

Greg Hansch became interested in mental health policy in large part because of a book he read by journalist and author Pete Earley. The book is called *Crazy: A Father's Search Through America's Mental Health Madness*, which details both Earley's son's story of battling mental illness, and his own investigation into the Miami-Dade County Jail. It discusses how the criminal justice system is often used as a de facto mental health treatment system.

Hansch's lifelong interest in politics and policy, coupled with the desire to support family members who were dealing with their own mental health challenges, led him into the work that he does today.

Hansch serves as the Executive Director of [NAMI Texas](#), the Texas branch of the National Association of Mental Illness. He has held various roles over the past ten years; Hansch first joined the staff in 2012 and worked exclusively on mental health policy for his first seven years.

Before starting his work at NAMI Texas, Hansch earned a master's degree in social work from Rutgers University. During that time, he focused his studies on policy – mental health policy in particular. Hansch had a fellowship that gave him access to an internship at the New Jersey Division of Mental Health and Addition Services.

"I got that experience working within state government and saw how mental health policy is implemented," Hansch said. "Shortly thereafter, I was able to get a job at NAMI Texas."



*Hansch graduating from the Eagleton Institute of Politics*

He described the nexus between mental health and criminal justice as an area of emphasis for NAMI Texas. His expertise in the area got him an invitation to join the JCMH's Collaborative Council.

The Collaborative Council is made up of judges, attorneys, advocates, and other professionals across Texas who have a stake in how mental health and the criminal justice system intersect. Their role is to bring unique perspectives and knowledge to the JCMH when considering projects and policy.

"There are so many strong voices, well informed people at the table," Hansch said. "I am just so impressed by the experience and the knowledge that they have, and I'm honored that I can, from time to time, chime in with a with a perspective."



*Hansch leading a NAMI SMARTS Teacher Training. Round Rock TX, May 2016.*

He also enjoys being able to share resources that NAMI Texas has developed. Hansch and NAMI Texas have collaborated with JCMH Commissioner & Texas Tech Law Professor Brian Shannon to publish a [book](#) on the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure. This book is an analysis and guide for practitioners called *Texas Criminal Procedure and the Offender with Mental Illness*. The Texas Bar Foundation provided grants to produce the book, now in its sixth edition, which allow the book to be printed and shared at no cost to stakeholders.

Hansch says the most rewarding part of the work he does is seeing the impact of the policies he and his team have advocated for. One of those policies is funding for Clubhouses.

Clubhouses are organizations focused on supporting people living with mental illness. They focus on wellness, recovery, and independence. Many people come out of the hospital, or out of the criminal justice system, and they are looking for something to be a part of. Clubhouses seek to provide a sense of belonging.

In 2014 NAMI Texas asked the state Legislature to support the Clubhouse model. In 2015, the Legislature invested more than \$1 million in Clubhouses across Texas. That funding has not only continued, but has increased.

“Over the years, I've seen how the state's investment in Clubhouse services has improved quality of life in a measurable number of people's lives,” Hansch said. “I think Clubhouses really emphasize the value of engaging in work as a tool for recovery. If you could feel like you're contributing to something, you are more likely to feel confidence in yourself and you're more likely to be able to build

skills that are then marketable in the workforce.”

Outside of his work with NAMI Texas and the JCMH, Hansch volunteers with HeadCount, a voter registration service at live music events. In 2019, he registered more than 100 people to vote.

“I really love helping people learn how they can participate in the democratic process,” Hansch said.

Hansch lives in Manor, Texas and is a recent homeowner. He has a fiancé and two cats.



*NAMI Texas Policy Team at the Texas State Capitol, 2021*



*Hansch registering voters with HeadCount at the Mohawk music venue in Austin, September 2019.*