



February 19, 2024

Dear Members of the House Human Services Finance Committee:

NAMI Minnesota was pleased to have the opportunity to serve on the Priority Admissions Task Force. The task force had a difficult charge, but we believe the final report is good and contains important recommendations.

It's important to note that our mental health system has not been fully built. Adding to this is an increased number of people struggling with their mental health. Every day we see the inability of children or adults to access the level of care where and when they need it. It ranges from not being able to schedule an appointment with a therapist or psychiatrist for months, to boarding in the ER, to waiting for a residential bed in the community, to ending up in jail.

Thus, the solution isn't just to add beds at DCT. We must address the shortages and lack of funding in the community as well, and we must increase the level of treatment we provide in the jails.

For NAMI, one of the most important recommendations is that we need to provide earlier intervention. We cannot address the need for the highest and most restrictive level of care if we don't figure out how to help people earlier. Diverting people from the criminal justice system in the first place, through calling 988 and having mobile crisis teams respond is critical. Making sure that young people experiencing their first psychotic episode or bipolar disorder receive intensive treatment soon after their symptoms develop to prevent these mental health conditions from becoming disabling is critical. And lastly, intervening before someone is a danger to themselves or others by utilizing peer specialists to engage people in treatment is also critical.

We know the focus will be on adding beds to DCT. But please do not forget about the importance of our community mental health system – and the need to address low rates and the workforce shortage. People need DCT services often because of their inability to access the level of care they need in the community – and their condition worsens.

We have already heard from legislators stating there is no funding this year and so what can be done that doesn't cost anything. While DCT can try to find staff to open up some beds, the reality is that this crisis we are experiencing of people waiting in jails and hospitals for care at Anoka cannot be addressed without funding. We hope you take the time to read the full report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sue Abderholden", is written over a white background.

Sue Abderholden, MPH  
Executive Director



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