



Advocacy and Raising
Awareness on Campus

For NAMIC on Campus Clubs



Why Raise Awareness and Advocate?

Long story short: Because mental health matters.

Mental health impacts every part of life, including academic success, social interactions and overall health. Balancing papers, exams and a social life can make college stressful. For the one in five students with a mental health condition, this balance can present unique challenges.



ADVOCATE

As a NAMI on Campus club, you play a vital role in creating positive change on your campus. Your voice is critical in raising mental health awareness and decreasing the stigma associated with mental health conditions. We know that stigma is the number one barrier to college students seeking help. Your advocacy can increase access to mental health services, educate your peers and leave a positive impact on the mental health culture of your campus.

Raise Awareness of What?

In 2011, NAMI conducted a national survey of college students with mental health conditions to learn about their experiences in school. The students gave great information on what could improve their college experience. Through advocacy you can improve the experiences and lives of your peers. In the survey report, [College Students Speak](#), students' recommendations fell into three categories and provide important opportunities to advocate for positive change.

1. Increased Mental Health Awareness, Training and Education

The most fundamental way your NAMI on Campus club can make a positive difference on campus is to advocate for increased mental health awareness. Team up with other mental health organizations or departments or take the lead on raising awareness for your campus. You will educate the campus community, reduce stigma and direct people to campus resources. Raising awareness of the cause is the first step for improving the culture.



AWARENESS

Ideas for action:

- Distribute materials with information about mental health and resources available on your campus.
- Promote the Stigmafree campaign on your campus and encourage students, faculty and staff to take the #IamStigmaFree pledge.

2. Improved Mental Health Services and Supports

Effective mental health services and supports are important to student success and a healthy campus community. Supports offered by colleges and universities vary, but every school should have:

- Counseling services – both individual and group.
- Mental health screening and evaluation.
- Connection and referrals to off-campus and community mental health providers.
- Crisis services – including a twenty-four-hour hotline and staff trained in how to effectively respond to mental health crises.
- Integrated mental health and drug and alcohol treatment programs.
- Peer support and education services.

Ideas for action:

- Work with the student health center and counseling center to increase the scope of mental health services and supports available to students.
- Promote crisis intervention services, including suicide prevention, and training for students, faculty and staff.

3. Promotion of Student Accommodations

Accommodations allow students to participate equally and fully in their education. Some common accommodations include a reduced course load and modified testing and assignments. For students with mental health conditions, accessing appropriate accommodations can make a huge difference in academic achievement and degree completion. We asked our survey respondents who did not access accommodations on campus to tell us why they didn't use them. Many said it was because they didn't even know that accommodations were available for students with mental health conditions. This is where your advocacy to promote accommodations can make a difference.



PROMOTE
ACCOMODATIONS

Ideas for action:

- Work with your Student Disabilities Center to ensure that students know that accommodations are available.
- Educate students and faculty members about the importance of accommodations and making the process of getting them easy to understand for students living with mental health conditions.

Allies

Allies are those who share a common interest with your club. Natural allies are those on your campus who are already working on similar issues, like professors in the psychology department, staff in the counseling center, public safety staff, campus mental health professionals, LGBTQ clubs, cultural organizations, veterans' groups and other mental health advocacy groups like Active Minds. Create a mental health work group comprised of these allies to increase communication between students and administrators. The more allies you have, the more you can accomplish, as everyone brings different resources, connections, insight and skills to the group.

Students are your most important allies. Incorporate their voices into all your advocacy efforts. Find out what changes they want to see by hosting town hall meetings and surveying them to learn more. Submit testimonials and op-eds to your campus newspaper. Hold panel discussions with students to get their input and experiences on a relevant topic to your campus (i.e. suicide prevention, eating disorders, veterans' transitions, LGBTQ mental health, minority mental health and more).

Working together will build a strong, unified and amplified voice for change.

Goals

Once you've identified what you want to change, work with your allies to develop targeted goals. Setting goals defines the actions needed to make the change happen. Make your goals SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, related and time-bound. This will help divide long-term goals into shorter-term goals.

Here's an example: You identify your issue as inadequate crisis services on campus. Your goal is to have a 24/7 crisis hotline staffed by mental health professionals on campus within three months. With your allies help, decide what person on campus has the power to make the changes you envision and meet with that school leader to work on your goal. Funding may be a hurdle, and the SMART framework can help you adjust your goals as challenges arise.

Ultimately, your college decides on changes; however, your club can provide strong, vocal support for needed change, and that matters. Bringing awareness to an issue is a victory itself.

Are you ready to advocate? Check out the steps to positive change on campus!

Steps to Positive Change on Campus

Identify Your Issue

What do you want to change?

Before you start advocating, assess what's going on.

Be Strategic

Based on your assessment, what changes need to be made?

How can you make it happen?

Begin by identifying what's working well and build on this foundation.

Connect with Allies

As you build your advocacy campaign, work with natural allies to develop your goals.

Next, meet with campus leadership to get the ball rolling.

Check out the [allies and goals page](#) for more.

Launch a Campaign

Tell other students what you're working on. Use social media and campus publications to get the word out.

Need to build your case? Invite other clubs to get involved and create a workgroup. Find out what changes students want and increase buy in through surveys and discussion groups.

Keep Going

If you are not seeing change, meet with campus leaders again to present your case. Bring the information, data and numbers you've gathered.

Accountability matters so stay involved so that your school does what they said they would do.

Assessment example: What mental health services and supports already exist on campus? How do these compare to similar schools and what students have said they want? Check out [College Students Speak!](#)

When developing your strategy, consider beginning with small asks and work toward broader change. Systematic change is a process.

Aim high when meeting with school administrators. If they are willing to work with you, great! If not, don't settle. It's time to build your case through your campaign.

Uncontrollable factors can slow the process but don't let it derail your advocacy activity. Work with the decision makers. Don't let them off the hook too easily, but acknowledge the challenges.

Additional Resources

If you have questions or would like additional information, check out the following resources:

- [Raising Mental Health Awareness](#)
 - Created specifically to support presentations about mental health to students on college campuses, this toolkit provides all the resources necessary for a successful educational presentation

All materials needed for Raising Mental Health Awareness can be found on the NAMI on Campus NAMINet page, linked above. Just use your nami.org login!

- Use the [Stigmafree on Campus](#) campaign to educate and raise awareness.
- Access the [NAMI on Campus leaders only](#) materials. If you don't have access, email your NAMI State Organization (NSO) or NAMI Affiliate (NA) for directions on how to gain access.
- The sample [survey](#) on the Extranet is a great way to gather students' opinions
- Work with your NSO or your NA. There may be advocacy and awareness events you can collaborate on.

Email your NSO/NA contact to share your club's successful advocacy projects! This is a great way for your NSO/NA to share what's happening on campus with membership and stakeholders.

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