



## AATA Represents the Art Therapy Profession at Mental Health Awareness Month Briefings on Capitol Hill

AATA  
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The AATA actively participated in several events throughout May to ensure representation of the art therapy profession in support of National Mental Health Awareness Month. In addition to AATA's collaboration with SAMHSA for [Children's National Mental Health Awareness Day](#) (May 5th), several AATA personnel attended a number of briefings on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.



*From left: Bill O'Brien (NEA), Rebecca Vaudreuil (NICoE), CAPT Walt Greenhalgh (Director for the NICoE), Melissa Walker (NICoE), Donna Betts (AATA), Cynthia Woodruff (AATA), Andrew Callahan and Ethan Abner (Rep. Rooney's office).*

In his [Presidential Proclamation](#), Mr. Obama called upon the nation to raise awareness: "Although we have made progress expanding mental health coverage and elevating the conversation about mental health, too many people still do not get the help they need." To convey how people are helped by art therapy, on May 25th, AATA President Dr. Donna Betts gave opening remarks at a briefing and exhibition in the Cannon House Office Building hosted by the [Congressional Military Mental Health Caucus](#), the [Congressional Mental Health Caucus](#), and the [Congressional Arts Caucus](#). This event brought attention to the benefits of art therapy in treating soldiers and veterans with PTSD, TBI, and other debilitating conditions. Art therapist Melissa Walker and music therapist Rebecca Vaudreuil

provided an overview of the model creative arts therapies program at the [National Intrepid Center of Excellence \(NICoE\)](#). The event was hosted by Rep. Grace Napolitano (D-CA 32nd), Chair, Mental Health Caucus; and Representatives [Tim Ryan](#) (D-OH 13th) and [Tom Rooney](#) (R-FL 17th), Co-Chairs, Military Mental Health Caucus, and was well attended by their staff members. Given that 20 percent of veterans who served in Iraq and 11 percent who served in Afghanistan are estimated to suffer from PTSD, this briefing not only conveyed the invaluable benefits of arts therapies services for soldiers and veterans, but also made the audience aware of resources readily available to them for further information and follow up.



*Rep. Tom Rooney at the podium, conveying his appreciation for the exemplary creative arts therapy services offered at NICoE. Photo shared from the [Congressman's Facebook page](#), with permission.*



From left: Todd Harwood, Dr. Jeffrey Burk, Rep. Grace Napolitano, and Lisa Goodale, May 18th.

AATA was also represented at the briefing, *Lived Experiences: Survivors of Suicide*, on May 23rd. Speakers shared powerful and frank accounts of their personal experience with suicide, as well as their stories of recovery and resiliency. The event, hosted by the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) (AFSP) and sponsored by Rep. Grace Napolitano, addressed the importance of understanding lived experiences to support suicide prevention and help-seeking behaviors, and highlighted effective ways to identify and approach this difficult topic.

A briefing on *Military Mental Health Awareness*, co-hosted by the [Mental Health Caucus](#) and the [Military Mental Health Caucus](#), took place on May 18th. The panelists discussed the contributions of Peer Support Specialists deployed in the VA system in helping veterans navigate the behavioral health system. The audience, which included AATA President Betts, was apprised of the vital role of

Peer Support Specialists topic from the first-hand perspective of expert panelists Todd Harwood, Certified Peer Specialist at the VA; Dr. Jeffrey Burk, National Mental Health Director for Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Services in the VA; and Lisa Goodale, Peer Support Services Vice President, [Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance](#).



Rep. Judy Chu making remarks during the *Stigma in the Asian and Pacific Islander Community* briefing, May 17th.

On May 17th, Kat Michel of the AATA National Office attended *Stigma in the Asian and Pacific Islander Community*, hosted by Congressional Mental Health Caucus Chair [Rep. Grace Napolitano](#) (D-CA 32nd) and [Asian Pacific American Caucus](#) (CAPAC) Chair [Rep. Judy Chu](#) (D-CA 27th). This briefing signified the challenges faced by the Asian and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community, which often endures the consequences of the model minority myth, further contributing to the stigma that still exists for those that seek out help for mental illness. Often, AAPI groups are viewed as a single unit, which can strip away the identities of individual cultures under that umbrella and can lead to misunderstandings about their mental health needs. Panelists outlined how to more accurately discern the experiences of the AAPI community, and offered suggestions for legislators and mental health care providers to improve accessibility, reduce stigma, and bridge cultural gaps.



Rep. Tim Ryan making remarks at the May 25th briefing.

AATA's involvement in the National Mental Health Awareness Month events and our ongoing efforts to outreach to and educate the public on behalf of the art therapy profession, are made possible through the support of our members. We appreciate your continued investment in the future of art therapy.

