



National Alliance on Mental Illness

NAMI | New Hampshire

Statement on March 31st Officer-Involved Shooting in Claremont, NH (April 3, 2021)

NAMI New Hampshire mourns the death of another NH resident, reportedly in a mental health crisis, killed by a police SWAT team in Claremont this week. NAMI NH Executive Director Ken Norton stated, “This is a tragic outcome for the individual, their family and friends, as well as the law enforcement officers involved.”

While not commenting on this specific case, NAMI NH believes more intensive training of law enforcement is needed and the issue is much larger than any one single case. This can be clearly seen by a report issued by the NH Attorney General’s Office on officer-involved shootings, indicating 45% of those fatalities in New Hampshire involve people with known mental health issues – a significantly higher rate than the national average.

Under a federal grant due to expire in September 2021, NAMI NH has been collaborating with the New Hampshire Department of Safety and New Hampshire State Police to provide the internationally acclaimed 40-hour Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training for law enforcement and first responders. However, Norton indicated demand far exceeds their capacity to provide the training, noting: “Police recognize the need for more mental health training; every time we offer a CIT course, the seats are all filled with a waiting list in a matter of hours.” Norton called on New Hampshire legislators to approve the increased funding for Police Standards and Training and for additional CIT training as proposed in the Governor’s budget, and in a bill sponsored by Senator Giuda.

National events of the past year have led to calls for police reform and also the recent passage of federal legislation to create a 3-digit suicide prevention/mental health crisis line (988 – due to go into effect in July 2022). NAMI NH urges state policy leaders and legislators to rebuild a system of mental health crisis care which relies less on 911, law enforcement, and hospitalization, and more on a mental health crisis line, regional mobile crisis response teams, and community-based services including peer support.

NAMI NH also emphasizes the importance friends and family can play in averting tragedy. They urge people to not wait until a crisis to seek help for mental health issues. Talk to your family physician, call NAMI NH’s Information and Resource Line (not a crisis line) at 1-800-242-6264 (press 4), or visit www.NAMINH.org for local mental health resources. Friends and family members are also urged to temporarily and voluntarily remove access to firearms for an individual who is depressed or acting erratically (like you might take the car keys from someone who is intoxicated), noting that firearm suicide deaths are more than double firearm homicide deaths in the United States. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, answered locally by Headrest in Lebanon, NH, is available 24/7 by calling 1-800-273-8255; the Crisis Text Line can be reached by texting NAMI to 741741.

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