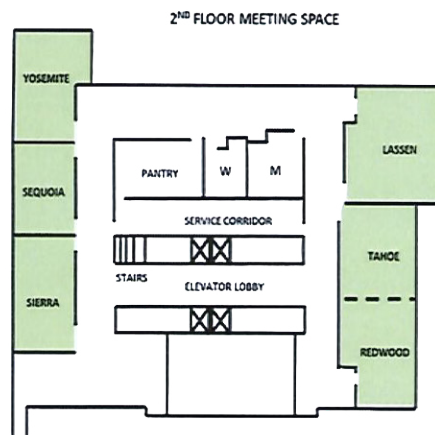
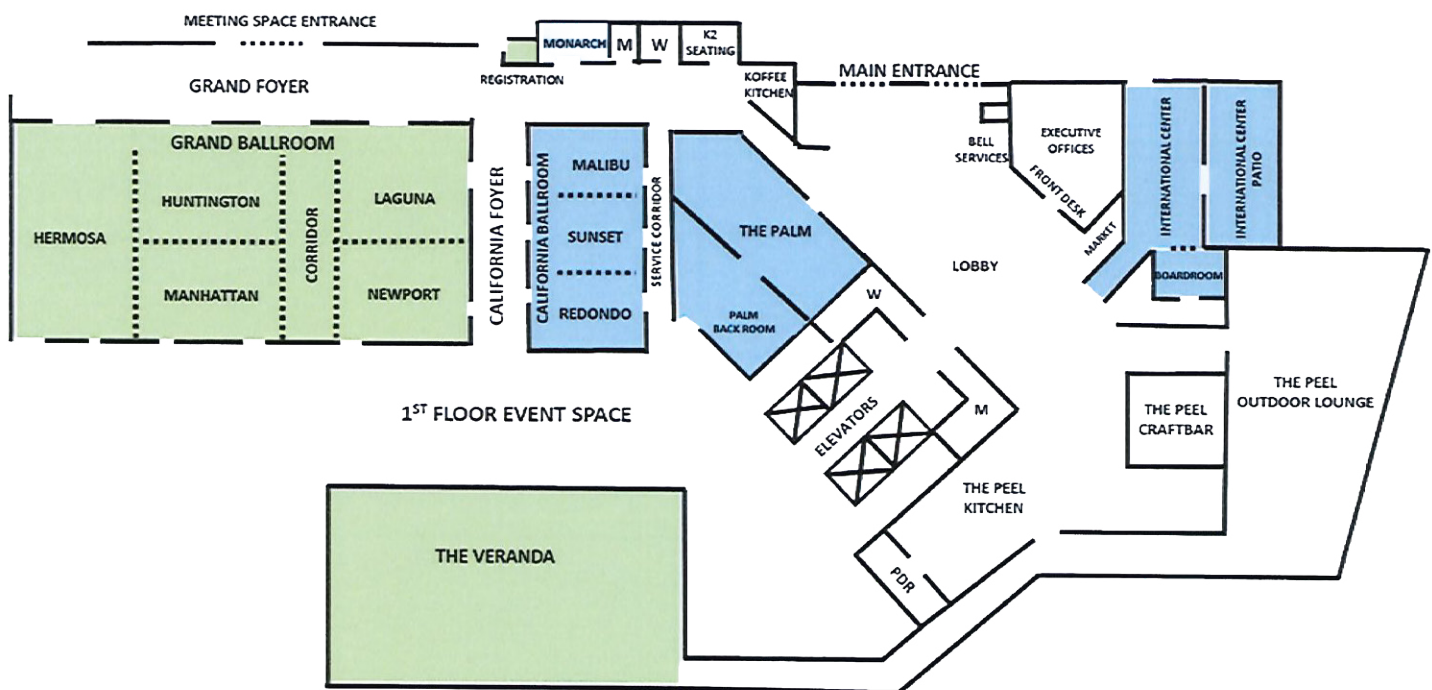




2026 *Conference*

HOTEL FERA

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2026 *Conference*

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FROM OUR CEO

On behalf of the entire NAMI California team, I would like to thank you for being here at the 2026 NAMI California Annual Conference.

Reflecting on this past year, the challenges we all have faced, the wins we have celebrated, one word keeps coming to the forefront for me. Change.

Change can be difficult, but as we all know, it is inevitable. Change is also necessary to create a better behavioral health system for everyone impacted by mental illness. Change can be necessary to lead to something brighter for us.

Recently, the state made the shift from the 20-year-old Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) to the Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA). For many years, it had been common knowledge that the MHSA was sorely outdated. It was allowing programs that were seen as ineffective to retain funding that often never served the individuals and families the money was allocated for because we were seen as too "high need." This shift was difficult, scary, and at times confusing for individuals and organizations around the state. It meant we all had to take a step back, evaluate our work, and advocate for funding. As the implementation of BHSA moves forward, we are vigilantly advocating for the voter voice to remain honored and for funds to be used as intended.

Like many organizations, NAMI California faced funding threats this year. We got to work and fought for what we knew was important and needed for families and individuals impacted by mental illness in every county. NAMI won't ever back down from a challenge, and we won't ever allow the work we all do to be forgotten.

Throughout this year, we have seen changes in crisis response around California, leading to opportunities to advocate for a better system ahead. Later this year, we will have a change in our Administration as we vote for a new Governor. NAMI California is working to be at the center of these changes as true system transformation is right in front of us. Throughout shifts, we must ensure the NAMI voice remains consistent and loud. We cannot do this without families, whose perspectives and experiences have always been integral to successful reform.

We - everyone here at conference, everyone part of the NAMI family - are the change. We are at the forefront of advocacy for a better behavioral health system, ensuring the NAMI voice is consistent, loud, and productive. We couldn't do what we do without each and every one of you continuing to engage and grow with us. We look forward to continuing to lead the change, alongside you all. Thank you for being here.

