

## meet with candidates start a dialogue

If you think our country is not prioritizing mental health care and you'd like to do something about it, *meet with candidates*. Today's candidates, if elected, will cast votes that determine the future of health and mental health care in America.

NAMI needs people who are passionate about mental health to voice their opinions with candidates—and we'd like you to be one of them.

Not sure how to begin? Call a candidate's office and ask for a meeting. Group meetings are ideal. Or, invite candidates to a NAMI meeting or event. Use our conversation starter to introduce yourself and NAMI and to explain our priorities.



*Please remember that NAMI is nonpartisan and does not endorse any candidate or political party.*

### Introduce yourself and NAMI

“I am [name] from [city or county you live in] and I'm a member of NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. We are the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.”

### Option: Add a personal touch

If mental illness has affected your life, consider letting the candidates know. Your story helps make our issues real and helps build a personal connection. Before you share, think about whether it is something you are comfortable doing. If you decide you're ready to, practice sharing the highlights of your story in a few brief lines.

### For example

“As the mother of a son who lives with bipolar disorder, I can tell you that mental health care can make the difference between despair and recovery. My son is enjoying life, working hard and making me proud. But before he got the treatment he needs, I saw him taken away in the back of a police car. No child—and no family—should have to go through this.”

“I was married and had a successful career. I worked hard and never imagined I would experience a mental illness. But, I did. The symptoms got worse and eventually I lost everything. I hit rock bottom. With the help of mental health services, I fought my way back and today I'm proud to be working again and volunteering with the NAMI In Our Own Voice program.”

## Talk about our priorities

“Every American deserves the opportunity to be productive and healthy. To have that opportunity, Americans need—and want—access to quality mental health care.

You can help ensure access to mental health care—and the opportunity for better lives—by supporting our three priorities:

1. Protecting public mental health funding;
2. Expanding access to mental health coverage; and
3. Ensuring that effective mental health services are available.

If elected, how will you address these priorities?”

## Listen and respond

Listen to a candidate’s response. Acknowledge their response and then make your final points.

### For example

“I appreciate hearing your thoughts on our priorities. Millions of youth, adults, seniors and veterans in America are affected by mental illness. We know treatment works, but too many aren’t getting the care they need.

Without appropriate treatment, mental illness devastates lives and contributes to rising costs. Providing effective mental health care is part of the solution.

With the right care at the right time, Americans living with mental illness can lead healthy and productive lives in their communities.

That’s why your support for improving access to mental health care is so important.”

For more options, see our Respond Positively tip sheet.

## Say thank you

Thank the candidate for taking the time to meet with you. Ask them what the best way to stay in contact is.

### For example

“Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I’d like to know the best way to stay in contact with you. Do you prefer email or standard mail? Also, is there a staff person I can stay in touch with?”

## Follow up

Nurture your relationship with a candidate by saying thank you again:

- Send a thank you via email;
- Write a thank you card and mail it; or
- Visit the candidate’s website, which will have their Facebook and Twitter links. Go to a link and post or tweet a short thank you.

Here’s another way to follow up: offer the candidate a folder containing NAMI’s Candidate Kit resources—or email it. To download the kit, visit [www.nami.org/election](http://www.nami.org/election) and click on the candidate kit tab.