

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Use of Stigma as a Political Tactic

Approved by the Board of Trustees, July 2017

Approved by the Assembly, May 2017

“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

ISSUE:

In several instances in recent years, the fact that a political candidate has consulted a psychiatrist at some time has been exploited by the candidate’s opposition to undermine public confidence in the candidate. This political tactic is, to a significant extent, based on lack of knowledge and understanding, a lack that has stigmatized people with mental and emotional disorders for ages.

Mental and emotional disorders occur with wide variety in degree of impairment and in duration, much as physical illnesses do. Thus, in the complicated process of assessing fitness for public office, psychiatric illness of consultation or treatment should be evaluated realistically, in the same way other medical illnesses or treatments are. We consider it particularly unreasonable to hold a history of consultation or treatment against anyone.

POSITION:

The American Psychiatric Association a) holds that a history of mental illness, or consultation or treatment for mental illness or mental distress, does not disqualify qualified people from any political office and b) deplores political tactics that discredit candidates by exploiting misguided prejudices about psychiatric illness and emotional distress.

Authors:

Council on Advocacy and Government Relations