

NAMI's 2007-10 Strategic Plan poses a goal for NAMI to become a truly inclusive organization that embraces and celebrates the diversity of its membership, envisioning the organization to have a culturally competent presence among diverse communities. With the recognition that the American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) population is one that NAMI is committed to including and effectively engaging within the organization, the NAMI Multicultural Action Center is planning new and focused efforts within this community. To kick off these efforts, the Multicultural Action Center hosted an AI/AN Mental Health Listening Session on Feb. 7, 2009.

The NAMI AI/AN Mental Health Listening Session consisted of 20 national experts from a variety of backgrounds and tribal affiliations. The group was comprised of individuals living with mental illness, family members of persons with mental illness, providers and researchers. The main objectives of the meeting were to identify opportunities to improve mental health education and support for this population and to elicit expert advice in order for NAMI to successfully engage AI/AN communities as a valued stakeholder of the organization.

This report documents what participants of the listening session identified as important historical and cultural context, pressing issues in mental health among AI/AN communities, recommendations for the mental health system as a whole and potential next steps for NAMI to increase inclusion and support of American Indian and Alaska Native communities across the nation.

Discussion of pressing mental health issues among AI/AN communities covered a broad range of topics including stigma, cultural sensitivity, discrimination, integration of AI/AN traditions in mental health care and the need for education and advocacy. Participants provided recommendations for the mental health system as a whole out of this discussion that are categorized in this report in priority areas of *barriers to quality care*, *cultural competence* and *advocacy and community collaboration*.

Participants' recommendations for NAMI are framed as short- and long-term goals regarding organizational readiness, outreach efforts, education and support programs, and meaningful membership and leadership roles for AI/AN individuals and families.

Based on the AI/AN Listening Session and follow-up dialogue with the participants of this meeting, NAMI has identified the following next steps:

- create advisory roles for AI/AN individuals to offer feedback and guidance;
- develop a list of potential partners and media outlets;
- develop and disseminate resources for providers, AI/AN individuals living with mental illness and their families;
- obtain and review feedback from AI/AN participants of education and support program; and
- collect demographic data to ensure AI/AN individuals and families are accessing NAMI programs and events and that this community is represented among NAMI membership.

*Executive Summary*

**Proceedings Document: NAMI American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Listening Session**

The Multicultural Action Center has already begun to move forward by creating the American Indian and Alaska Native Leaders Group to act in an advisory role to NAMI. This report will provide a foundation for the group's work to advise NAMI in addressing the needs of AI/AN communities. The support of leadership at national, state and local levels of NAMI is also imperative to effectively address AI/AN inclusion and support.

It is NAMI's hope that the wider mental health system will join our efforts to effectively address the mental health needs and recommendations of AI/AN communities.

Access the full proceedings report at [www.nami.org/multicultural](http://www.nami.org/multicultural)

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