



## **NAMI Statement on the Parkland School Shooting**

NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is deeply saddened by the tragic school shooting that occurred yesterday in Parkland, Florida. These tragedies impact our communities – our parents, our children, our school professionals, our first responders – the mental health of our whole country.

The details are still unfolding and there are still unanswered questions, but what we do know is that there were warning signs and that the shooter had received mental health treatment. As we continue the national discussion about what we can do to prevent further tragedies, we need to be willing to engage in an honest conversation about what allowed this young man to fall through the cracks, and the broader personal and societal factors that may have fueled his actions.

It is paramount for us to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our children and youth, and to remember that 1 in 5 people, potentially hundreds of students in a high school, have or will experience a mental illness. We need to be very careful that the response to these tragedies by the media and others does not discourage students from seeking help.

There are steps we can take now to educate and intervene early to break down barriers of understanding, and put an end to the stigma that often prevents people from getting the help they so desperately need:

1. Increase mental health awareness and availability of counselors in schools. Students should be encouraged to seek help for themselves or a friend. School based mental health has also proven extremely effective in engaging students who would not otherwise seek help. Some states have made significant investments in school based mental health and more needs to be done.
2. Train school staff, administrators, parents and youth, and provide the tools necessary to have conversations about the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions and where they can turn to for help. Far too often, when families are most in need, there isn't a clear pathway to getting help.
3. Develop a comprehensive response program for youth who have demonstrated behavioral issues including involving family and mental health providers. Take steps to avoid expelling and suspending students as this only exacerbates the situation.
4. Increase the ability of the mental health system to be proactive in reaching out to youth, particularly those with the most serious conditions. Young people in distress will not seek help so there needs to be mobile outreach responses that are funded and easily available. This requires sustained and expanded funding for coverage for mental health, not cuts.

Another part of the conversation that cannot be ignored is acting on common sense approaches to ending gun violence such as gun violence prevention restraining orders, which can allow for the removal of guns from people who may pose a risk of violence to themselves and others. While the relationship between mental illness and gun violence is very low, we need reasonable options, including making it

possible for law enforcement to act on credible community and family concerns in circumstances where people are at high-risk.

We all want an end to these horrific acts of violence. To achieve this, we need to understand the full picture of what is really driving increased violence and take sensible steps. Only then can we find meaningful solutions to protecting our children and communities.

**About NAMI**

NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.

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