NAMI’s Priorities in the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act or the “HEROES Act” (H.R. 6800)

Updated as of 5/13/2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is pushing the U.S. into a mental health crisis that our health care system is ill-prepared to face unless Congress acts. At the very time that anxiety, depression, substance use and other mental health symptoms are rising, our nation’s already-strained mental health system is being pushed to the brink. Congress must take immediate action to address this “epidemic within the pandemic” of rapidly escalating mental health needs by passing the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act (H.R. 6800).

Congress must invest in mental health care. This bill addresses NAMI’s priorities by:

1. **Protecting State and Local Capacity to Provide Mental Health Services**
   State and local governments are on the verge of making widespread cuts due to the double hit of reduced tax revenues and increasing public needs. They need emergency funds to be able to preserve mental health services and meet the growing demand.

   We are pleased that the HEROES Act:  
   **Provides $3 billion in emergency funds to help states and local communities meet mounting mental health and addiction needs.** Communities need additional emergency, flexible funds via the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to help preserve non-Medicaid mental health and addiction services and meet new needs as a result of the pandemic.

   **Provides support to states through the Medicaid program.** State Medicaid programs — the single largest payer of mental health services in the country — are in danger due to state budget shortfalls. Congress should help by picking up a bigger share of the program’s cost through an increased Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP). Congress provided a 6.2 percentage point bump earlier this year. The HEROES Act provides states with a FMAP increase of 14 percentage points starting July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021. With the deepening economic downturn, this increase is desperately needed to reduce state costs and prevent program cuts.

2. **Enhancing the Ability to Respond to Mental Health Crises**
   SAMHSA’s Disaster Distress Helpline has experienced an 891% increase compared to last year, and NAMI’s own HelpLine has experienced a 65% increase in calls during March and April – similar increases have been seen by other helplines across the country. Recent reports project that, without adequate services, suicide and overdose deaths are expected to rise. We can prevent these tragedies.
We are pleased that the HEROES Act:

**Establishes the three-digit National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Hotline (9-8-8).** Over half of Americans report that COVID-19 has had a negative impact on their mental health. The HEROES Act helps prevent avoidable tragedies by formally designating 9-8-8 as a nationwide mental health and suicide prevention hotline number and allowing states to impose a fee to support or implement 9-8-8 services.

3. **Protecting People with Mental Illness Who are Justice-Involved**
   Far too many people with mental illness are needlessly involved in the criminal justice system. Alarmingly, this pandemic has exposed life-threatening gaps in the health system’s ability to care for people who are incarcerated or reentering communities.

   We are pleased that the HEROES Act:
   **Provides for continuation of health care for people leaving criminal justice settings.** As the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases climbs inside our nation’s jails and prisons, thousands of incarcerated individuals are being released early to further prevent its spread. People who have been incarcerated, including those with mental illness or addictions, are at high risk of not getting health care and placing additional demands on already overburdened emergency departments and homeless shelters. The HEROES Act includes The Medicaid Reentry Act, which will ensure greater public safety during the crisis by providing health care coverage to eligible people 30 days prior to reentry into the community.

   **Provides resources to local governments to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our criminal justice system.** This pandemic has underscored the conditions inside our nation’s jails and prisons that make it ripe for the spread of viruses such as COVID-19. The HEROES Act includes grant funds to help local governments control the spread of the virus inside jails and prisons.

4. **Ensuring Safe Housing for People with Mental Illness**
   Without safe housing, people with mental illness are uniquely vulnerable to being exposed to and spreading the virus. Additionally, many people with mental health conditions are at risk of losing housing with the loss of steady income. Housing is key to maintaining social distancing in this emergency.

   We are pleased that the HEROES Act:
   **Prevents housing instability and homelessness as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.** Even before the coronavirus pandemic, many people with mental illness lacked access to affordable housing. Declining income and unemployment can quickly send households down the spiral of housing instability, eviction and homelessness. The HEROES Act includes a new $100 billion in emergency rental assistance at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In addition, the legislation includes an additional $200 million for the HUD Section 811 program, $11.5 billion for the Emergency Solutions Grant program and $750 million for project-based rental assistance. The bill further clarifies that multifamily property owners can use funds from Section 811 and project-based assistance to help residents in congregate housing (group homes) who may need to self-isolate or quarantine, including the use of funds to pay for motel rooms.
5. **Preserving the Mental Health Treatment Infrastructure**

While the need for mental health services has never been higher, clinics and offices are largely closed. With services limited to mainly virtual services, many provider organizations are unable to realize the revenue they need to sustain their programs and staff. Many mental health providers are at risk of limiting services or closing at a time when needs continue to grow.

We are pleased that the HEROES Act:

**Provides emergency funding to health care providers.** Congress has provided emergency resources to help health care providers through the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund. Unfortunately, most providers who rely primarily on Medicaid, including mental health organizations, have not yet received money from this fund — leaving much of our community mental health system in peril. The HEROES Act provides an additional $100 billion in grants for hospital and health care providers, and specifically includes Medicaid providers. NAMI will continue to urge the Administration to prioritize mental health providers as funds are distributed.