Jessica Wilson

Jessica Wilson, MPA/HS
Chief Executive Officer
NAMI California

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2026-2027

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



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CONFERENCE OPENING HOURS & LOCATIONS

Check-In and Registration Desk

MALIBU ROOM

Early Check-In and Registration

Wednesday, October 7

3:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Check-In and Registration

Thursday, October 8

8:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Friday, October 9

8:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Exhibitors Area

GRAND BALLROOM FOYER

Open Hours

Thursday, October 8

8:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Friday, October 9

8:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Support Groups

SUNSET ROOM

Sesión en español

Thursday, October 8

4:50 PM – 5:50 PM

REDONDO ROOM

Family Support Group

Thursday, October 8

4:50 PM – 5:50 PM

Wellness Room

SEQUOIA ROOM

Reading Materials | Quiet Space | Art & Crafts

Thursday, October 8

8:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Friday, October 9

8:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Light Breakfast

CALIFORNIA FOYER

Thursday, October 8

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM

Friday, October 9

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM

Networking Mixer

VERANDA

Thursday, October 8

4:05 PM – 5:30 PM

Snack Break

GRAND BALLROOM FOYER

Friday, October 9

2:30 PM – 3:00 PM

Lunch and Dinner will not be provided on October 8 or October 9. Attendees are encouraged to dine at the host hotel restaurant and coffee station. Show your name badge to receive a discount on your meal.

For additional dining options, please contact the hotel concierge or www.cityoforange.org/our-city/visitor-information

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AT-A-GLANCE CONFERENCE AGENDA

Thursday, October 8 - Conference Day 1

8:00 AM	Check-In and Registration Opens
8:00 AM – 9:00 AM	Light Breakfast
9:00 AM – 10:20 AM	General Session
	Land Acknowledgement and Cultural Performance – RedBoys Productions
	Opening Maria Case, Founder & CEO, Kompashion, Mistress of Ceremonies
	Welcome Steve Pitman, President, NAMI Orange County
	CEO Remarks Jessica Wilson, MPA/HS, CEO, NAMI California
	Keynote Dan H. Gillison, Jr., CEO, NAMI
10:30 AM – 11:30 AM	Plenary Sessions
11:30 AM – 12:45 PM	Lunch (on your own)
12:50 PM – 1:50 PM	Afternoon Workshops 1
2:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Afternoon Workshops 2
3:05 PM – 4:05 PM	Afternoon Workshops 3
4:05 PM – 5:30 PM	Networking Mixer
4:50 PM – 5:50 PM	Family Support Groups (English and en español)
5:30 PM – 6:40 PM	Dinner (on your own)
6:45 PM – 8:45 PM	Film Screening, <i>Prodigal Daughter/ Hija Pródiga</i> – 90 minutes Post – Screening Q & A to follow On-Stage Host: Tricia Creason – Valencia, CEO – Tricia Speaks! Featured Speaker: Mabel Valdiviezo, Director, Producer, Editor – <i>Prodigal Daughter/ Hija Pródiga</i>

Friday, October 9 - Conference Day 2

8:00 AM	Check-In and Registration Opens
8:00 AM	Light Breakfast
9:00 AM – 10:00 AM	General Session
	Welcome Maria Case, Founder & CEO, Kompashion, Mistress of Ceremonies
	Remarks Dr. Robert McCarron, Vice President, NAMI California Board of Directors
	Keynote Gary Tsai, MD, Sr. VP and Chief Medical Officer, Telecare Corporation, NAMI California Board of Directors
10:30 AM – 12:40 PM	Plenary Sessions* and Morning Workshops
12:40 PM – 1:25 PM	Lunch (on your own)
1:30 PM – 2:30 PM	Afternoon Workshops
2:30 PM – 3:00 PM	Snack Break and Closing Session

*Spanish interpretation available during select sessions on October 8 and 9

*Film Screening Plenary – **No One Cares About Crazy People**, will be held across the street at AMC Orange 30 Theatre – Please Meet Conference Staff in the Lobby of the Hotel FERA Anaheim at the conclusion of the General Session to depart to the Theatre as a group.

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CONFERENCE AGENDA

Thursday, October 8, 2026

	Time	Title	Room	Speaker
REGISTRATION	8:00 AM - 4:00 PM	Malibu		
BREAKFAST	8:00 AM - 9:00 AM	California Foyer		
QUIET SPACE	8:00 AM - 4:00 PM	Sequoia		
GENERAL SESSION	9:00 AM - 10:20 AM	Land Acknowledgement and Cultural Performance RedBoys Productions is a Native American Family Dance Group based out of Orange County, California. The Dance Group is led by Ba’ac Garcia, a member of the Tohono O’odham Nation.	Grand Ballroom	RedBoys Productions, Dance Performers: Ba’ac Garcia, Nanabah Kadenehii
		Welcome	Grand Ballroom	Maria Case Founder & CEO Kompashion, Mistress of Ceremonies
		Remarks	Grand Ballroom	Steve Pitman President, NAMI Orange County
		Annual State of the Community Report Video	Grand Ballroom	
		CEO Remarks		Jessica Wilson, MPA/HS CEO, NAMI California
		Keynote Speaker	Grand Ballroom	Dan H. Gillison, Jr. CEO, NAMI
		Interactive Activities	Grand Ballroom	NAMI CA Youth Leadership Council Members
Transition Time 10:20 AM - 10:30 AM				
ASK A DOCTOR Spanish	10:30 AM - 11:30 AM	Pregúntele al Doctor Una conversación interactiva con el Dr. Kopelowicz para resolver preguntas sobre salud mental, tratamiento y bienestar desde una perspectiva experta y accesible.	Redwood/ Tahoe	Dr. Alex Kopelowicz UCLA Vice-Chair with Biobehavioral Science and Psychiatry Departments [Dr. Alex Kopelowicz, Vicepresidente del Departamento de Ciencias Bioconductuales y Psiquiatría de la UCLA]
ASK A DOCTOR	10:30 AM - 11:30 AM	Depression and Bipolar Disorder - Just What You Need To Know Get real answers to your health questions in this open, interactive Q&A session with an expert physician. Bring your curiosities and concerns for a candid discussion about serious mental health conditions. This is a unique opportunity to hear from our subject matter experts and for audience members to receive information that is accurate and practical.	Grand Ballroom	Dr. Robert McCarron Director of Education, Susan Samueli Integrative Health Institute; Associate Dean, Continuing Medical Education & Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior, UC Irvine School of Medicine; Vice President, NAMI California Board of Directors Dr. Gemma Espejo Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior, UC Irvine School of Medicine

