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Study Indicates Alzheimer's Disease Affects Voting Capacity

Arlington, Va. – People with very mild to mild Alzheimer's disease generally retain adequate ability to vote, and most people with severe Alzheimer's do not, according to a study in the November 2005 edition of the *American Journal of Psychiatry (AJP)*, a monthly psychiatric journal of the American Psychiatric Association (APA).

Alzheimer's disease is a brain disorder that progressively destroys a person's memory and ability to learn, reason, make judgments, communicate and carry out daily activities. Over time, individuals may also experience changes in personality and behavior, such as anxiety, suspiciousness or agitation, as well as delusions or hallucinations. Currently there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease.

The study, "The Capacity to Vote of Persons With Alzheimer's Disease," led by Paul S. Appelbaum, M.D., Department of Psychiatry, University of Massachusetts Medical School and APA past president, found a strong correlation between dementia severity and the capacity to understand the voting process.

Most people with very mild to mild Alzheimer's disease preserve their ability to reason and appreciate the electoral process. However, those with more severe Alzheimer's disease who cast their ballots do not understand the nature and effect of voting, potentially compromising elections.

"America's aging baby boomers have been very active during local and national elections," said Dr. Appelbaum. "When Presidential and other major races are a close call, distinguishing voters with adequate versus inadequate voting capacity will become increasingly important on election day in many cities and states."

November is National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month.

(Am J Psychiatry. 2005; 162: 2094-2100).

Note to Editors: Contact APA's Office of Communications and Public Affairs at 703-907-8640 or press@psych.org for a pre-embargo copy. Visit *AJP* at <http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org>.

About the American Psychiatric Association:

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