bill is involved, cite the correct title or number whenever possible.
- Close by requesting the action you want to be taken. It might be a vote for or against a bill, a change in general policy, or some other action, but be specific. The direct you are the easier it is for them to get an idea of how they can address your issue.
- **Always proofread your letter before sending it**
 - Consider having a friend read it for anything you might have missed

A couple more tremendous ways to connect with your representatives include participating in town hall meetings and local advocacy groups. Inviting local staffers to show up at these events will give you the chance to speak with staff who are directly involved with the work that goes on within Congress. Going the extra mile and attending these events may present mutually beneficial opportunities for you and staff members to educate one another and amplify the voices of those who need to be heard.

What to do when calling a decision maker

There are many key strategies when it comes to calling a decision maker. When encountering a decision maker, being polite and assumptive is an incredibly powerful technique. For instance, saying “please” can come off as a request but saying “thank you” will compel the listener to act. Providing less information in a message can create a stronger message to the sender. Mastering the art of saying fewer words can give the speaker more clarity of your message. Giving less information is not the only effective way to deliver a strong message across but having a downward inflection in your voice makes you sound confident. Turning statements into a question implies more of an invite for objections or

follow up comments. Using these techniques can be very constructive and effective, but it's important to practice with a friend or colleague to improve it further.

Meeting with Representatives

The most effective way to connect with members of congress or their staff is face-to-face interactions. Individuals can arrange personal meetings with representatives throughout the year. Firstly, identify your local representative based on your zip code and check for websites or office numbers to make an appointment. Some do walk-in meetings, but the most convenient is to schedule an appointment.

To prepare for the meeting, plan to discuss multiple issues and learn everything you can about them, for example, opposition, statistics, key points to arguments, etc. It's important to bring your materials, such as, supporting handouts, charts, and graphics for the staff members to review.

Day of the meeting, it's recommended to arrive 10 minutes early and dress conservatively and professionally. Introducing yourself is extremely important because it impacts how others perceive you and the relationship you'll later have with them. After introductions, complement them on anything they've done recently to warm them up.

There are some general tips when focusing on the issues that you are addressing to your local congressional district, such as, being direct, be prepared to answer questions, focusing on local communities and populations, and standing up for your argument by explaining the positives of your standpoint.

After the meeting, I plan on sending a follow-up thank you letter for taking the time to be heard and provide any additional information on your issue. There are several opportunities to voice your opinions through Town Hall Meetings or other local events, such as, connecting with your local NAMI affiliate about volunteer opportunities.

Thank you to those who helped make this Toolkit possible!

- Green Ribbon Club founders, staff, volunteers, and clubs for providing your research and materials that helped NAMI CA develop this toolkit.
- NAMI California Programs Team for your help in the development of this toolkit

Sources:

Longley, Robert. "How to Write Effective Letters to Your Congressman or Senator." ThoughtCo, ThoughtCo, 2 Oct. 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/write-effective-letters-to-congress-3322301>.

Longley, Robert. "How to Meet Your Members of Congress Face-to-Face." ThoughtCo, ThoughtCo, 4 May 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/meeting-with-your-members-of-congress-3322076>.

"How to Write a Petition." GoPetition, <https://www.gopetition.com/info/how-to-write-a-petition>

Ingham, Gavin. "Cold Calling Tips For Getting Through To The Decision Maker." Gavin Ingham, September 21, 2007, <https://www.gaviningham.com/cold-calling-tips-for-getting-through-to-the-decision-maker/>

Amatulli, Jenna. "Here's How To Make Sure Congress Hears You." HuffPost, November 16, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/contacting-your-congressional-representative_n_582a0965e4b060adb56f8e95