

**APA President Dilip Jeste, MD**  
**Video Message # 4 - Mental Health and Gun Violence**  
**January, 2013**

Hi. I'm Dilip Jeste, President of the American Psychiatric Association. A month ago we all were shocked by the senseless and brutal mass murder of 20 children and 6 staff members at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newton, Connecticut. Since then there has been a lot of soul searching about gun violence in the country as well as the role of mental illness in this context. Two days ago, President Obama outlined his plan to reduce gun violence, including proposals for improving mental healthcare. A number of these proposals have been advocated by the APA over the past several years.

I want to begin by reviewing some important facts related to mental illness and violence. Research shows that 96% of people with serious mental illnesses never act violently. A vast majority of violent crimes are not committed by people with mental disorders. A far greater danger associated with firearms is suicide deaths. Research also shows that people with mental illnesses who engage in regular treatment are much less likely to commit violent acts than those who need, but are not engaged in, appropriate mental healthcare. And yet, in spite of evidence for effectiveness of mental health treatment, funding for public mental health services has plunged in the last few years.

For these reasons, I applaud the proposals put forth by President Obama. I am particularly gratified that the Administration plans to finalize rules governing mental health parity under the Mental Health Parity Act, the Affordable Care Act, and Medicaid. At the same time, we want to strongly urge the Administration to close loopholes involving the so-called 'non-quantitative treatment limits' and to ensure that health plans deliver a full scope of mental health services to comply with the law.

One new initiative outlined by the President would provide training for school staff and help ensure that young people who need help are referred for treatment. This is in line with an effective school outreach program developed by our own American Psychiatric Foundation. It is called Typical or Troubled? This program works with school systems to

help identify warning signs of mental health problems in teens and to teach educators how to respond to them. The Administration has also proposed funding to support school-based violence prevention efforts, and to train 5,000 additional mental health professionals working with students and young adults. We whole heartedly support these actions.

We are glad that the President has clarified that doctors are not prohibited from asking their patients about guns in their homes. APA has consistently advocated for such a position. We also applaud President Obama's plan to expand research on the causes and prevention of gun violence, including suicide.

APA is looking forward to participating in the national dialogue on mental health. We are also ready to work with the Administration and the Congress to improve access to quality mental healthcare and public safety. Such an outcome will be the best tribute to the memory of the innocent children and brave school staff who lost their lives a month ago.

Thank you for listening to my video. I wish you all a healthy and happy new year.