

Mental Health Matters

The newsletter of the Illinois State Bar Association's Section on Mental Health Law

Editor's Note

BY SANDRA BLAKE

INSTITUTED IN 1949 BY MENTAL Health America, May is Mental Health Awareness Month. This year's theme, "More Good Days, Together," focuses on community connection, encouraging individuals to share experiences, support one another, and collectively build mental wellness, moving away from solitary struggles.

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) efforts, on the other hand, are centered on reducing stigma and supporting mental wellness. The NAMI theme is "Stigma grows in silence. Healing begins in community."



Advocates in all Mental Health Awareness activities participate in initiatives that emphasize connecting with others and sharing support that helps

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Lawyers' Assistance Program: Mental Health

BY NICOLE SARTORI

A WEEK AFTER CELEBRATING my twentieth wedding anniversary, I was blindsided by discovering my husband's infidelity. Utterly devastated does not begin to describe how I felt in those first couple of weeks following the discovery. I was on autopilot during those first couple of months. As a partner in a two-person firm in a smaller collar county that focused primarily on family law (the irony was not lost on me) and traffic/criminal defense, I had difficulty concentrating at work. I knew that I had court appearances in the morning but would drive to the office instead. I had such difficulty controlling

my emotions that I cried twice while in court because a well-meaning court staff person asked me how I was doing. As I went through the stages of grief of my marriage, I recognized that I was overwhelmed, severely depressed, and had suicidal ideations. After deciding that death by train would be my preferred way of dying, I reached out to my doctor. She prescribed an antidepressant and referral to a therapist. Because my health insurance was an HMO plan, I had to use the in-network therapist with the doctor's group in my plan. The waitlist for the therapist

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create more positive days. All the while, participants wear the green apparel that signifies mental health awareness.

Mental Health America prepared a [downloadable planning guide](#) to equip organizations, workplaces, educators, or advocacy groups with the tools to make a meaningful impact on mental wellness. The organization also provided outreach

ideas for individuals, organizations, businesses, or schools.

In this issue, one attorney shares how the Lawyers' Assistance Program (LAP) helped address her mental health needs, and another attorney shares her personal experience with individuals with mental health and NAMI. ■

The Gift of Understanding

BY SUSAN M. GOLDBERG

AS A CHILD, EVERY YEAR I NOTICED that there was always one present that remained under our Christmas tree for several days after Christmas. It was a small gift with a tag on it that said "For Luella." My mother told me that Luella was a woman who was in "a mental hospital."

Back then, the only other person I knew who had ever been in a "mental hospital" was the mother of a friend. I never heard anything else about Luella or my friend's mother, why they were there, or what such a place was like.

Today there is much more discussion about mental health. The phone number "211" offers resources and support for mental health issues. The National Alliance for Mental Illness, or "NAMI" was started in the late '70s by two mothers, who each had a son with schizophrenia. NAMI offers free online and in-person support groups, information and practical advice for critical times such as the hospitalization and return home of a loved one with a mental health condition.

I hope that Luella was comforted by my mother's gesture of kindness at Christmastime each year. And I hope that I can show that same kindness toward persons I meet along the way who need love and understanding in difficult times. Not just at Christmas, but all year long. ■

Susan Goldberg wrote and recorded this article, which was aired on her local NPR station.



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Mental Health Matters

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Lawyers' Assistance Program

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was six weeks. During those six weeks, I filed for divorce and an emergency motion to restrict my husband's parenting time. I was struggling. I did not know that the Lawyers' Assistance Program (LAP) had mental health services available.

I was familiar with LAP providing alcohol-based interventions based on programming at my law school back in the early 2000s. Back when the Lawyers' Assistance Program was founded in the mid-1980s as a non-profit organization, it dealt primarily with issues of lawyers' alcohol dependence. A 1990 study showed that lawyers were abusing alcohol at a much higher rate (18%) as compared to the general population (10%). See "Substance Use Disorders Among Legal Professionals," Research Update Butler Center for Research (Mar. 2017). Even now, in their most recent statistics that cover July 2025 to February 2026, 81% of the substance use services that LAP provides lawyers in Illinois dealt with alcohol. As I discussed how much I was struggling with a fellow colleague, he asked if I reached out to LAP. Because I was not drinking alcohol as part of my healing journey, LAP was not even on my radar. He was the one that told me about the mental health services that LAP provides.

LAP provides assessments, individual counseling, support groups as well as referrals for licensed Illinois judges, attorneys, and law students. Their mental health assessments can be for anxiety, depression, etc., as well as cognitive decline in aging attorneys. Their current confidential support groups include a

Women's Support Group, a Men's Support Group, a Young Lawyers'/Law Student Group, a co-ed Depression and Anxiety Support Group, and a Relapse Prevention Group that meet weekly over Zoom. Each group is led by a clinician that informally checks in with each participant and discussions organically lead from there. You do not need to RSVP to attend. Attendance is optional without having to explain why you can't attend if you have a scheduling conflict. Currently, LAP employs four professional clinicians, two of which are also attorneys. Reaching out to LAP to explore these services that are available to you is as simple as clicking on the "Get Help" tab on their website of www.Illinoislap.org or calling 312-726-6607. There is no fee associated with utilizing these services.

In my case, I was talking with a representative from LAP within 2 hours of filling out the form on their website. In fairness, I did complete it during work hours. I was scheduled for individual counseling over Zoom within the week. I was given the Women's Support Group Zoom link and attended the weekly group the same week. It brought relief to me almost instantly because I did not feel like I was drowning anymore.

