

# Position Statement on Research with Involuntary Psychiatric Patients

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**Issue:** There is an ongoing and urgent need for clinical research on serious mental disorders, including the treatment of acute episodes. Psychiatric patients who are involuntarily committed to treatment, including both hospitalized patients and those subject to outpatient commitment, are an important population for such research. It is important to safeguard the integrity of the informed consent process for these patients, but in general, the law presumes that all patients have adequate capacity to consent and voluntariness, unless there is evidence to the contrary. Recently, however, some jurisdictions have placed restrictions on research participation for involuntarily committed patients as a class; for example, by creating the presumption that all such patients are unable to give adequate consent to research and should be excluded from participation.

### **POSITION:**

**It is the position of the APA that:**

- 1. The existing guidelines and regulatory frameworks for research oversight, including those that provide guidance for research with potentially vulnerable populations, provide appropriate protections for involuntarily committed psychiatric patients.**
- 2. Properly constituted Institutional Review Boards are best situated to make case-by-case determinations about—and consider the need for additional safeguards for—each study proposal’s risks and benefits, including the potential vulnerability of participants due to impaired consent capacity or voluntariness.**
- 3. Hospitalized psychiatric patients, including those who are involuntarily committed, should be permitted to participate in research, so long as appropriate safeguards are in place; and consistent with respect for their autonomy, patients are able to exercise adequate informed consent. For involuntary patients, those safeguards should address both the voluntariness of a decision to participate in the research and the nature of the consent that will be required.**
- 4. Barring involuntarily committed patients, as a class, from participation in research unnecessarily impedes the progress of scientific and clinical research. It also promotes stigma by portraying people with mental disorders as more impaired than they actually are.**

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