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For more information, contact:
Cheri L. Walter or Mary Inbody (614) 224-1111

Board Association and State Departments Take Action to Address Behavioral Health Needs of Older Ohioans

April 10, 2007 (Columbus, Ohio) – Last year, the baby boomer generation started turning 60, triggering a growth spike in the number of older adults. In 2000, more than 1.9 million Ohioans were aged 60 or older, and 11% of them were identified as having a mental disability with roughly 9% having a substance abuse problem. Based on national population projections, the number needing treatment could more than double by 2030.

On Tuesday, April 10th, “Policy Institute II: Turning Policy into Practice” will be held at the Columbus Renaissance Hotel from 9 am-4 pm. Highlights of the Institute will include remarks from Governor Ted Strickland. The Governor has made older Ohioans a priority in his Biennial Budget with increases to the Medicaid PASSPORT program and a Homestead Tax Exemption for seniors. Governor Strickland said, “With two million Ohioans in the senior age range, we have to make sure that services are available to meet their needs. A focus on behavioral health will help to minimize healthcare costs for other related diseases.”

Another feature will be the morning keynote speaker Julie Winokur, nationally known for creating the presentation and book *Aging in America: A Pictorial Call to Action*. Ms. Winokur will be with the participants throughout the day as they review priorities and determine action steps for the future.

A number of Ohio organizations have taken on the mission of ensuring that a potential behavioral health crisis among older Ohioans is averted. The Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities (OACBHA) and the Departments of Mental Health (ODMH), Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services (ODADAS) and Aging (ODA) established an Older Ohioans Behavioral Health Network in 2006 to coordinate Ohio’s older adults’ mental health and substance abuse issues and informational needs.

“We know that treatment works, that people recover no matter their age, and that recovery from mental illness, and/or addiction affords all people the opportunity to live life to its fullest. Age should never be an impediment to treatment, nor should lack of access to information for individuals, families and caregivers. Through this initiative we hope to close the gap, providing people looking for resources on mental illness and addiction and aging a place to find them,” said Cheri L. Walter, OACBHA CEO.

To date, the Network has focused on the following three approaches: 1) funding demonstration mini-grants to Ohio’s Area Agencies on Aging, to work in collaboration with the ADAMH/CMH/ADAS Boards in their catchment areas to foster collaboration at the local level to increase service capacity to meet older Ohioans’ behavioral health needs; 2) promoting information sharing and technical assistance for clinicians, caregivers and the aging network on working with older Ohioans with behavioral health needs; and 3) identifying research initiatives, training efforts and other funding sources to expand best practices.

For more information on “Policy Institute II: Turning Policy into Practice,” visit the ODADAS website Spotlight page at <http://www.odadas.ohio.gov> or call Beth Hahn, 614-466-5987. For more information on the Older Ohioans Behavioral Health Network, go to <http://www.oacbha.org/olderohioans.htm>.

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