In conducting my research for this article, I found out that I am not alone. Over the last several years, LAP on average, received over 450 new attorneys seeking services annually. Like me, 79% of the individuals that seek services are self-referrals. Interestingly, according to the

statistics from July 2025 to February 2026, only 37% of the attorneys using services by LAP are female even though the research shows that a significantly higher proportion of women had AUDIT-C (Alcohol Use Disorder Identification test) consistent with problematic [alcohol] use compared to men, and women had higher levels of anxiety and stress. See "The Prevalence of Substance Use and Other Mental Health Concerns Among American Attorneys," *Addict Med*, Volume 10, Number 1, 48, 49 (Jan./Feb. 2016).

I do not know why women tend to need more help but are not reaching out to LAP as much. My goal in writing this article for the ISBA Women and the Law Standing Committee and sharing my personal story is to create awareness of the existence of these services and reduce the stigma associated with utilizing these services. I would like to thank Alison Siczek and Tony Pacione at LAP for taking the time to answer my questions and provide the most updated statistics for this article. I dedicate this article to the colleague that helped me by sharing the information and implore you to share this knowledge with any of your fellow lawyers that you think would benefit from these amazing services. ■

Nicole Sartori is a partner with McAdams & Sartori, LLC, located in Yorkville, Illinois.

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Seeing the Humanity: Northern Illinois NAMI

BY SUSAN M. GOLDBERG

DANIELLE ANGILIERI HAS ALWAYS PROTECTED PERSONS with mental health conditions...since kindergarten. Then, she would fold her small arms around them to shield them from unkind words and actions. Now, she protects them with her words and her work.

Danielle has been the Executive Director of [Northern Illinois National Alliance for Mental Illness](#) (NAMI) in Rockford for the past 10 years. Before that, she was a volunteer with NAMI, and she was then the NAMI Affiliate Coordinator. At present Northern Illinois NAMI has a staff of four, and they are about to hire a fifth person.

Danielle expresses great appreciation to the Winnebago County Mental Health Board for this growth. Prior to the Board's formation, Winnebago County had been the largest county in Illinois without a Mental Health Board. The passage of a referendum to provide additional funding for mental health through sales tax has allowed Northern Illinois NAMI to increase its staff, its outreach, and services to persons with mental health

conditions and their families and loved ones.

The national organization of NAMI started in 1979, and Northern Illinois NAMI was an all-volunteer organization from 1984 to 2015. NAMI was started in the basement of a library, by two mothers whose children had mental health conditions. They saw the need for family members to find resources, help, and understanding.

"Connection has always been my purpose in life," says Danielle, "And I have always been interested in mental health. I can see the impact on families and the isolation of mental health conditions."

Danielle notes that one in five persons will experience mental illness in their lifetime. She has noticed several changes and trends in the area of mental health, including that people are talking about mental health more; many people are suffering with serious and chronic mental illness; there are hundreds of private therapists in many cities; there are more options for treatment; and there are new treatments and new testing available, including injectable medications for psychotic disorders. Danielle also notes that there is more emphasis, nationwide, about a preventative approach. This includes addressing mental health issues in youth and doing early intervention for emotional support. NAMI is, on a national level,

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now trending toward work with youth, including a middle school curriculum for teachers to use and which is available on the NAMI website.

When asked how a person knows which therapist to see, Danielle recommends interviewing a therapist to see if that person is someone who will be a good fit. NAMI can also help with recommendations for therapists.

Danielle sees the need for improvements in the area of involuntary admissions, often as requested by family members. “Kendra’s Law” is a New York law creating a means for court ordered Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT), so that persons with mental illness and a history of hospitalizations or violence are provided with community-based services to meet their needs. Danielle notes that although many Illinois counties, especially with large cities, have utilized this approach, in only one instance has this approach been utilized in Winnebago County. Danielle notes that for this approach to be more widely accepted, there must be a local provider that agrees to provide this type of outpatient admission and treatment.

NAMI Northern Illinois offers several programs and resources for persons with mental health conditions and their families. These programs include an eight-week class called “NAMI Family-to-Family,” for family members of adults living with mental illness, NAMI “In Our Own Voice,” a presentation from persons with personal experience of living with mental illness, and NAMI

“Ending the Silence,” presented to middle and high school students about signs and symptoms of mental illness. They also offer several support groups, including those for teens, adults, and family members of persons living with mental illness.

Danielle offers the following words of wisdom:

- Know that one in five persons will experience mental illness in their lifetime.
- Be prepared for what to look for as signs of mental illness.
- Educate yourself on symptoms of mental illness diagnoses.
- Do not equate mental illness with low intelligence.
- When approaching a person who you think may be experiencing a mental health condition, speak in basic terms but listen to them, don’t rush, and be aware that family members will often try to insert themselves.
- **See the humanity first, not the illness.**

We are fortunate to have leaders like Danielle, and organizations like NAMI, to provide education, support and resources to help lead to better understanding of the needs of persons with mental health conditions and their friends and family. ■

Susan M. Goldberg is a member of the ISBA Mental Health Law Section Council. Susan is a Champion of the Illinois Bar Foundation and is an Attorney Manager with Five Lakes Law Group.



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Silence sounds like...

NO ONE WOULD UNDERSTAND.

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I DON'T WANT TO BE A BURDEN.

Community sounds like...

YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

