



**For Information Contact:**

Lydia Sermons-Ward, 703-907-8640

[press@psych.org](mailto:press@psych.org)

Jessica Mikulski, 703-907-8562

[jmikulski@psych.org](mailto:jmikulski@psych.org)

**For Immediate Release:**

Embargoed until Oct. 1, 2006

Release No. 06-61

## **APA Draws Attention to Inappropriate Incarceration of the Mentally Ill During 2006 Mental Illness Awareness Week**

**Arlington, Va.** – During Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW), October 1-7, 2006, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) is drawing attention to the large number of people with mental illnesses who are inappropriately incarcerated in U.S. jails and prisons – most of whom would be better served through community-based mental health services.

“It is a national tragedy that jails and prisons have become the primary mental health care facilities in the United States today,” said Henry Weinstein, M.D., chair of the APA Committee on Jails and Prisons. “People with mental illnesses, left untreated, can develop symptoms and behaviors that lead to their arrest and incarceration in jail. Treatment in appropriate settings is often the answer, and adequate funding for such treatment is urgently needed.”

According to a new report by the United States Department of Justice (DOJ), entitled "Mental Health Problems of Prison and Jail Inmates," more than half of all prison and jail inmates – including 56 percent of state prisoners, 45 percent of federal prisoners and 64 percent of local jail inmates, – were found to have a mental health problem. Many of these people are suffering from very treatable disorders like major depression, bipolar disorder and substance abuse.

Ending the “criminalization of the mentally ill” and the inappropriate incarceration of persons with mental illness in jails and prisons system can prevent unnecessary building of correctional facilities and make room for violent and repeat offenders. Crimes committed by those suffering from mental illnesses can be reduced and lives improved by providing them with appropriate mental health services *before* they reach a crisis which can lead to incarceration.

Expert psychiatrists are available to the media to discuss issues around incarceration of the mentally ill and other mental health concerns. Requests for interviews should be directed to 703-907-8640 or [press@psych.org](mailto:press@psych.org). Mental health resources and more information on common mental illnesses and MIAW are available on APA’s consumer Web site, [www.HealthyMinds.org](http://www.HealthyMinds.org).

To read the full DOJ report "Mental Health Problems of Prison and Jail Inmates", log onto [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/mhppji.htm](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/mhppji.htm).

Mental Illness Awareness Week is an annual observance instituted by the APA and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), a patient advocacy organization, to raise public awareness on mental illnesses and the effectiveness of treatment, and to combat mental illness stigma. This year’s MIAW theme is *Building Community, Taking Action*. For more information on MIAW, visit NAMI’s Web site [www.nami.org/miaw](http://www.nami.org/miaw).

*National Depression Screening Day* and *Bipolar Disorder Awareness Day* will also be observed on Oct. 5, 2006.

**About the American Psychiatric Association:**

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose more than 37,000 physician members specialize in diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at [www.psych.org](http://www.psych.org) and [www.HealthyMinds.org](http://www.HealthyMinds.org).