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## **APA-NAMI Symposium Educates Congress on Inappropriate Incarceration of the Mentally Ill**

**Arlington, Va.** – Today the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) helped raise congressional awareness of mental illnesses and psychiatric services by telling members of Congress of a dire situation: our nation’s jails and prisons have become the primary mental health care facilities in the United States today – a function these institutions are neither designed nor equipped to handle. The current system hurts the correctional system, the taxpayer, and people who could be helped by being diverted to appropriate care and treatment.

Each year the APA and NAMI host a “Mental Illness Awareness Week” (MIAW) luncheon symposium for federal lawmakers and their staffs in advance of MIAW. This year’s symposium, held in the U.S. Capitol, was themed “The Criminalization of the Mentally Ill” and articulated that people with mental illnesses are one of the most vulnerable and treatable populations in our society, yet they are being housed in punitive institutions.

Featured guest speakers included Richard K. Nakamura, Ph.D., deputy director, National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH); Wilson M. Compton, M.D., M.P.E., director of the Division of Epidemiology, Services and Prevention Research at the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA); Tom Hamilton, Ph.D., NAMI liaison to the APA’s Committee on Jails and Prisons; and James H. Scully, Jr., M.D., APA CEO and medical director.

Other invited guests included U.S. Congressman Tim Murphy (R-Pa.) and Michael Fitzpatrick, NAMI executive director.

MIAW is an annual observance instituted by the APA, NAMI and other patient advocacy organizations and mental health providers. This year MIAW is observed Oct. 1-7, 2006, and the overarching theme of the week-long acknowledgment is “Building Community, Taking Action.”

**About the American Psychiatric Association:**

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose more than 36,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Public outreach during MIAW is a component of APA’s “*Healthy Minds. Healthy Lives.*” public information campaign to raise awareness on mental health issues. Visit APA at [www.psych.org](http://www.psych.org) and [www.HealthyMinds.org](http://www.HealthyMinds.org).

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