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Introduction

This advocacy toolkit is aimed to help people who care about mental health to learn effective ways to advocate on behalf of the cause.

Advocates work in organizations or individually to support causes, influence decisions, and draw attention to issues. Many of the tactics advocates use are explained in detail in these pages.

Tactics in this toolkit include how to write an op-ed, letter to the editor, and a blog post. We also detail how to contact your elected officials and the best way to expand mental health awareness.

Being a mental health advocate means fighting to improve the quality of life for people with a mental illness and their families.

We need advocates at the local, state, and national levels to work for non-discriminatory access to quality healthcare, housing, education and employment for people with mental illness.

We need your help!



National Alliance on Mental Illness

nami | Iowa

**FACT
SHEET**

Who we are

From support groups and education to outreach and advocacy, NAMI IOWA works to provide the tools needed by people with serious mental illness, their family members and friends.

Our vision

We envision a world in which all people affected by mental illness experience resiliency, recovery and wellness.

We are dedicated to improving the quality of life for people with mental illness and their families through support, education, and advocacy.

Our goals

Advocate at the county, state and national levels for non-discriminatory access to quality healthcare, housing, education and employment for people with mental illness.

- Educate the public about mental illness.
- Advocate for a comprehensive mental health system that provides effective and timely services for those struggling with mental health.
- Support those with mental illness, their loved ones and providers.



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Iowa

**write a
letter to
the editor**

Let your voice be heard.

First, check your local paper for length requirements. Typically letters to the editor are 200-300 words.

Be direct and get to the point. Explain what the issue is and what you want to have done about it within the first two paragraphs.

Figure out the most important issue and focus on that. Avoid tangents or unnecessary information.

Use sources to bolster your argument. Provide a website or source for further information.

Take what you are passionate about and make a real change by writing to your local paper.

Check out your paper's word count. It may vary but try to keep it around 500 words. You should submit only one letter to one newspaper in your area.

Find a single topic and research it. Find credible sources to help your argument. Keep your writing short and concise.

Present the problem and a solution. Outline what you think is best and back it up with facts.

Finish with a call to action. Ignite the passion you feel for the topic in your readers.

If you maintain a personal blog or have always wanted to start, here are some helpful hints to consider before you post.

Be creative

Add pictures, video and a creative headline.

Focus

Start with one topic and stick to it.

Be concise

Pay attention to word count.

Personalize

Write about your passions.

Cite sources

Credit sources for their info.

Promote

Post links to your blog on social media.

Inspire

Make your blog matter by inciting action.



National Alliance on Mental Illness

NAMI

Iowa

**meet your
lawmaker**

Setting up a meeting with your local member of Congress is easier than you might think.

State

Go to one of your local legislative forums first. This will make you more comfortable before meeting with them one-on-one.

Always remember you can meet with your representative when they are not in session.

National

Start by calling their home district office and see when your representative will be in the state next.

Lawmakers are in their home districts visiting with constituents more than you might think.

Don't forget lawmakers work for you. Let your voice be heard!

If mental health is something you're passionate about, then get your friends and family involved too.

Start by reaching out. Try email or even better, get together over a meal. Invite your neighbors, friends and colleagues. The more the merrier!

Give the details. If you really have a passion for this issue, know the specifics and don't be afraid to tell others what you know.

Use an emotional appeal. Let everyone know why you care so much and make them care too. Put a name and a face to mental illness.

Finish with a call to action. Provide sources for more information, somewhere to donate, or a way to volunteer. It is one thing for people to care, it is another for people to act .

10 ways to effectively spread the word about NAMI Iowa

- 1 Follow NAMI and NAMI Iowa on Twitter and Facebook and share our content with your followers.
- 2 Write a personal email asking your friends and family to check out NAMI Iowa at namiiaowa.org.
- 3 Sign up for the NAMI Iowa newsletter that features important information and news about our cause.
- 4 Reach out to other advocacy groups in your community. Ask these groups to include important NAMI Iowa information in their newsletters and at their meetings.
- 5 Write a blog post for your personal blog and share it with your friends and family on other social media sites.

6

Write an op-ed for your local newspaper telling people about NAMI Iowa and why they should get behind mental health awareness.

7

Interact with your lawmakers on Facebook and Twitter. It can be easier to connect with your Congress Member online.

8

Email, call, or write letters to your members of Congress urging them to work with NAMI Iowa.



9

Attend a forum held by your local member of Congress and tell them about NAMI Iowa and what they could do to help mental health services in Iowa.

10

Ask your local elected officials for a coffee meeting to discuss your concerns with mental health.



National Alliance on Mental Illness

nami

Iowa

**Contact
Info**

You can reach us Monday-Friday from
8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Phone: (515) 254-0417 (not a crisis line)

Iowa Office of Consumer Affairs phone:
855-OCA-IOWA

NAMI's National Information Helpline:
(800) 950-NAMI

info@namiiowa.org

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