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CONFERENCE AGENDA

Thursday, October 8, 2026

	Time	Title	Room	Speaker
PLENARY Caregiver Resiliency & Self-Care	10:30 AM - 11:30 AM	Understanding Compassion Fatigue and Burnout This session will examine the relationship between burnout, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction, highlighting common symptoms, contributing workplace factors, and their impact on mental health practitioners. Attendees will be introduced to evidence-informed strategies for recognizing early warning signs and implementing practical approaches to support resilience, professional sustainability, and overall wellness.	Redondo	Dr. Elizabeth English, RPA
PLENARY Youth and Young Adults	10:30 AM - 11:30 AM	Catching Psychosis Early; How Schools, Families, and Communities Can Work Together Many people who develop schizophrenia spectrum disorders experience early symptoms during adolescence. This interactive panel introduces Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC) for early psychosis, an evidence-based, team-based model that supports recovery. Panelists from Stanford's INSPIRE360 program will share practical, real-world perspectives on how early psychosis can present, how to respond with hope rather than fear, and how collaboration across systems can change a young person's trajectory.	The Palm	Dr. Apurva Bhatt Clinical Assistant Professor, Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Nuriya Hefron Training & Technical Assistance Manager, Psych/Public Mental Health & Population Sciences Natalie Rutherford Peer Support Specialist, Inspire 360 Mary Pacheco Affiliate, Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Stanford School of Medicine/Stanford Healthcare
ASK A DOCTOR	10:30 AM - 11:30 AM	Navigating the CA Mental Health Care System Navigating your own healthcare journey or supporting loved ones through theirs can feel overwhelming, especially when faced with a new diagnosis or trying to manage treatment plans. Hear from doctors who have guidance to share that will help empower participants to more easily access care and resources they need and the support they deserve.	Sunset	Dr. Rimal Bera and Dr. Jody Rawles Clinical Professors, Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior, UC Irvine School of Medicine
ASK A DOCTOR	10:30 AM - 11:30 AM	Women's Mental Health While serious mental health conditions can affect everyone, the onset and expression of these disorders can differ, particularly among women. This session offers participants an opportunity to gain insight about why understanding women's mental health requires a holistic approach that considers both biological and socio-environmental influences.	Sierra	Dr. Patricia DeMarco Centeno Senior Psychiatrist Specialist, Psychopharmacology Resource Network, California Department of State Hospitals
Lunch Break/Almuerzo 11:30 AM - 12:45 PM				

CONFERENCE AGENDA

Thursday, October 8, 2026

	Time	Title	Room	Speaker
ASK A DOCTOR	12:50 PM - 1:50 PM	Schizophrenia: Early detection and Best Treatment Approaches Get real answers to your health questions in this open, interactive Q&A session with an expert physician. Bring your curiosities and concerns for a candid discussion about serious mental health conditions. This is a unique opportunity to hear from our subject matter experts and for audience members to receive information that is accurate and practical.	The Palm	Dr. Cameron Carter Professor of Psychiatry and Chair of Psychiatry and Human Behavior, UC Irvine School of Medicine
PLENARY Spanish	12:50 PM - 1:50 PM	Panel de experiencia vivida Una conversación honesta y significativa donde una familia comparte su experiencia personal con la salud mental, ofreciendo esperanza, aprendizajes y perspectivas sobre el camino hacia la recuperación.	Redwood/ Tahoe	Panelistas: Alberto Juárez, Norma Juárez y Jonathan Juárez
WORKSHOP Innovation	12:50 PM - 1:50 PM	What We Have Always Known: Innovative Indigenous Approaches to Mental Health and Wellness For Native peoples, healing has never been about treating one thing at a time. Our ancestors understood grief, trauma, physical health, spiritual disconnection, community, and relationship to the land as deeply interconnected. While Western systems are only beginning to recognize and integrate many of these principles, Indigenous peoples have long understood the power of cultural, spiritual, and community-based healing. This workshop explores how Native peoples are reclaiming and revitalizing traditional approaches alongside modern clinical practices, not simply adapting Indigenous healing to Western systems.	Sierra	Monique Castro Founder & CEO, Indigenous Circle of Wellness
WORKSHOP Criminal Justice & MH Policy	12:50 PM - 1:50 PM	CARE Act Panel Join CARE Court experts as they discuss CARE implementation and how family members can best approach the CARE process to get support for their loved one.	Sunset	Judge Scott Herin (LA County) Judge Ebrahim Baytieh (Orange County) Patricia Bradwell (Public Defender, Orange County) Dr. Stacey Berardino (Health Services Manager, OC Health Care Agency) Adelene Tsujiuchi (Health Services Manager for OC Health Care Agency) A family member of a loved one who graduated CARE

