Proposal for HHS request for IOM study on mental health workforce for older adults:

The Committee provides $1,000,000 for a study by the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences to determine the multi-disciplinary mental health workforce needed to serve older adults. The initiation of this study should be not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act, whereby the Secretary of Health and Human Services shall enter into a contract with the Institute of Medicine to conduct a thorough analysis of the forces that shape the mental health care workforce for older adults, including education, training, modes of practice, and reimbursement.

Rationale:
The Institute of Medicine is undertaking a study of the workforce needed to serve the broad health care needs of older adults in the twenty-first century. IOM has suggested in discussions with AAGP that, because this study will not delve deeply into the composition of the mental health workforce needed to meet future needs of the elderly, a complementary study be undertaken to consider specifically this vital area of concern.

The aging of Baby Boom generation that begins turning 60 this year will have a massive effect throughout our society. By the year 2010, there will be approximately 40 million people in the United States over the age of 65. Over 20 percent of those people will experience mental health problems. In this context, it is important to note actions relating to late life mental health addressed by the White House Conference on Aging, which was convened by President Bush in December 2005. Recognizing the current health and mental health needs of older Americans and the challenges awaiting as the Baby Boom generation ages, delegates placed mental health and geriatric health professional training issues at the forefront by voting them among their top 10 resolutions. Our nation’s health care system must be able to provide the specialized care in geriatric mental health that this generation will need and deserve.

With the baby boom generation nearing retirement, the number of older Americans with mental disorders is certain to increase in the future. A national crisis in geriatric mental health care is emerging and has received recent attention in the medical literature. Action must be taken now to avert serious problems in the near future. While many different types of mental and behavioral disorders can occur late in life, they are not an inevitable part of the aging process, and continued research holds the promise of improving the mental health and quality of life for older Americans. A clear blueprint of the geriatric mental health workforce needs that would be afforded by an IOM study would be an important step forward in assuring appropriate research, prevention, and treatment for the future.

Contact: Marjorie Vanderbilt
Director of Government Affairs
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry