NAMI OREGON ANNOUNCES RECIPIENTS OF 11th ANNUAL GORDON & SHARON SMITH NEW FREEDOM AWARD

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July 19, 2019
Portland, OR - The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Oregon announced today that Senator Ron Wyden has been selected as the recipient of the 11th Annual Gordon and Sharon Smith New Freedom Award.

Created by NAMI Oregon in 2009 to honor the mental health advocacy efforts of former United States Senator Gordon Smith and his wife, Sharon, the New Freedom Award is presented annually and recognizes an individual or individuals for their leadership on mental health issues.

“I’m incredibly honored to receive the Gordon and Sharon Smith New Freedom Award. I have always appreciated the partnership with my friends Gordon and Sharon Smith in not only highlighting opportunities to improve mental health policy, but addressing these crucial challenges,” said Sen. Wyden. “Thank you for this recognition.”

Former Sen. Smith said, “During the twelve years we served together in the United States Senate, Ron and I set aside partisanship and forged a friendship that allowed us achieve legislative victories that greatly benefitted Oregonians in every corner of our state.

“His tireless energy and his tenacity are legendary. And when it came to my efforts to put mental health and suicide prevention on the top of our national agenda, I could not have asked for a better ally than Ron. His selection by NAMI Oregon as the 2019 recipient of the award that bears Sharon’s and my name is richly deserved, and I look forward to personally presenting him with the award.”

The award will be presented at a dinner to be held at the Portland Downtown Waterfront Marriott on October 1. More information about the dinner can be obtained at www.namior.org or by calling (503) 230-8009.

About Sen. Wyden
Sen. Wyden has long advocated for the needs of Americans living with mental health issues and supported policies that improve access to and quality of mental and behavioral health services. Some highlights include:

- Sponsorship of the Creating High-Quality Results and Outcomes Necessary to Improve Chronic (CHRONIC) Care Act, passed as part of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, which made several policy changes in Medicare to improve care and care coordination for adults with complex needs, including mental and behavioral health issues.
- Sponsorship of the Family First Prevention Services Act, passed as part of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, which allows the use of foster care funds for mental health services and substance abuse prevention and treatment services.

- Strong support for passage and protection of the Affordable Care Act, which expanded access by including mental health and substance use disorder services, including behavioral health, as an Essential Health Benefit. The ACA also applied federal mental health parity protections to Medicaid and the individual and small group markets.

- Strong support for the CHIP Mental Health and SUD Parity Act, passed as part of the bipartisan SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act, which requires coverage and parity for mental health and substance-use disorder services in CHIP as well as expanding the use of telehealth services in Medicare for the treatment of substance use and mental health disorders.

- Cosponsorship of the Behavioral Health Coverage Transparency Act, which would increase oversight and enforcement to ensure insurance companies comply with mental health parity requirements.

- Cosponsorship of the Excellence in Mental Health Act, which created the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) program, increasing access to community mental health and substance use treatment services in eight states including Oregon. Sen. Wyden has also cosponsored the Excellence in Mental Health and Addiction Treatment Expansion Act, which would extend the program by two years and expand it to 11 additional states.

About NAMI Oregon
The National Alliance on Mental Illness of Oregon (NAMI Oregon) is a statewide grassroots organization with more than 1,700 members in 15 affiliates; it is one of 50 state organizations that comprise the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). NAMI Oregon is the state’s largest grassroots organization dedicated to education, support and advocacy around mental illness and treatment. All proceeds from the dinner will benefit NAMI Oregon’s free education, support and advocacy programs.