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CONFERENCE AGENDA

Thursday, October 8, 2026

	Time	Title	Room	Speaker
WORKSHOP Caregiver Resiliency & Self-Care	12:50 PM - 1:50 PM	Understanding Invisible Wounds: Recognizing Stress, Building Resilience, and Supporting Mental Wellness Stress affects everyone, yet its deepest impacts are often invisible. Drawing on experience as a military veteran, author, and mental health advocate, this session explores the concept of "invisible wounds" and how they shape our lives in ways we may not immediately recognize. This engaging session offers valuable insights for anyone seeking to better understand themselves or support others on the path toward recovery and wellness.	Redondo	Dr. Vernita Black President, NAMI Western Riverside
WORKSHOP Spanish	1:50 PM - 2:50 PM	Presentación: Traumas y duelos: impacto en la salud mental Experiencia en trabajo colaborativo con expertos nacionales e internacionales en psiquiatría y neurología.	Redwood/ Tahoe	Dr. Juan Carlos Equihua Ramirez Rector del Instituto de Filosofía, Guadalajara, México
Transition Time 1:50 PM - 2:00 PM				
WORKSHOP Youth and Young Adults	2:00 PM - 3:00 PM	Youth-Led Change: How a High School NAMI Club is Transforming Mental Health Culture from Elementary to Community This session will highlight how students are leading change across multiple levels, from hosting campus-wide mental health advocacy events to delivering classroom lessons in elementary and middle schools. A key focus will be our "Mental Health Buddy Boxes," toolkits created by high school students and distributed to younger students to promote emotional regulation, coping strategies, and help-seeking behaviors.	The Palm	Aleah Musto, Harjot Kaur NCHS Club Members Justin Garza High School
WORKSHOP Criminal Justice & MH Policy, Innovation	2:00 PM - 3:00 PM	Why SB 43 Didn't Fix Access - And What Might SB 43 expanded the definition of grave disability to include severe substance use disorder, but the system hasn't meaningfully changed. The core problem is not eligibility, but access to higher levels of care beyond the Emergency Department. This presentation explains how the LPS continuum of care actually functions and why so many cases stall. Most importantly, we will examine a largely forgotten access pathway, Welfare and Institutions Code section 5200, and how its use could be a game changer for the future of care for California's most seriously mentally ill.	Sunset	Ann Marie Council Founding Partner, Quarter Turn Strategies Dr. Aaron Meyer Behavioral Health Officer, City of San Diego, Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California, San Diego

CONFERENCE AGENDA

Thursday, October 8, 2026

	Time	Title	Room	Speaker
ASK A DOCTOR	2:00 PM - 3:00 PM	Understanding Anxiety What is anxiety—and when does it become more than everyday worry? Join a physician for an engaging conversation about anxiety, including common symptoms, treatment options, and ways caregivers and individuals can better understand and manage the challenges it can bring. Bring your questions for an open and informative Q&A.	Redondo	Dr. Thomas Okamoto Psychiatrist, Private Practice NAMI CA Board Member
WORKSHOP Caregiver Resiliency & Self-Care	2:00 PM - 3:00 PM	Safetypowers: Boundary Setting and Advocacy Skills In this interactive, experiential workshop, caregivers will learn practical strategies they can use right away to protect their emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing.	Yosemite	Erika Leonard CA Program Director and Comm. Ed. Director, Kidpower International
WORKSHOP Caregiver Resiliency & Self-Care	2:00 PM - 3:00 PM	Unleashing the Muse: Recognizing Creativity as a Community Resource We are living in uncharted and unpredictable times as a society, with respect to mental health. Participants will be guided to open up, explore, and to exercise their own creative wheelhouses, as a means of personal processing and healing, and also as a way of practicing feeling empowered to develop new and impactful materials to share with their community, and its youth, in particular.	Sierra	Oshri Hakak School Program Coordinator, NAMI Westside LA
WORKSHOP Spanish	3:00 PM - 3:50 PM	Conversación comunitaria: Hablemos de Salud Mental. Conversación facilitada sobre las barreras, la cultura, el estigma y posibles soluciones.	Redwood/ Tahoe	Moderadora: Senobia Pichardo
WORKSHOP Innovation	3:05 PM - 4:05 PM	Brick by Brick: Strengthening Behavioral Health Infrastructure with BHCIP The implementation of BHCIP funding in California for the construction and expansion of facilities treating mental health and substance use disorders has changed the landscape of behavioral healthcare. In partnership with the RUHS Behavioral Health team, we will explore the design and development of the first-of-its-kind RUHS Wellness Village and outline how its innovative, person-centered approach intentionally co-locates the continuum of behavioral health, substance use disorder, and physical health services within an integrated campus environment.	Sunset	From Boulder Associates: Mila Volkova Assoc. Principal Architect Kellen Schauermaun Asst. Principal Architect Darci Hernandez Principal Architect Rhyan Miller Deputy Director Integrated Programs, Riverside University Health System

