

December 2, 2011

Statement of the American Psychological Association on the DSM-5 Development Process

WASHINGTON—Diagnostic classification systems of disorders and diseases are an integral part of health care delivery. Any such system, including the upcoming 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) of the American Psychiatric Association and the pending revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) of the World Health Organization, must be based on the best available science and serve the public interest.

The American Psychological Association has members with significant expertise in the scientific areas relevant to the DSM, and we have urged them to take part in the DSM revision efforts. We are encouraged that many psychologists are making meaningful contributions to the process as individuals, as members of the DSM-5 Task Force and work groups, and through the divisions of the American Psychological Association. This involvement includes offering comments on draft provisions and participating in field trials.

We applaud the Society for Humanistic Psychology (Division 32 of our association) for its leadership role in generating dialogue and information-sharing within the broader mental health community concerning the revisions process. The Society also has prepared, disseminated, and garnered wide support for an "open letter" to the DSM-5 Task Force and the American Psychiatric Association, which expresses specific concerns related to the DSM-5 development process. We share their belief that the purpose of any diagnostic classification system should be to improve treatment outcomes. Thus it is essential to consider the impact of any new diagnostic system or category on vulnerable individuals, groups and populations, particularly children, older adults, and ethnic minorities. By appropriately identifying individuals in need of treatment, it is possible to both safeguard the welfare of individuals and to direct treatment resources where they are most needed. Concerns also have been raised that over-identification or misidentification of individuals as being in need of treatment could lead to the use of unnecessary and potentially harmful interventions.

The American Psychological Association recognizes that there is a diversity of opinion concerning the ongoing DSM-5 development process. Our association has not adopted an official position on the proposed revision; rather, we have called upon the DSM-5 Task Force to adhere to an open, transparent process based on the best available science and in the best interest of the public. In this regard, we appreciate the Task Force's expressed commitment to seriously consider the issues and concerns raised by experts in the mental health field in their deliberations.

We call upon our members (either as individuals or groups) to continue to add their perspectives to enhance the validity and clinical utility of the DSM-5. The American Psychological Association will continue to monitor the revision process and be a strong voice for its transparency.

The American Psychological Association, in Washington, D.C., is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. APA's membership includes more than 154,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance psychology as a science, as a profession and as a means of promoting health, education and human welfare.