



# **nami news**



*The Nation's Voice on Mental Illness*

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## **NAMI MAINE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR WINS NATIONAL AWARD FOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP IN HELPING PRISONERS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS**

**Arlington, VA**—Carol Carothers, executive director of NAMI Maine, who led Maine's initiative to prevent inappropriate incarceration and improve treatment of people with mental illnesses has been awarded \$120,000 and the nation's highest honor for community health leadership. She is one of 10 outstanding individuals from around the United States chosen to receive a Robert Wood Johnson Community Health Leadership Program (CHLP) award.

"We are very proud of Carol," said Michael J. Fitzpatrick, acting national executive director of NAMI (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill). "Her leadership, commitment, advocacy and organizing skills have long been known to many of us within NAMI. It is wonderful to see her recognized now for her effectiveness at a broader national level."

Influenced by the suicide of an 18-year-old inmate at a maximum-security prison, Carothers in 2000 launched an initiative to improve treatment for prisoners with mental illnesses and to find alternatives to jail for offenders with serious mental illnesses. She called attention to the cause by generating statewide media coverage of the condition under which an estimated 5,500 inmates with mental illnesses live in Maine's jails and prisons, and assembled a broad-based coalition of families, inmates, mental health providers, corrections and law enforcement professionals, state officials and advocates to identify problems and solutions for inmates with mental illnesses.

She also initiated several legislative proposals to increase options for diverting people with serious mental illnesses from the criminal justice system and improve crisis response by prison and jail personnel and police officers. As a result of her efforts, NAMI Maine now provides education and training to law enforcement and corrections officers to avoid unnecessary confrontation and violence with people with mental illnesses. The organization has become a national source of best practices for criminal justice professionals.

"The award really honors all of NAMI Maine and all the people who have worked with me as a coalition," Carothers said. "With the state budget cuts we are facing, the timing is perfect. I hope we can use it to help raise even more money to keep making a difference."

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“These committed people have stepped into the breach, providing services and attending to needs that our larger health care system is unable to meet,” said Catherine Dunham, program director, CHLP. “They have the wisdom to invest in and educate their communities because they know that the only real way to improve the health of the people in their communities is to prevent illness and injury in the first place.”

The program awards \$1.2 million each year to individuals who have overcome significant challenges to expand access to health care and social services to underserved members of their communities. Carothers and the nine other winners will be honored at a June 16 event in Washington, D.C. She will receive \$105,000 to enhance her program and \$15,000 as a personal award. The honorees were selected from nearly 800 nominations. The Community Health Leadership Program is a national program of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the nation’s largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving health and health care for all Americans. For more information, contact the program at (617) 426-9772 or visit [www.communityhealthleaders.org](http://www.communityhealthleaders.org)

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*NAMI: The Nation’s Voice on Mental Illness leads the national grassroots effort to transform America’s mental health care system, combat stigma, support research, and attain adequate health insurance, housing, rehabilitation, jobs and family support for millions of Americans living with mental illnesses. NAMI’s one thousand affiliates are dedicated to public education, advocacy and support and receive generous donations from tens of thousands of individuals as well as grants from government, foundations and corporations. NAMI’s greatest asset, however, is its volunteers—who donate an estimated \$135 million worth of their time each year.*

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