

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Youth Mental Health Services on the Chopping Block Without Community Support

NAMI San Francisco turns to community to close \$200,000 funding gap and save mental health programs for 2,600 students

SAN FRANCISCO, April 21, 2026 – San Francisco has one of the highest rates of mental health needs in California. More than 22% of adults in the city report needing help for mental health or substance use issues, compared to 16% statewide. NAMI San Francisco, the local chapter of the grassroots nonprofit National Alliance on Mental Illness, provides free services for nearly 7,000 San Franciscans every year through peer-led support groups, education programs, and crisis helplines. However, budget cuts at City Hall are putting these mental health services at risk.

In February the City proposed sweeping cuts that would wipe out 100% of NAMI SF's public funding – and many of its programs. The community mobilized, inundating the inboxes and voicemails of the Department of Public Health, supervisors, and the Mayor and showing up for public testimony. A petition to restore NAMI SF funding garnered 1,985 signatures within three days. In late March the DPH announced a partial reversal, stating in a memo, "NAMI's peer-to-peer program delivers direct client stabilization, crisis prevention, and recovery support that reduce psychiatric hospitalizations and connect individuals to formal clinical care with a special focus on serving the Black/African American population."

The reversal still leaves NAMI SF with a \$200,00 shortfall. "We are deeply grateful for continued funding from the City," says NAMI SF executive director Anne Fischer. "But we're still short. Without new funding sources, we're facing the reality that we might have to cut our school-based youth program."

Last year, NAMISF reached more than 2,600 students and educators at 29 high schools in San Francisco, talking to students about how to recognize signs of mental health challenges in themselves and their peers, understand available resources, and feel empowered to reach out for help. Mental health conditions start early – 50% by the age of 14. Yet one-third of youth ages 10-24 who struggle with mental health do not seek care at all, with an average lag of 8-10 years between onset of symptoms and treatment. "One of the goals of our youth program is crisis reduction," Fischer says. "By high school, most teens know someone with mental health issues or have experienced mental health concerns themselves. Our high school program gives them tools to talk about these concerns, pathways to get help, and envision a world where people affected by mental health conditions can live healthy, fulfilling lives."

After a NAMISF visit to Balboa High School, a student realized they'd been depressed for years. "I've been holding it in for a really long time. After school that day, I went home and told my mom. I told her I need help with this because it is not something I can fix for myself."

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and NAMISF hopes to rally the community again to help make up the funding gap and preserve its teen outreach programs. The biggest fundraiser of the year, NAMIWalks SF, takes place on May 16, with a goal of raising \$200,000. The Walk welcomes individuals, teams, and sponsors to come together in a celebration of community resilience – and to save vital programs.

NAMISF Board President Charles Reader summarizes the stakes: "San Francisco is facing a mental health crisis, and the systems meant to respond are under-resourced and overextended. Organizations like NAMI San Francisco are helping to hold the line, but we cannot do it alone. Our peer-led programs are a critical part of the city's mental health safety net. The NAMIWalk is a call to action to invest in community-based support and ensure no one is left without access to care."

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About NAMI SF

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is the nation's largest grassroots organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals living with a mental health condition and their loved ones. NAMI San Francisco works collaboratively with partners in our city to end the stigma associated with mental illness and to promote early identification and recovery by providing education and community support. NAMISF partners include the Kumbaa Healing Project, the San Francisco African American Faith-Based Coalition, the San Francisco Department of Public Health, and Citywide Case Management.

NAMISF offers support groups and classes for people living with a mental health condition and, separately, for family and caregivers, available in English, Spanish, and Cantonese. All are led by NAMI-trained peers who understand mental health challenges firsthand. NAMI San Francisco programs are recovery- focused and progressive, supporting individuals at every stage in their journey. For anyone with immediate needs, NAMISF provides a Help Line and resource guides on our website.

<https://www.namisf.org/namiwalks>