

News RELEASE

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APA Urges House Appropriations Subcommittee to Increase Funding for Veterans

Arlington, Va. – The American Psychiatric Association (APA) urged the House VA-HUD Appropriations subcommittee to increase funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care and medical research programs during a hearing today on the fiscal 2003 budget.

“While we support the Administration’s FY2004 proposed budget for veterans’ health care, the APA joins with many other veterans groups in requesting an additional \$2 billion, for a total of \$27.3 billion, to ensure the success of the VA’s health care mission and ensure that the rights of veterans with mental illness remain protected,” said APA Trustee Joseph T. English, M.D.

“Mental health parity, in practice, does not exist in the VA. For example, overall VA spending increased by 10 percent between 1993 and 1999 while spending for substance abuse treatment declined by 41 percent,” said Dr. English. “Additionally, homelessness and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) programs have received attention from the VHA, Congress and the government; however, problems remain, including long waiting lists for treatment programs, lack of resources and minimal technical equipment. The number of veterans in need of mental health services increased 26 percent between 1995 and 2001, yet the programs’ expenditures have been reduced about 4 percent and the patients’ expenditures have been reduced 24 percent.”

“While we are pleased with the reported outcomes of the VA’s mental health and substance abuse programs in the areas of clinical care, research and education, we are concerned about the significant inequalities in access and quality of care of specialized treatment services across the Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs). The APA is particularly concerned with the remaining stigma towards mental illness by VA Administrators.”

“The APA also applauds the VA for initiating the Psychiatric Primary Care Education (PsyPCE) program to allow psychiatric residents to assume the duties of primary care physicians for mentally ill patients in mental health and primary care settings, we believe it is important for the VA to maintain its core psychiatric residency and fellowship training capabilities,” said Dr. English.

“Mentally ill veterans face a variety of complex problems including homelessness and poverty,” said Dr. English. “The APA suggests the VA should invest resources to develop a continuum of care that includes intensive case management, psychosocial rehabilitation, housing alternatives, integrated treatment of mental illness and substance abuse disorders, and other support services for veterans with serious mental illness.”

Dr. English’s full testimony is available at: http://www.psych.org/pub_pol_adv/increasefund4vet.cfm

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society, founded in 1844, whose more than 35,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. For more information, visit the APA Web site at www.psych.org.

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