



NAMI Calls on Congress to Promote Nationwide Expansion of Police Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT)

WASHINGTON, April 29, 2014 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The National Alliance on Mental Illness ([NAMI](#)) is calling for nationwide expansion of Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) to reduce fatal events involving police and people living with mental illness.

"CIT saves lives," wrote NAMI Policy Director Ron Honberg and NAMI CIT Program Manager Laura Usher in testimony submitted to a U.S. Senate Judiciary [subcommittee hearing](#) on April 29 on "Law Enforcement Responses to Disabled Americans."

"Police are often the first responders when a person is in psychiatric distress" said the NAMI testimony. "Every community owes it to them to provide the knowledge and training to handle mental health crisis situations safely and compassionately." "At the same time, people living with [mental illness](#)—through no fault of their own—deserve to be helped through appropriate understanding and de-escalation tactics. Ultimately, we should be promoting treatment rather than warehousing them in jails and prisons."

CIT includes 40 hours of intensive training for police as well as coordination with mental health providers in a community to transfer individuals in crisis directly to treatment facilities.

The CIT model was established 25 years ago in Memphis. NAMI today has a national [CIT Technical Assistance Center](#) that works closely with the [University of Memphis CIT Center](#).

- Following establishment of the Memphis program, injuries to police officers responding to mental health calls dropped 80 percent.
- CIT helps to reduce arrests and save money, yet only 15 percent of law enforcement jurisdictions have adopted the program.

- One in five jail and prison inmates lives with mental illness. Many might have been diverted into treatment rather than incarcerated.

In calling for CIT expansion, NAMI emphasized that federal and state policies should focus on providing incentives rather than mandates.

"CIT won't work if it is imposed from above," the testimony noted. "The commitment has to be rooted in the community, involving local leaders, police and mental health professionals."

Witnesses on the hearing panels included Sergeant A.D. Paul of the Plano Police Department, who serves on the board of NAMI Collin County in Texas and Pete Earley, author of *Crazy: A Father's Search through America's Mental Health Madness* and a NAMI member.

About NAMI

NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.

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