



Comments in Support of Senate Bill 686  
From Chris Bouneff, Executive Director, NAMI Oregon  
March 23, 2021  
Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery

NAMI Oregon wishes to express its support for the intent in SB 686, which would give patients in inpatient psychiatric care the choice to see a psychiatrist in person where practical instead of being limited to only telehealth consultations.

Our understanding is that amendments are being drafted that would make SB 686 workable. We support those continued conversations to ensure the legislation doesn't inadvertently impact rural hospitals and other inpatient care settings where recruiting and retaining a psychiatrist for in-person care is impractical.

NAMI supports this concept because patients deserve a choice. While telehealth has proved an unexpected boon during the pandemic for delivery of behavioral health services, it's not appropriate for all people in all circumstances. Inpatient psychiatric care is an intensive and sometimes disorienting level of care where patients are at their most vulnerable. And the families who support them are scared and uncertain how best to support their loved ones.

The option to interact with psychiatrists and other caregivers in-person is essential to the recuperative process and essential for the families providing support following discharge. In an already harried care environment, the option to visit face-to-face with a clinical expert can both be a calming experience and better equip patients and families for discharge and beyond.

We encourage the parties working on SB 686 to continue their discussions and urge the committee to ultimately support the final product.