

NAMI Illinois Position: SB2187 and HB 3074
Psychologists Prescriptions Privileges
April 2013

NAMI Illinois opposes SB 2187 and HB 3074 in its current form to expand prescriptions privileges to psychologists. We clearly acknowledge that there are serious shortages in the mental health professional workforce, particularly in public mental health systems and in rural and medically underserved areas of Illinois. We do not believe, however, that the proposed legislation will address these shortages or save money under current Illinois law.

NAMI Illinois members include family members and individuals living with mental illnesses, plus a host of relevant healthcare and policy professionals and advocates. We remain supportive of the level of scientific knowledge and experience that medical training brings to the field. The brain is a powerful, vital organ of the body. There is no way to separate brain function from overall health and the medical / physiological function of each organ. By the pure nature of mental illnesses, medications and therapies used to treat mental illnesses are designed to alter the brain's chemistry, circuitry and function. Side effects of medications are common, often to the point that patients discontinue medications because of negative effects.

The medical facts are undeniable. Statistics continue to show that on average, individuals with mental illnesses die 20-25 years earlier than the general population, suggesting that we need more emphasis on integration of primary and behavioral health services, not less. The best medical expertise must be brought to bear. Mental health professionals have been late to the dance in looking at the connections between mental health and physical health, but its time has come. If we don't fully address integrated health care needs, mental health needs become moot if people continue to die so early from physical causes. NAMI Illinois cannot advocate for the creation of more silos that hinder full integration of physical and mental health care needs.

Instead, NAMI Illinois calls upon the Illinois Psychological Association and the Illinois Psychiatric Society to work together to thoughtfully address all areas of the proposed legislation, and the touted benefits. We urge professional associations to work together toward goals that clearly address workforce shortages throughout the state, access to quality care and true integration of physical and behavioral health. The focus must be on creation of a system that will better promote the development of integrated primary and behavioral health services whether individuals are seen in specialty behavioral health or primary care provider settings.

The sands are currently shifting in every imaginable discussion within the entire healthcare arena. A piecemeal approach has never been a good method of setting policy or changing rules. NAMI Illinois' concern is not solely with psychologists' prescription privileges; it's with passing bills that don't mandate the highest level of biomedical education, followed by an appropriate period of supervision with a psychiatrist. The debate over SB 2187 and GB 3074 feels like there has never been dialogue or discussion between the full ranges of professionals who would be affected by this decision. We urge that discussion to begin now. It's a professional discussion that must fully involve psychiatrists, psychologists, advanced practice nurses, physician's assistants and others. While not an easy discussion, it's one where individuals with mental illnesses – and their families – have the most to gain and the most to lose. Discussions must include clear negotiation and agreement on educational requirements, clinical experience, medical supervision, boundaries/limits of authority and collaboration for each professional license.

NAMI Illinois' focus and broader goals remain on creating improved systems for integrated, person-centered care. That means quality, safe care for individuals living with mental illnesses.