

**NAMI SW WA's Behavioral Health Services Unit to Close; NAMI Affiliate Will Expand
Advocacy, Support and Education Programs
April 12, 2019**

NAMI SW WA (www.namiswwa.org) has decided to close its three-therapist Behavioral Health Services (BHS) unit, which provided behavioral health therapy to Medicaid patients. NAMI SW WA was the only NAMI affiliate in the nation to provide this service. Over the next 30 days or less, NAMI SW WA will assist its BHS clients to transfer to other service providers. This closure does not impact NAMI SW WA's other employees, volunteers, or services, which focus on community education, advocacy, and support for individuals and families impacted by mental health conditions.

"This action in no way reflects upon the work done by our three dedicated BHS therapists. With the important experience they have gained at NAMI SW WA, they will go on to further growth in their field, in an industry where they are urgently needed due to scarcity of qualified professionals," explained Ann Donnelly, Board President.

Other behavioral health providers to Medicaid clients in the region include Community Services Northwest (now a part of Sea Mar), Lifeline Connections and Columbia River Mental Health Services. The Kaiser system provides behavioral health services to its subscribers.

Donnelly explained that challenges for the three-year old program included rising labor costs, complex compliance and billing procedures, and the small size of the unit compared to other providers. "Critical mass is important to cost control. We realized we weren't likely to get where we needed to be. We wanted to offer our therapists the benefits they deserved but our budget didn't permit it. We faced a difficult choice and we finally decided to expand in traditional NAMI fields that are in increasing demand."

NAMI SW Washington is one of over 500 local affiliates of the nation's largest organization advocating for mental health in the nation. Currently located at Tower Mall, which will be redeveloped according to a City of Vancouver plan, NAMI SW WA will soon move to its new location at 2500 Main Street, where it will lease office space from the Vancouver Housing Authority.

An example of advocacy and education thrusts for NAMI SW WA, the non-profit proposes to offer a newly designed briefing for companies' employees who serve the public face to face, who may be challenged in encounters with individuals with mental health conditions. "The response to this offering has been very positive. Companies need this. Their employees need it, and certainly individuals with serious mental health conditions need to be understood and valued when they enter a work place."

NAMI SW WA (www.namiswwa.org) already provides a wide variety of programs for individuals and families impacted by mental illness, such as Family to Family, Peer to Peer, and Basics. NAMI SW WA provides Crisis Intervention Training to law enforcement, emergency response personnel and public employees, and its See Me workshop in which mental health peers describe their life experiences with mental health conditions.

For further information, contact Kim Schneiderman, Executive Director, NAMI SW WA, at 360-695-2823.