

NAMI Maryland

Position on Suicide

NAMI Maryland will advocate for legislation and support programs which will reduce suicides. Suicide, while not a mental illness itself, can and does go hand in hand with mental illness. It is a tragic and potentially preventable public health problem.

The following facts support our position:

- Every year, more than 30,000 Americans take their own lives.
- Suicide is the eighth-leading cause of death in the United States, and the third among youth, ages 15 to 24.
- A person completes suicide about every 15 minutes in the U.S., but it is estimated that an attempt is made about once a minute.
- 90 percent of people who kill themselves have a diagnosable mental or substance abuse disorder or both, and that the majority of people have a depressive illness.
- 1 out of 5 people with bipolar illness will die by suicide
- 1 out of 15 people with schizophrenia will die by suicide
- 435 People of all ages died by suicide in 1999 in Maryland
- 73 young people under the age of 24 died by suicide in 2000 in Maryland

We therefore support the “Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent Suicide 1999”. Specifically, we will work to:

- Support the prevention of suicide and suicidal behavior through the early recognition and the ongoing treatment of depression and other psychiatric illnesses.
- Support education on suicide and mental illness in schools.
- Expand public awareness of suicide through a campaign of education and enhance resources in the community.
- Reduce stigma of mental illness and suicide.
- Support legislation that will protect a survivor from an attempted suicide or suicide pact from being treated as a criminal.
- Protect jumpers from bridges in Maryland, beginning with the installation of phones by the Department of Transportation.
- Educate police, emergency personnel, public and private security personnel, teachers, school personnel and communities, primary care givers, and health professionals in order to help them recognize signs of mental illness and suicide.
- Educate the police about the need to show more sensitivity to the family and/or survivors at the scene of a suicide.
- Educate members of the media so they are more comfortable discussing mental illness and suicide.
- Support the development and implementation of new technologies to aid in suicide prevention, including safety measures to reduce easy access to lethal means of suicide.
- Establish mechanisms for state interagency public health collaboration concerning suicide with the goal of improving monitoring systems for suicide and suicidal behaviors.

Approved by the board on November 17, 2001, modified by the Public Policy Committee on May 4, 2002