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CONFERENCE AGENDA

Thursday, October 8, 2026

	Time	Title	Room	Speaker
WORKSHOP Youth and Young Adults	3:05 PM - 4:05 PM	Unmasking Mental Health - A Student Led Approach Led by student members of a NAMI On Campus club, this interactive workshop features a mask-making activity that encourages reflection on identity, emotional expression, and mental health stigma. Presenters will share their lived experiences, demonstrate strategies for engaging peers, and highlight how their student-led media team uses social media and schoolwide initiatives to promote awareness and connection.	The Palm	Ziva Chan, Sean Gapuzan, Evelyn Huang, Marin Rezko NCHS Club Members, Glen A. Wilson High School
WORKSHOP Criminal Justice & MH Policy	3:05 PM - 4:05 PM	Shared Responsibility: Building Safer Responses to Behavioral Health Emergencies in Ventura County When a behavioral health emergency happens, who is responsible for keeping everyone safe? This session examines how law enforcement, first responders, bystanders, and communities can work together to create safer, more effective responses.	Redondo	Erik Nasarenko District Attorney, Ventura County, 1st Vice President, NAMI California Board of Directors
SOCIAL TIME	4:05 PM - 5:30 PM	General Networking Mixer/Presentación Cultural y sesión de networking	Veranda	
SUPPORT GROUP	4:50 PM - 5:50 PM	NAMI Family Support Group 1 (English)	Redondo	
SUPPORT GROUP	4:50 PM - 5:50 PM	NAMI Family Support Group 2 (Spanish)	Sunset	
Dinner (On Your Own) 5:30 PM - 6:40 PM				
FILM SCREENING General	6:45 PM - 8:15 PM	Prodigal Daughter/Hija Pródiga Filmmaker and former punk artist Mabel Valdiviezo reunites with her family in Peru after 16 years of silence, confronting haunting childhood memories, her youth in war-torn Peru, and her past as an undocumented immigrant artist and stripper in the United States.	Grand Ballroom	
FILM SCREENING General	8:15 PM - 8:45 PM	Q & A with Film Director	Grand Ballroom	On-Stage Interviewer: Tricia Creason-Valencia CEO, Tricia Speaks! Film Director: Mabel Valdiviezo

PROGRAMA

DE LA CONFERENCIA

Jueves, 8 de octubre de 2026

Tema	Hora	Descripción	Salón	Presentadores
Sesión General 9:00 AM - 10:20 AM				
PREGÚNTELE AL DOCTOR	10:30 AM - 11:30 AM	Una conversación interactiva con el Dr. Kopelowicz para resolver preguntas sobre salud mental, tratamiento y bienestar desde una perspectiva experta y accesible.	Redwood/ Tahoe	Dr. Alex Kopelowicz Vicepresidente del Departamento de Ciencias Bioconductuales y Psiquiatría de la UCLA Anfitriona: Ana González
Almuerzo 11:30 AM - 12:45 PM				
PANEL DE EXPERIENCIA VIVIDA	12:50 PM - 1:50 PM	Una conversación honesta y significativa donde una familia comparte su experiencia personal con la salud mental, ofreciendo esperanza, aprendizajes y perspectivas sobre el camino hacia la recuperación.	Redwood/ Tahoe	Panelistas: Alberto Juárez, Norma Juárez y Jonathan Juárez Moderador: Luis Garcia, PsyD
TALLER: TRAUMAS Y DUELOS: IMPACTO EN LA SALUD MENTAL	1:50 PM - 2:50 PM	Experiencia en trabajo colaborativo con expertos nacionales e internacionales en psiquiatría y neurología.	Redwood/ Tahoe	Presentador: Dr. Juan Carlos Equihua Ramirez Rector del Instituto de Filosofía, Guadalajara, México Anfitriona: Ana González
CONVERSACIÓN COMUNITARIA: HABLEMOS DE SALUD MENTAL	3:00 PM - 3:50 PM	Conversación facilitada sobre las barreras, la cultura, el estigma y posibles soluciones. Un espacio seguro, respetuoso y sin juicios para compartir experiencias, fomentar la comprensión y normalizar las conversaciones sobre la salud mental.	Redwood/ Tahoe	Moderadora: Senobia Pichardo
PRESENTACIÓN CULTURAL Y SESIÓN DE NETWORKING	4:05 PM - 5:30 PM	Presentación Cultural: Lluvia de Estrellas y Sesión de Networking	Veranda	Anfitriona: Egle Cisneros
PROYECCIÓN ESPECIAL	6:45 PM - 8:45 PM	Proyección Hija pródiga seguida de una sesión de preguntas y respuestas.	Grand Ballroom	

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CONFERENCE AGENDA

Friday, October 9, 2026

	Time	Title	Room	Speaker
REGISTRATION	8:00 AM - 12:00 PM		Malibu	
BREAKFAST	8:00 AM - 9:00 AM		CA Foyer	
QUIET SPACE	8:00 AM - 3:00 PM		Sequoia	
GENERAL SESSION	9:00 AM - 10:00 AM	Welcome Day 1 Recap	Grand Ballroom	Maria Case, Founder & CEO Kompashion, Mistress of Ceremonies
		Remarks	Grand Ballroom	Dr. Robert McCarron Director of Education, Susan Samueli Integrative Health Institute; Associate Dean, Continuing Medical Education & Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior, UC Irvine School of Medicine; Vice President, NAMI California Board of Directors
		Keynote Presentation	Grand Ballroom	Dr. Gary Tsai Sr. VP & Chief Medical Officer, Telecare Corporation NAMI CA Board Member
Transition Time 10:00 AM - 10:30 AM				
PLENARY Criminal Justice & Mental Health Policy	10:30 AM - 12:30 PM	No One Cares About Crazy People (Q&A post-screening) A feature documentary film about the tragedy, crisis and chaos of severe mental illness in America – and a burgeoning national crusade to do something about it.	AMC Orange 30 (Off-Site)	On-Stage Interviewer: Tricia Creason-Valencia CEO Tricia Speaks! Speakers: Teresa Pasquini, NAMI Volunteer Gigi Crowder, LE CEO, NAMI Contra Costa
PLENARY Caregiver Resiliency & Self-Care	10:30 AM - 11:30 AM	Who’s On the Bus: Planning for Mental Health Challenges This presentation explores practical planning strategies for families supporting a child or other loved one with mental health challenges. We will discuss how to maximize quality of life, preserve independence, and protect vulnerable loved ones through thoughtful legal and financial planning.	Sunset	Ellen Cookman Owner/Principal Attorney, Cookman Law
PLENARY Youth and Young Adults	10:30 AM - 11:30 AM	Misdiagnosed & Misunderstood Youth: Understanding Neuroimmune Disorders This workshop shines a light on the frequently overlooked disorders that cause a sudden onset of psychiatric symptoms/conditions. These conditions are known as PANS (Pediatric Acute-onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome) and PANDAS (Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorder Associated with Streptococcal Infections). The workshop explores how the way the medical field is divided is causing issues for patients, why you should know about PANS/ PANDAS, and how we can create a better environment for neuroimmune conditions to be recognized.	Redondo	Brandi Alden Event Organization/Public Relations Committee Lead Cat Doherty Social Media Committee Lead Dr. Zoe Gillispie Advisor Nash Matson Founding Member, National PANDAS/PANS Youth Alliance

