

Today's candidates, if elected, will cast votes that set the course for the future of mental health care. If we want them to make good decisions, we need to educate them about mental illness, mental health services and recovery supports. Your voice counts! Pick a question from those below to post on candidate websites or social media, or ask during radio shows, at candidate forums or political rallies. *Remember: NAMI is nonpartisan and does not endorse any candidate or political party. We are, however, the nation's voice on mental illness.*

### Ask a Question

**COVID-19:** The global pandemic affects everyone but especially those living with a mental illness who are experiencing increased isolation, anxiety and depression.

**How do you plan to ensure that everyone has access to appropriate mental health services when they need them? How will you promote the safe utilization of peer supports in our state?**

**Action:**

- Eliminate barriers to telehealth by ensuring that health insurance companies cover telehealth services and expand access to broadband to rural and underserved parts of our state.
- Create a 24/7/365, statewide warmline that will provide peer support, referrals and resources to people experiencing emotional distress.

**Access to care:** About half of the Wisconsin residents with a mental health condition don't get the care they need.<sup>1</sup> In national studies, four in ten people who did not get needed mental health care cited cost as the number one barrier.<sup>2</sup>

**What will you do to ensure Wisconsin residents have access to affordable mental health services?**

**Action:**

- Support Medicaid expansion
- Strengthen enforcement of insurance parity for mental health
- Oppose the sale of Association Health Plans and Short-Term Limited Duration plans that can exclude mental health benefits

**Workforce shortage:** Wisconsin faces a critical mental health workforce shortage. All but four counties have a shortage of psychiatrists.<sup>3</sup> The turnover in service teams for youth is especially high.<sup>4</sup> Waitlists for Community Support Programs have steadily increased over recent years (2011-2015).<sup>5</sup>

**What will you do to attract new, qualified providers to the mental health field? How will you ensure everyone gets the help they need when they need it?**

**Action:**

- Enact legislation with a range of incentives for mental health practitioners who agree to accept Medicaid enrollees and practice in underserved communities.
- Develop responses that aim to provide tax incentives, employment opportunities for peer specialists and loan forgiveness programs for behavioral health professionals

**Medicaid reimbursement rates:** In past years, the Medicaid reimbursement rate increases for mental health providers in Wisconsin was a step in the right direction, but Wisconsin still falls short. As a result, we have a mental health workforce shortage and gaps in services for Medicaid enrollees.

**What will you do to bring Wisconsin Medicaid rates into line with the rest of the Midwest?**

**Action:**

- Promulgate rules and allocate funds to make reimbursement on par with nearby states.

**Suicide Prevention:** Suicide is a growing but preventable public health crisis in Wisconsin and we need a comprehensive approach to help save lives.

**How will you prioritize mental healthcare before people find themselves in a crisis?**

**Action:**

- **Address lethal means access. Pass the Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) which will allow family members to petition a court to have a firearm temporarily removed from a home when a loved one poses a risk of violence to themselves or others.**
- **Support initiatives that are developed by the SAMHSA's Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and their Families (SMVF).**
- **Support legislation aimed at high risk groups such as youth, LGBTQ, veterans, law enforcement and farmers.**

**Youth Mental Health:** Youth need access to appropriate school and community-based mental health services and peer supports during the first signs of mental, emotional or behavioral health challenges. They also face additional barriers to success while navigating a new type of learning during a pandemic

**What do you see as the most dire issue facing our education system today? How will you help Wisconsin's youth, teachers and parents get mental health care and supports to be successful in such a difficult landscape?**

**Action:**

- Support training educators in Mental Health First Aid
- Provide funding for additional support in and out of the classroom as students, teachers and parents navigate a health pandemic and new way of learning.
- Ensure adequate access to school-based mental health services and peer support programs for all Wisconsin students in need.

**Criminal Justice Reform:** It is an outrage that we are forced to rely on the justice system as the default for our threadbare mental health system. At least half of the adults in our prisons and jails have mental health or substance use disorders.<sup>12</sup> Many are behind bars for low-level crimes that could be linked to untreated mental illness.<sup>13</sup>

**How will you reduce the number of people with mental health conditions in jails and prisons? For those currently involved in our justice system, how you propose we best ensure they are healthy and safe, especially during COVID-19.**

**Action:**

- Increase access in jails and prisons to medical care, personal hygiene products, no-cost phone calls to family members and 30-day medication prescriptions upon release.
- Expand the Treatment Alternatives & Diversion (TAD) program to divert low-risk offenders away from jails and into treatment.
- Increase the number of mental health treatment courts in the state.

**Law enforcement:** Law enforcement is the number one referral source for people served by our public mental health system - one in four in 2015.<sup>14</sup> We need more training and resources to help them effectively and compassionately serve their communities.

**What do you feel are the most important issues facing law enforcement today? What alternatives to incarceration would you propose in order to best serve individuals experiencing a mental health crisis?**

**Action:**

- Increase funding for Crisis Intervention Trainings (CIT) so more officers can learn how to effectively deescalate someone in a mental health crisis and refer them to appropriate mental health services
- Create regional crisis stabilization centers and reopen Mendota Mental Health Institute in Madison for civil commitments so law enforcement are not using

valuable resources to transport individuals to Winnebago during an emergency detention.

### **Connect with Candidates!**

*Identify yourself as a NAMI member and a registered voter.\* Ask one of the candidate questions or talk about your own story of mental illness.*

\* If you are 18 or older and have not registered to vote, register online or find out how to register on Election Day. Go to MyVote Wisconsin: <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/RegisterOnline>. Voting is easy but you will need a photo ID:

- Wisconsin driver's license
- US passport
- Military ID
- Tribal ID (even if expired)
- Certificate of nationalization that is less than 2 years old
- College or university of ID (and proof of enrollment)

### References

1. Wisconsin Mental Health and Substance Use Needs Assessment, p. 53 & 39, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p00613-17.pdf>
2. Wisconsin Mental Health and Substance Use Needs Assessment, p. 43, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p00613-17.pdf>
3. Wisconsin Mental Health and Substance Use Needs Assessment, p. 52, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p00613-17.pdf>
4. Wisconsin Mental Health and Substance Use Needs Assessment, p. 57, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p00613-17.pdf>
5. Wisconsin Mental Health and Substance Use Needs Assessment, p. 56, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p00613-17.pdf>
6. Winnebago Mental Health Institute, p. 5, <http://media.graytvinc.com/documents/WMHIReportFinal442018.pdf>
7. Wisconsin Mental Health and Substance Use Needs Assessment, p. 58, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p00613-17.pdf>
8. Wisconsin Mental Health and Substance Use Needs Assessment, p. 40, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p00613-17.pdf>
9. MN Department of Human Services, [https://mn.gov/dhs/assets/school-linked-mental-health\\_tcm1053-333534.pdf](https://mn.gov/dhs/assets/school-linked-mental-health_tcm1053-333534.pdf)
10. IPS Employment Center, <https://ipsworks.org/index.php/evidence-for-ips/>
11. Social Security Administration, [https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/supported\\_employment.html](https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/supported_employment.html)
12. Wisconsin Mental Health and Substance Use Needs Assessment, p. 14, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p00613-17.pdf>
13. Pewtrusts, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2017/04/07/getting-the-mentally-ill-out-of-jails>
14. Wisconsin Mental Health and Substance Use Needs Assessment, p. 42, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p00613-17.pdf>