

Past Panel: Houselessness and Mental Health

Reflections: *On June 28th, 2018 NAMI Multnomah held an Evening with the Experts panel discussion on houselessness and mental health. The panel featured a variety of perspectives: some of the speakers had professional or volunteer experience advocating for causes related to mental health and houselessness (see links listed below), while others had experience living with mental health conditions and being houseless—many fell into multiple categories.*

Panelists answered a couple of key questions. The first was: What do you see being the greatest barrier facing those living with mental health conditions who are also unhoused? This question generated a variety of responses, ranging from plain stigma to a mutual lack of trust between those giving and receiving services for mental health and homeless communities. One panelist noted that houseless patients who seek mental health crisis care are often assumed to be faking illness in order to secure a bed for the night, while another stated that those who most need services often refuse them for various reasons. Another panelist cited the legislative process as the biggest difficulty, explaining that political representation and legislation change too rapidly to be able to effectively aid a group of people. Each of these is a formidable barrier. The second question was: Where do you see the largest need for change, and what sorts of solutions do you envision being effective? One panelist raised the difficulty of following up on employment opportunities without a phone number, and suggested a phone-sharing program to mitigate this problem. Another urged the use of more sympathetic language in policy. Many others saw various service deficits, from poor accessibility to a lack of follow-up care. Finally, a panelist suggested that perhaps we would all be a bit kinder if we remembered that people go through many of the same struggles indoors that they do out of doors; that is, we are all human, and therefore we are all vulnerable—but we can also be loving.

To explore the organizations represented on the panel, check out these links:

[Bailey's Bones and Wishes](#)

[Because People Matter](#)

[A Home for Everyone](#)

[NorthStar Clubhouse](#)

Operation Nightwatch

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