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CONFERENCE AGENDA

Friday, October 9, 2026

	Time	Title	Room	Speaker
WORKSHOP Innovation	11:40 AM - 12:40 PM	Closing the Continuity Gap: Community-Embedded Care that Meets Patients Where They Are This panel will explore an innovative community-embedded model that brings behavioral health pharmacists and Community Health Liaisons together to address these challenges where they occur—in homes, shelters, treatment programs, and other community settings.	The Palm	Henna Zaidi Senior Vice President, Strategic Partnerships, Advantage Healthcare Services
WORKSHOP Caregiver Resiliency & Self-Care	11:40 AM - 12:40 PM	Behind the Uniform: Supporting Military Service Members and Families Through Mental Health Challenges What happens to the families and caregivers who stand beside military service members through the challenges of service, deployment, transition, and recovery? Presented from the caregiver perspective, this workshop offers an honest look at the experiences of those supporting a loved one through mental health challenges while navigating the unique demands of military life.	Sunset	Bri Soriano NAMI Monterey
WORKSHOP Criminal Justice & Mental Health Policy	11:40 AM - 12:40 PM	Family Collaboration in CIT What changes when families have a voice in how communities respond to behavioral health crises? This workshop explores the powerful role families can play in Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) programs, from shaping training to strengthening crisis response and policy. Drawing on Humboldt County's rural CIT experience, participants will hear personal stories and practical lessons on building stronger partnerships with families.	Redwood Tahoe	Lea Nagy and Jacob Rosen NAMI Humboldt County
WORKSHOP Youth and Young Adults	11:40 AM - 12:40 PM	Supporting Young Adults After Parental Loss: Lessons from the First Three Years of a Peer Grief Support Program This session shares lessons learned from the first three years of facilitating monthly peer grief support groups for young adults (ages 18–39) following the death of a parent or parental figure. Attendees will explore the importance of age- and loss-specific grief spaces, the value of a more informal support environment, and how peer support can serve as a bridge to further mental health care.	Redondo	Shannon Bell Founder/Director, Two Daughters Foundation
Lunch Break 12:40 PM - 1:25 PM				

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CONFERENCE AGENDA

Friday, October 9, 2026

	Time	Title	Room	Speaker
WORKSHOP Innovation	1:30 PM - 2:30 PM	Nothing About Us Without Us: Co-Producing Behavioral Health Solutions with Community Many organizations express a commitment for youth voice, yet young people are often invited to give input without real influence. This session will highlight learnings from the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI) Community Defined Evidence Based Practice (CDEPs) grant program, focusing on how organizations are designing, implementing and providing culturally grounded behavioral health practices that are designed by the community to advance equity and improve access for historically underserved communities.	The Palm	David Salinas Senior Associate, Strategic and Equity Initiatives Phanit Dy Director, Community Defined Evidence Practices (CDEP) Implementation Ryan Mertz, PsyD Senior Associate, CIBHS
WORKSHOP Caregiver Resiliency & Self-Care	1:30 PM - 2:30 PM	Hope and Healing: A Caregiver's Guide to Eating Disorder Support Caregivers and loved ones are often an essential part of eating disorder recovery, yet they may find themselves navigating unfamiliar challenges. This session will provide an overview of eating disorders and explore the role of caregivers in recovery. Presenters will also examine the emotional demands of caregiving and strategies for recognizing and preventing burnout.	Redwood Tahoe	Cami Nelsen CEO and Founder Eden Hadar CFO, The RecoverED Project
WORKSHOP Dual Diagnosis (Co-Occurring Disorders)	1:30 PM - 2:30 PM	Tobacco and Nicotine Addiction Among Adults with Serious Mental Illness People living with serious mental illness experience disproportionately high rates of tobacco use and tobacco-related health disparities. In this session, participants will explore the complex relationship between tobacco and mental health, including the impact of nicotine use on health and recovery.	Sunset	Dr. Maya Vijayaraghavan Professor of Medicine Distinguished Professor of Health and Health Care, Director, Smoking Cessation Leadership Center, UCSF
WORKSHOP Youth and Young Adults	1:30 PM - 2:30 PM	See Me Before the Crisis: Emotional First Aid Through BPD, DBT & Lived Experience People deserve to be seen as more than a diagnosis, a crisis, or the hardest moment of their life. This session is an honest conversation about BPD, DBT, emotional intensity, and what it means to support someone before they reach a crisis. Rooted in Unmasked Authenticity, the session looks beyond labels and asks what might actually be happening underneath.	Redondo	Merlot Ghadoushi NAMI Next Gen Advisor Dr. Courtney Tracy, LCSW Clinical Entrepreneur and Digital Mental Health Educator
GENERAL SESSION	2:30 PM - 3:00 PM	Snack Break and Closing Session	Grand Ballroom	Maria Case Founder & CEO, Kompashion, Mistress of Ceremonies

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MISTRESS OF CEREMONIES & KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Maria Case Founder & CEO – Kompashion

Maria Case is a visionary entrepreneur, mental health advocate, and community leader dedicated to creating meaningful support for people facing life's challenges. A longtime NAMI supporter, Maria and her family have benefited from NAMI's programs and services and have contributed their time and talents to its mission.

