

May 1, 2021

Dear Members of the Higher Education Conference Committee:

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed tremendous strain upon young people. The number of young adults with suicidal ideation is on the rise and more people are turning to drugs and alcohol to manage the stress of social isolation. NAMI Minnesota is pleased to see the care and attention that the Higher Education Committees in both the House and Senate have taken to address student mental health issues, particularly those with less access to supports in our community and technical colleges.

NAMI Minnesota supports the funding increases in both the House and Senate bills to address student mental health. We see tremendous value in expanding access to peer supports that is made in the Senate Higher Education Omnibus bill, as well as efforts to ensure that teachers and staff have access to suicide prevention training. The House also has good ideas and their omnibus bill funds an online information hub that can connect students with the mental health resources, as well as to meet other needs such as housing and food. NAMI is also pleased to see that the House provides \$100,000 for grant funding to support a community-based mental health provider to co-locate at a community or technical college to provide mental health treatment. These providers can bill health insurance and can continue providing care for the student during the summer or after graduation.

Minnesota is in the midst of a severe mental health workforce shortage. Of Minnesota's eleven geographic regions, nine have been designated by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as mental health shortage areas. This shortage is most acute in rural parts of the state and in communities of color. For this reason, NAMI Minnesota supports the House funding that allows up to four physicians to participate in an addiction medicine fellowship program through Hennepin Health, providing an important new pathway for people to enter the substance use disorder workforce. This fellowship program will prepare physicians to become experts in the prevention, clinical evaluation, and treatment of people with substance use disorders. This includes supporting adolescents with substance use disorders, Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), outpatient therapies, care coordination for pregnant women, as well as supporting people with substance use and a co-occurring mental illness. These fellows will be prepared to serve as leaders in their department or program and support other physicians and clinicians to better meet the needs of people with substance use disorders.

Thank you for your hard work and support of people with mental illnesses and substance use disorders in the omnibus higher education bill.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director

Sam Smith
Public Policy Coordinator