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## **SEPTEMBER IS OLDER VIRGINIANS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH**

**Richmond** – The U.S. Surgeon General reported that nearly 20 percent of individuals age 55 and older experience specific mental disorders that are not a part of “normal” aging. In recognition of the unique and complex needs of older adults in the Commonwealth, Governor Timothy M. Kaine has proclaimed September as Older Virginians Mental Health Month.

“Clinical depression and other mental health issues are not a normal part of aging and should not be overlooked as simply ‘the blues’ or senility,” said Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services Commissioner James Reinhard, M.D. “In fact, mental health issues may be underlying problems for other conditions such as signs of dementia or weight gain or loss. The good news is mental health problems can be treated and older adults can recover from them.”

In Virginia, close to 282,000 older adults suffered from a mental disorder in 2000. Many of these cases were not treated. Furthermore, the risk of suicide increases along with a person’s age and according to a 2006 survey by the Virginia Department of Health, the suicide rate for adults age 70 and older led all other age groups. These problems will grow as the population age 85 and older in Virginia will increase five times faster than the state’s total population between 1990 and 2025.

The risks of untreated mental health issues in older adults can have serious consequences for individuals and their families, including:

- Increased mortality;
- Increased risk of suicide;
- Increased risk of disability;
- Increased caregiver stress; and
- Reduced independence.

During the 2009 Legislation Session, the General Assembly passed House Joint Resolution 674, patroned by Delegate Brink, which also declared September as Older Virginians Mental Health Month. The purpose of Older Virginians Mental Health Month is to heighten public awareness of the needs of older citizens and to promote discussion of strategies to address them.

To get mental health help for an older adult, contact your local community services board ([www.dbhds.virginia.gov/SVC-default.htm](http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/SVC-default.htm), or dial 2-1-1.). To locate services for older adults throughout Virginia, go to the Virginia Department of Aging’s Web site at [www.vda.virginia.gov](http://www.vda.virginia.gov) or the Senior Navigator at [www.seniornavigator.com](http://www.seniornavigator.com) .

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*Available to citizens statewide, Virginia’s public mental health, intellectual disability and substance abuse services system is comprised of 40 community services boards (CSBs) and 16 state facilities. DBHDS seeks to promote dignity, choice, recovery, and the highest possible level of participation in work, relationships, and all aspects of community life for individuals with a mental illness, intellectual disability or a substance-use disorder.*