

**For Information Contact:**

Eve Herold, 703-907-8640

press@psych.org

Erin Connors, 703-907-8562

econnors@psych.org

January 20, 2012

Release No. 12-03

DSM-5 Proposed Criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder Designed to Provide More Accurate Diagnosis and Treatment

ARLINGTON, Va. (Jan. 20, 2012)—The American Psychiatric Association (APA) has proposed new diagnostic criteria for the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (*DSM-5*) for autism. While final decisions are still months away, the recommendations reflect the work of dozens of the nation's top scientific and research minds and are supported by more than a decade of intensive study and analysis. The proposal by the *DSM-5* Neurodevelopmental Work Group recommends a new category called autism spectrum disorder which would incorporate several previously separate diagnoses, including autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified.

The proposal asserts that symptoms of these four disorders represent a continuum from mild to severe, rather than a simple yes or no diagnosis to a specific disorder. The proposed diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorder specify a range of severity as well as describe the individual's overall developmental status--in social communication and other relevant cognitive and motor behaviors.

Dr. James Scully, Medical Director of the American Psychiatric Association said, "The proposed criteria will lead to more accurate diagnosis and will help physicians and therapists design better treatment interventions for children who suffer from autism spectrum disorder."

The draft *DSM-5* criteria will provide a more useful dimensional assessment to improve the sensitivity and specificity of the criteria. This change will help clinicians more accurately diagnose people with relevant symptoms and behaviors by recognizing the differences from person to person, rather than providing general labels that tend not to be consistently applied across different clinics and centers.

Proposed *DSM-5* criteria are being tested in real-life clinical settings known as field trials. Field testing of the proposed criteria for autism spectrum disorder does not indicate that there will be any change in the number of patients receiving care for autism spectrum disorders in treatment centers--just more accurate diagnoses that can lead to more focused treatment.

Criteria proposed for *DSM-5* are posted on the *DSM-5* website and will be open for additional public comment this spring. More information on the process for developing *DSM-5* is also available on the website. Final publication of *DSM-5* is planned for May 2013.

DSM is the manual used by clinicians and researchers to diagnose and classify mental disorders. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) will publish DSM-5 in 2013, culminating a 14-year revision process. For more information, go to www.dsm5.org.

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment, prevention, and research of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at www.psych.org, psychiatryonline.org, and www.HealthyMinds.org.

###