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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Study shows NAMI education program improves coping skills with mental illness in the family

SAN DIEGO— For many years, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has been offering free classes to help people with loved ones who have mental illness better understand their condition. Now a landmark study has shown that this program "significantly" improves coping and problem-solving abilities of family members of individuals living with mental illness.

Psychiatric Services, a journal of the American Psychiatric Association, has recently published a study led by Lisa B. Dixon, MD, MPH, of the University of Maryland School of Medicine, that looks at the efficacy of NAMI's signature program, Family-to-Family. The study found that the NAMI classes increase both knowledge about mental illness and "empowerment within the family, the service system and the community." It also offers "concrete practical benefits" and demonstrates the value of free, community-based self-help programs as a "complement" to professional mental health services.

Family-to-Family is a program comprised of a series of 12 classes for the families of persons with mental illnesses, such as major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or other conditions. The classes are small and the course co-teachers are family members themselves. The course has been designed and written by an experienced family member-mental health professional and balances education and skill-training with self care, emotional support and empowerment.

Important components of the course are:

- Learning about feelings, learning about facts
- Schizophrenia, Anxiety Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, Bipolar Disorder and Depression
- Basic brain biology/new research
- Problem solving workshop
- Medication review
- Empathy workshop - what it's like to have a brain disorder
- Communication skills workshop
- Self-care

- Rehabilitation services-what's available
- Advocacy: fighting stigma

"NAMI has long had confidence in Family-to-Family as a signature education program," said NAMI Executive Director Michael J. Fitzpatrick. "The study reinforces the position of family advocates. It is a signal to the medical profession. Doctors and other mental health care workers are often unable to provide enough support to family members, even though families often play a critical role in the treatment and recovery of loved ones."

On a local level, NAMI San Diego offers free Family-to-Family classes throughout the county funded by the County of San Diego. From June 2010 through June 2011, NAMI San Diego offered a total of 21 Family-to-Family classes with more than 270 participants completing the course. These classes are offered in English, Spanish, Vietnamese and Arabic. Classes are free, but all participants must be registered in order to attend, and can do so by calling (619) 543-1434 or (800) 523-5933.

"Family-to-Family is a very important course for anyone who has a loved one that lives with mental illness because mental illness affects everyone in the family in one way or another," said NAMI San Diego Executive Director Shannon Jaccard. "It has been shown that relapse rates are reduced when family members are educated about mental illness and learn how to partner with their loved one in their treatment plan. That is exactly what Family-to-Family teaches within an instructional curriculum and support group environment."

NAMI is a non-profit organization that provides education, support services and advocacy to improve the lives of everyone affected by mental illnesses. NAMI San Diego offers a number of free classes and support groups for people who live with mental illness and their friends and family, including the Family-to-Family course. They also run a Family and Peer Support Helpline that offers free, safe, confidential information, referrals and support for people with mental illness and their loved ones.

For more information on Family-to-Family class schedules or any other NAMI San Diego class or service, visit us online at www.namisandiego.org or call the helpline at (619) 543-1434 or (800) 523-5933.

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