After experiencing an ectopic pregnancy in 2019 followed by severe depression, Maria experienced firsthand the importance of compassionate support during difficult times. Inspired by her parents' lifelong commitment to helping others—including supporting her mother through schizophrenia—Maria founded Kompashion to help people feel less alone during their darkest moments. She believes people often care deeply but simply need guidance on how to be there for one another.



Dan H. Gillison, Jr. CEO – NAMI

Dan Gillison is chief executive officer of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization, serving more than 650 communities across the country. A nationally recognized mental health advocate and nonprofit leader, Dan brings more than 30 years of leadership experience across the nonprofit, public, and private sectors, along with a deep passion for mental health advocacy fueled by lived experience with mental illness and its impact on families. Since joining NAMI in 2020, Dan has led the organization through a period of significant growth and expanded impact. Under his leadership, NAMI has received two transformative unrestricted gifts from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott, helping accelerate the organization's mission and long-term impact. NAMI also published two You Are Not Alone books—one focused on helping individuals navigate their own mental health journey and another designed to support parents and caregivers navigating their child's mental health. Dan is a sought-after speaker and



thought leader on mental health, workplace wellbeing, health equity, and the future of mental health care. He serves on the National Institute of Mental Health's National Advisory Mental Health Council, the lululemon Global Wellbeing Advisory Board, and the National Health Council Board of Directors. Prior to joining NAMI, Dan served as executive director of the American Psychiatric Association Foundation and held leadership positions with the National Association of Counties, Xerox, Nextel, and Sprint.

Dr. Gary Tsai Sr. VP and CMO - Telecare

Gary Tsai, M.D., is a physician executive board certified in psychiatry and addiction medicine. He is Senior Vice President and Chief Medical Officer of Telecare Corporation, where he provides leadership for clinical strategy, quality, innovation, and medical affairs. His work focuses on advancing person-centered, recovery-oriented care for individuals with complex behavioral health needs, improving outcomes, and strengthening the behavioral health workforce.



Dr. Tsai most recently served as Director of Substance Abuse Prevention and Control within the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, where he led more than 600 staff and oversaw a \$760 million annual budget supporting substance use prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services for Los Angeles County's 10 million residents.

Dr. Tsai serves as a Governor-appointed Commissioner on the Behavioral Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission, a member of the NAMI California Board of Directors, and a member of the California Health and Human Services Agency Behavioral Health Task Force.

As the son of a mother with schizophrenia, Dr. Tsai has experienced firsthand the stigma surrounding serious mental illness and is passionate about improving behavioral health systems and services. He is also the founder of Forgotten Films and author of *Against All Odds: A Practical Guide to Successfully Navigate Psychosis and Behavioral Health Systems*.

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2026 NAMI CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE

PLENARY AND WORKSHOP SPEAKERS

Brandi Alden
Judge Ebrahim Baytieh,
Orange County Superior Court
Shannon Bell
Dr. Stacey Berardino
Dr. Apurva Bhatt
Dr. Vernita Black
Patricia Bradwell
Monique Castro
Ellen Cookman
Ann Marie Council
Tricia Creason-Valencia
Gigi Crowder, LE
Cat Doherty
Phanit Dy
Dr. Elizabeth English, RPA
Dr. Juan Carlos Equihua Ramirez
Luis Garcia, PsyD
Merlot Ghadoushi
Dr. Zoe Gillispie
Eden Hadar
Oshri Hakak
Nuriya Hefron
Judge Scott Herin,
LA County Superior Court
Darci Hernandez
Familia Juarez
Erika Leonard
Nash Matson
Ryan Mertz, PsyD
Rhyan Miller
Dr. Aaron Meyer
Lea Nagy

Erik Nasarenko
Aleah Musto, Harjot Kaur
Justin Garza High School
Ziva Chan, Sean Gapuzan
Glen A. Wilson High School
Evelyn Huang, Marin Rezko
Glen A. Wilson High School
Cami Nelsen
Mary Pacheco
Teresa Pasquini
Jacob Rosen
Natalie Rutherford
David Salinas
Kellen Schauermann
Bri Soriano
Dr. Courtney Tracy, LCSW
Adelene Tsujiuchi
Mabel Valdiviezo
Dr. Maya Vijayaraghavan
Mila Volkova
Henna Zaidi

ASK A DOCTOR SPEAKERS

Dr. Rimal Bera
Dr. Cameron Carter
Dr. Patricia DeMarco Centeno
Dr. Gemma Espejo
Dr. Alex Kopelowicz
Dr. Robert McCarron
Dr. Thomas Okamoto
Dr. Jody Rawles

MEET OUR SPEAKERS

Want to learn more about our speakers and presenters? Scan the QR code or visit the link below to explore speaker photos, biographies, and additional information about the experts featured throughout this year's conference.



<https://namica.org/conference-speakers/>

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Mental Health Association for Chinese Communities
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Proxy Parent Foundation
Social Model Recovery Systems
Z-Cares Foundation

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the 2026–2027 NAMI California Board of Directors for their continued leadership, service, and dedication to our mission and vision.

Special thanks to NAMI Orange County and all conference sponsors and exhibitors, presenters, and volunteers who have contributed to the success of the 2026 NAMI California Annual Conference. We appreciate all of the staff at our host hotel, Hotel FERA Anaheim, a Doubletree by Hilton, for their hospitality and partnership.

With deep gratitude, we'd like to acknowledge the many hours NAMI California's employee partners have dedicated to planning and implementing this conference.

