

Nonviolent Medicaid Army

NONVIOLENT
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ARMY

BUILDING FROM SCRATCH

The Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA) did not become a national network overnight! During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NVMA became a national network which takes different forms in our 15 (and counting!) member states. In some states, the work of the NVMA is carried out by mass organizations with decades of history, and in others, it is grounded in a practice of ministry. But in most states where the NVMA is active, people have come together to start a member-led NVMA formation from scratch. Since 2020, we have learned many lessons about what it takes to do this. It isn't easy to organize the unorganized, but we think it is a crucial step on the path towards securing our human rights to healthcare and all of our basic needs. This document summarizes lessons we have learned about starting from scratch along the way. If you are considering making a commitment to building the NVMA where you live, this document is a great place to start.

We can't get organized at the level we need with just mobilizations, charity, or slogans. We need to take a systematic approach to identifying, uniting, and developing leaders from the ranks of the poor and dispossessed. We undertook a 4-month "Struggle is a School" (SIAS) process to gather all the insights we could from the development of the NVMA in all the states where we are organizing. We designed a survey for leaders in each state to fill out, focusing on the lessons learned from the painstaking process of starting from scratch. We asked questions like "What were your biggest challenges in establishing a core of leaders?" and "What helped you stick with it and overcome challenges?" We reviewed all the responses before having group discussions with each state. Then we thoroughly reviewed notes from those conversations in order to pull out the core lessons. While we still have so much more work to do and so much more to learn, this document represents the lessons we've learned from our history so far, and from this intensive process of learning and reflection.



WHERE TO START

Starting a chapter of the Nonviolent Medicaid Army is exciting but not something we recommend rushing into. To determine whether you are ready for this, here a few things you should be doing before you consider starting:



Attend / participate in National Calls and Saturday Schools of Struggle for a minimum of 3-6 months. This will help you understand the history, current work and theory of change of the NVMA; and meet people committed to this struggle from across the country.



Stay in touch. Get in regular contact with a leader on the NVMA Base Building Team to process what you're learning, assess your terrain and begin to build your core. Read through this document with that person and talk about it.



Share your story. Sharing your story as part of #MedicaidMondays is an important tactic in our ongoing Medicaid organizing drive. When we share our own healthcare story, we break our isolation and indict the system. You can submit a #MedicaidMonday using [this form](#).



Read [Medicaid Cuts = Death](#) and [The Nonviolent Medicaid Army: A Healthcare Revolution from Below](#). Study is integral to our development as leaders. We continue to study and learn, both on our own and collectively so that as our elder General Gordon Baker said, we can “turn thinkers into fighters and fighters into thinkers”.

SO YOU'RE READY TO BUILD?

1

Begin to or continue to make an assessment of your terrain. Are you based in a rural community, a big city, a small city, a suburban area, a small or mid-size town? Are you new to your area or have you been there awhile? Do you have lots of relationships and knowledge about the area or are you just learning about it? Ask your contact on the NVMA Organizing Team or Base Building Team to share the “landscape assessment tool” and work on it together.

“If you’re starting in a new place, you have to respect that and take the time to get to know how things are”

2

As you assess your terrain, start developing a “core”. A core is a group of 4-6 people (including you) that are committed to building up the NVMA with you. When you have assembled a core that meets regularly and is familiar with our Theory of Change, structure, history and DNA you can officially launch your chapter. We don’t work on the basis of individual contacts or activists in states, so identifying a core is an essential foundation. We can help you! We may have contacts to connect you with in your state, and we have lots of proven ideas for how folks have brought in other founding members.

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3

As you begin establishing your core, get active with the Medicaid and SNAP Organizing Drive! Remember: we’re organizing the unorganized – meaning people who don’t self-identify as activists and who aren’t already involved in a bunch of other groups. We can help your chapter to base build – connect with people who are on or excluded from Medicaid and bring them in! We can train your core in the tactics of the Organizing Drive that will make a concrete improvement in people’s lives and get them the care they need or are being denied. There are many ways to use the organizing drive to grow your numbers and become a force on the ground!

4

Everything we do, we do to develop leaders! We have 4 C's of leadership: clear, committed, competent and connected. There are lots of opportunities for people to develop in the struggle for healthcare. Additionally, plug people into monthly Saturday Schools and National Calls, and Seasonal Studies.

5

The NVMA functions on the basis of collectives. Don't overthink your structure – the best structures emerge out of necessity. Avoid giving people fancy titles – there are no “presidents” here. “Coordinator” is just fine. An initial structure could be: regular meetings of the core, and regular meetings open to new people that the core organizes and leads. Once your chapter grows you can begin to identify specific responsibilities and divisions of labor for individuals or groupings. Also remember, you're part of a national network where support and accountability go hand in hand!

6

The NVMA is a vehicle to organize our class – base building is essential. When you start developing a core, you become responsible not only for attending NVMA calls yourself, but getting your core leaders there too. However, the work of building the NVMA is far deeper and more lively than just connecting new people to these calls. These calls provide the grounding and training necessary for organizing in your state. Cores of leaders are responsible for base building – going out into our communities and using the Medicaid and SNAP Organizing Drive to connect with people who are hurting so that they can join our movement. Our Base Building Team can provide training and guidance on base building tactics like door-knocking, People's Clinics, identifying opportunities to meet our people, organizing conversations, and follow-up!

So you've gotten this far and you're not sure you can do this...

That's okay! We all develop at our own pace. If you're not in a place to start a formation, keep coming to Saturday Schools and National Calls. Staying connected will help you to be ready to identify opportunities to organize in your town, region or state as they arise. Reach out to the Organizing Team anytime for more conversation.