

# News RELEASE

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## **APA Urges to Congress “to Protect Our Young People Struggling with Mental Illnesses”**

Today the American Psychiatric Association (APA), in a letter from its medical director, James H. Scully Jr., M.D., Sc.D., urged Congress to support four proposals to help protect young people struggling with mental illnesses: 1.) enact a public clinical trials registry; 2.) fund further research on pediatric depression and treatments; 3.) call for enhanced training for those who prescribe antidepressant medication to pediatric patients; and 4.) help assure medically appropriate access to lifesaving medications.

The letter, sent to all members of the Senate and House of Representatives, read:

On behalf of the more than 35,000 physician members of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and our patients, I write to urge your support of four proposals to help protect our young people struggling with mental illnesses, especially depression. Pediatric depression is a very real illness that affects between three percent and five percent of all young people. These young people need and deserve our help.

The September 13 and 14 Food and Drug Administration hearings, as well as the FDA's March 22 public advisory, have increased public attention to potential problems with antidepressants and their use in some pediatric patients. While we share the desire of Congress to protect public safety, the issue is complex and care must be taken to ensure that patients have access to the treatments they need for their illnesses. Key elements of a balanced response should include the following:

- 1) Congress should enact legislation to establish a comprehensive registry for all clinical trials conducted in the United States – a registry maintained by the federal government and free and open to the public. We believe various bills currently contemplated in the House and Senate are very helpful.
- 2) Congress should call for and fund further research to help us better understand the effectiveness and safety of antidepressant medications and their use in children.

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3) Congress should call for additional education of medical professionals who prescribe these medications – particularly those professionals who are not psychiatric physicians. The APA is eager to work with the federal government to advance the knowledge base to ensure that these lifesaving medications are prescribed appropriately when indicated and to ensure that patients are properly monitored.

4) We respectfully urge you to be cognizant of the potential to limit medically appropriate access to lifesaving medications. We recognize that there is growing pressure on the FDA to issue a “black box” warning on antidepressants. This must be measured against recent prescription data that suggest the current controversy has lowered treatment rates, a potentially alarming trend. We note that the recent federally funded Treatment of Adolescents with Depression Study (TADS) showed that patients responded positively to a combination treatment (an antidepressant plus a talk therapy) at a rate of 71 percent – double the 35 percent response rate for patients on placebo. A black box warning may have a chilling effect on appropriate prescribing for patients that could result in putting seriously ill patients at grave risk.

Congress has the opportunity to help children and adolescents struggling with mental illnesses, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to achieve this goal. We commend you for your interest in helping patients, families and physicians.

**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](http://www.psych.org)**

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