

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **OLDER VIRGINIANS: MENTAL DISORDERS ARE NOT A PART OF NORMAL AGING**

*September is Older Virginians Mental Health Month*

**Richmond** – In 2009, the Virginia General Assembly proclaimed every September to be Older Virginians Mental Health Month to heighten public awareness of the needs of older citizens and to promote discussion of strategies to address them.

“Older adults and their loved ones should pay attention to symptoms of mental disorders, such as depression, anxiety and mood disorders, and seek assistance as soon as possible,” said Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services Commissioner Jim Stewart. “It is a myth that mental disorders are just part of getting older, and it is also untrue that it is too late for older adults to benefit from treatment.”

Today, there are many options, from therapy to medication, for older adults experiencing a mental disorder to regain improved mental health and quality of life. The risks of untreated mental health issues in older adults can have serious consequences for individuals and their families, including increased mortality, increased risk of suicide, increased risk of disability, increased caregiver stress and reduced independence.

“Our Commonwealth needs to prepare for a number of emerging needs as our Baby Boom generation ages,” said Department of Aging Interim Commissioner Jim Rothrock. “In order to support some of these individuals in their communities and foster healthy families, it is incumbent on all of our systems--including our mental health service delivery system--to prepare for this and take the requisite steps to assure that these supports are in place. Baby Boomers will demand and surely deserve a menu of services to select and options to exercise that will support a healthy lifestyle and desirable quality of life.”

To get mental health help for an older adult, contact your local community services board ([www.dbhds.virginia.gov/SVC-default.htm](http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/SVC-default.htm)), dial 2-1-1, or contact the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services. To locate services for older adults throughout Virginia, go to the Virginia Department of Aging’s Web site at [www.vda.virginia.gov](http://www.vda.virginia.gov) or the Senior Navigator at [www.seniornavigator.com](http://www.seniornavigator.com).

**More about older Virginians and their mental health:**

- The U.S. Surgeon General reported that nearly 20 percent of individuals age 55 and older experience specific mental disorders that are not a part of “normal” aging.
- In Virginia, close to 282,000 older adults suffered from a mental disorder in 2000. Many of these cases were not recognized and/or treated.
- The risk of suicide increases along with a person’s age and according to a 2006 survey by the Virginia Department of Health, the suicide rate for adults age 70 and older led all other age groups.
- Older adults do not typically seek treatment for mental health problems.
- The population age 85 and older in Virginia will increase five times faster than the state’s total population between 1990 and 2025.
- In the near future, growing numbers of older adults will require behavioral health services to enable them to reside in their homes or other community placements.

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*Available to citizens statewide, Virginia’s public mental health, intellectual disability and substance abuse services system is comprised of 40 community services boards (CSBs) and 16 state facilities. DBHDS seeks to promote dignity, choice, recovery, and the highest possible level of participation in work, relationships, and all aspects of community life for individuals with a mental illness, intellectual disability or a substance-use disorder.*

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