Jessica Wilson, MPA/HS
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Marielle Luhdorff
Programs & Services Manager

Matilda Grace
Sr. Regional Lead

Monica Rodriguez
Programs Manager, Training

Nicholas Rodriguez
Workforce & Community Engagement Manager

Sasha Levin-Güracar
Public Affairs and Advocacy Manager

Zainab Apalara
Program Manager, Data Management

NAMI CA

2026 ANNUAL

CONFERENCE

Support Groups/ Grupos de Apoyo



Hotel Fera Anaheim at DoubleTree by Hilton

Thursday, October 8th, 4:50 p.m. - 5:50 p.m.

Jueves, 8 de Octubre de 4:50 p.m.- 5:50 p.m.

FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP

Room Location: **Redondo**

Description: NAMI Family Support Group is a peer-led support group for any adult with a loved one who has experienced symptoms of a mental health condition. Gain insight from the challenges and successes of others facing similar experiences.

Facilitators: Elaine Huber and Steve McNally from NAMI Orange County

GRUPO DE APOYO PARA FAMILIARES

Ubicación de la sala: **Sunset**

Descripción: El Grupo de Apoyo Familiar de NAMI es un grupo de apoyo dirigido por pares para adultos con un ser querido que ha experimentado síntomas de una enfermedad mental. Conozca los desafíos y éxitos de otras personas que enfrentan experiencias similares.

Facilitadores: Aracely García y Linda Espinoza de NAMI San Francisco

We are looking forward to seeing you attend the group!

¡Esperamos verte asistir al grupo!



Neurocrine Biosciences is Proud to Support NAMI California

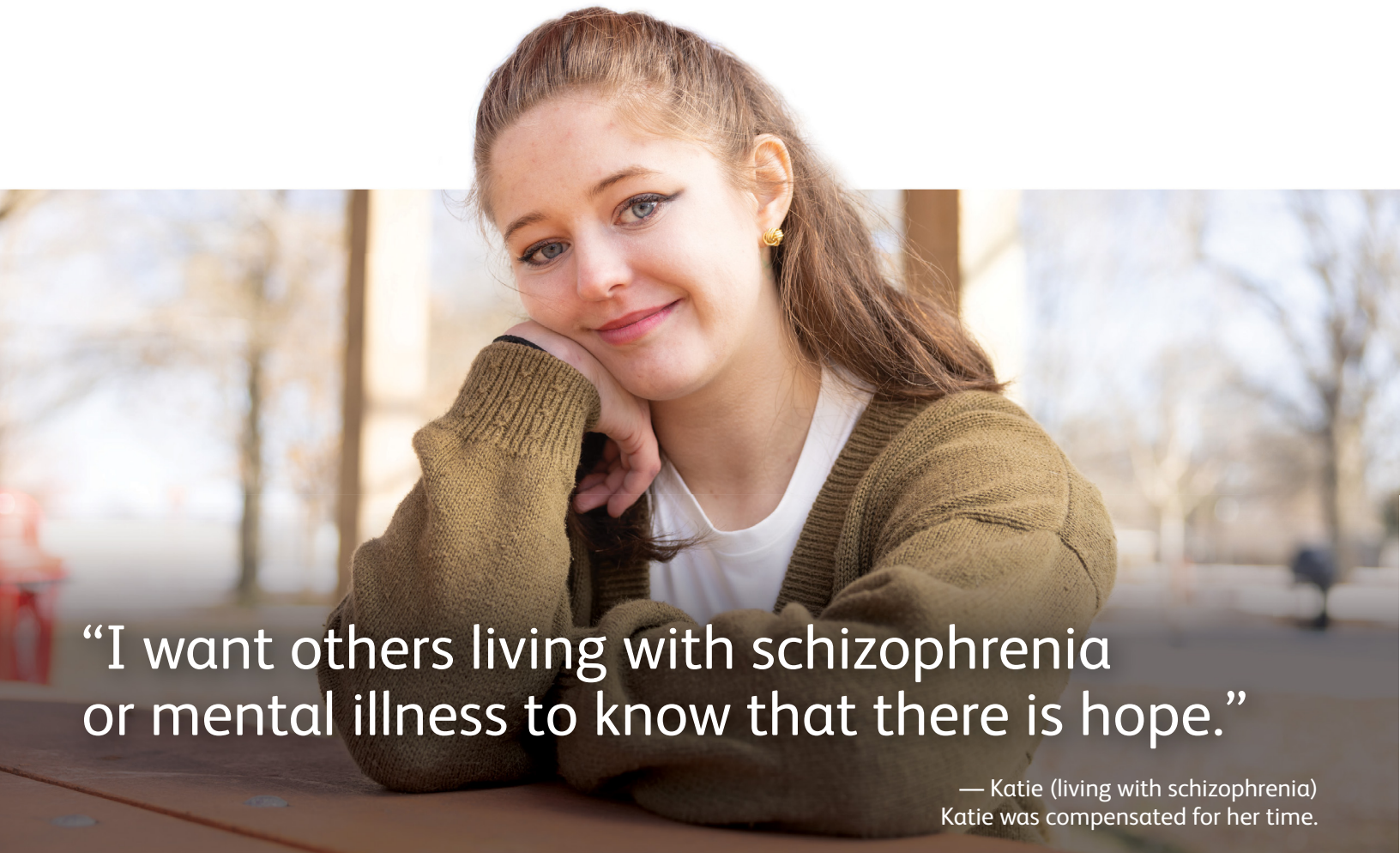
in their commitment, passion, and efforts towards increasing awareness around mental health and tardive dyskinesia (TD) in the community.

Learn more about TD,
living with TD and how to
treat it at **TalkAboutTD.com**



SHARE TO INSPIRE

Because your story can help inspire another.



“I want others living with schizophrenia or mental illness to know that there is hope.”

— Katie (living with schizophrenia)
Katie was compensated for her time.

Are you or someone you care for living with schizophrenia?



Share your story by calling
us toll-free at **1-855-436-5866**
or visiting ShareToInspire.com



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