

***MINDS ON THE EDGE: Facing Mental Illness* Launches National Campaign
at NAMI Convention in San Francisco July 6-9**

MINDS ON THE EDGE is a multiplatform media project that explores serious mental illness in America, describes a badly broken system, and focuses on innovative programs that offer alternatives to a mental health system that has been called “the definition of insanity.” The project was introduced at the annual National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) convention, July 6 through 9 in San Francisco, launching a year-long nationwide campaign to improve the treatment and support available to people with mental illnesses like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

The centerpiece of the project is a television program that will air on PBS stations in October 2009. Produced by the Fred Friendly Seminars, which has added a unique dimension to public affairs programming on PBS for more than 25 years, *MINDS ON THE EDGE: Facing Mental Illness* connects the dots between personal dilemmas facing individuals and families who are living with mental illness, medical practices that can be obstacles to treatment, and public policies that often do more harm than good while failing to provide the support that could make a positive difference. The multiplatform initiative includes a robust web site that provides tools and resources to support the national campaign. Widely-distributed DVDs and a series of podcasts will extend its reach and amplify its potential for impact.

Richard Kilberg, executive producer of *MINDS ON THE EDGE* and president of the Fred Friendly Seminars, said, “Lives are being ruined and money wasted with a mental health system that is universally acknowledged to be so fragmented and perverse that the system itself could be called insane. Ignorance about the biological basis of mental illness and the stigma associated with it make reform even harder than it should be. The goal of this program is to spark a public discussion that leads to change.”

Mike Fitzpatrick, executive director of NAMI, said, “For 30 years NAMI has been at the forefront, providing support and education for people with mental illness and their families and advocating for change in the mental health system. This initiative and the program DVD will be a valuable tool for our members in state chapters across the country, enhancing their efforts to increase understanding of these critical issues among stakeholders in their community”

Moderated by Frank Sesno, *MINDS ON THE EDGE: Facing Mental Illness* zeros in on wrenching and confounding situations that are playing out every day in homes and hospital ERs, on city streets and school campuses, in courtrooms and in jails, as Americans struggle with the challenges of severe mental illness. The one-hour program brings together people with such diverse perspectives as U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer, Nobel-prize-winning neuroscientist Eric Kandel, law professor Elyn Saks, who has lived with chronic schizophrenia for over 30 years, and journalist Pete Earley, who discovered the realities of the mental health system when his son developed mental illness four years ago.

NAMI is the first of many national organizations that are joining the *MINDS ON THE EDGE* campaign. Professional organizations in medicine, law, and public policy as well as support organizations for individuals with mental illness and their families are taking part, using *MINDS ON THE EDGE* as a tool to drive forward the civic dialogue about mental illness. The project, funded by the Sloan Foundation with additional support from the van Ameringen Foundation, is providing thousands of free DVDs for distribution through these organizations. The program, with its companion downloadable Viewer's Guide, provides a tool to engage the issues and help people find common ground as a first step to rectify systemic flaws in program and policy design, improve service coordination, and redirect resources into effective, evidenced-based treatment.

A website at www.mindsontheedge.org has launched providing outreach tools for the national campaign and reporting on the impact of the campaign across the country. In October the website will significantly expand in conjunction with the PBS premiere to offer extensive new multimedia content that probes the issues raised in the television program and present "best practices" that are proving effective in providing treatment and support for people with severe mental illness, their families, and the community at large. The expanded interactive website will provide a forum for many perspectives on the complex and sometimes conflicting values that must be considered and balanced as a basis for public policy.

The national campaign is organized around the stigma-busting mantra, "If I can talk about mental illness, so can you." That conversation has already begun on YouTube, where dozens of videos stories recorded by NAMI members at the NAMI convention have been uploaded at YouTube. Their voices will be joined by many more as organizations encourage their members to share their experience and insight as part of the *MINDS ON THE EDGE* campaign and drive forward the civic dialogue. The voices of people with mental illness are an essential and eloquent part of the national

conversation about improving care and support. Many people with mental illness, who call themselves “consumers” of behavioral health services, are playing an active role in creating and shaping public policies and medical practices that will support their recovery. *MINDS ON THE EDGE* includes three panelists who speak from their own experience with mental illness and have impressive professional careers that are a testament to the fact that mental illness can often be successfully managed.

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