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Los Angeles residents continue to report high levels of stress *Money, work continue to be significant stressors for Los Angeles, APA survey finds*

Los Angeles, Nov. 3, 2009 — While fewer Los Angeles residents this year report that money, work and the economy cause significant stress in their lives, their levels of stress remain considerably high. More than 50 percent of city residents remain stressed by one or more of these three sources, a cause of concern for psychologists who worry about the effects of long-term stress and how it can contribute to chronic health disorders.

In a survey released today by the American Psychological Association (APA), more than half of Los Angeles residents surveyed cited money, work and the economy as significant sources of stress, although the number citing these as stressors has decreased since 2008. Similarly, the number of Los Angeles residents who said their average stress level is in the extreme range is lower than last year. Less than one-quarter (21 percent) rated their average stress levels as an 8, 9 or 10 on a 10-point scale, compared to about one-third (31 percent) last year. Almost half (47%) said their stress has stayed the same over the past year, compared to 36 percent who reported in 2008 that it had not changed since the previous year. And fewer Los Angeles residents expressed strong satisfaction with their job than they did last year (22 percent vs. 33 percent in 2008).

These high and long-lasting levels of stress can contribute to serious physical health problems. Diabetes, heart disease, obesity and high blood pressure are just a few of the diseases linked to chronic stress. In the APA survey, more Los Angeles residents said they have been told by a health provider that they have a chronic condition (71 percent vs. 66 percent nationally). More than the rest of the nation, they reported that they have high blood pressure (34 percent vs. 30 percent nationally) and high cholesterol (31 percent vs. 28 percent nationally).

On a positive note, fewer residents this year reported physical symptoms caused by stress. For example, the number of Los Angeles residents who said they felt irritable or angry dropped 17 points (39 percent in 2009 from 56 percent in 2008) and fewer residents are feeling fatigue (33 percent in 2009 vs. 55 percent in 2008) or experiencing headaches (26 percent in 2009 vs. 46 percent in 2008) because of stress. Also, fewer Los Angeles residents are drinking alcohol to relieve stress (9 percent in 2009 vs. 25 percent in 2008).

“The good news for the region is that fewer people this year are reporting money, the economy, family responsibilities and relationships, among other things, as significant stressors. But with so many of us still so stressed—that’s alarming,” said psychologist Dr. Jana Martin, the public education coordinator for the California Psychological Association. “When stress is ignored or managed in unhealthy ways, it will most likely lead to further health problems. This is why it’s crucial for people to pay attention to their stress levels and do something about it.”

APA’s annual survey reveals that nationally nearly a quarter (24 percent) of adults reported experiencing high levels of stress, and half (51 percent) reported moderate stress levels in 2009. Many Americans continued to report that they rely on sedentary activities and unhealthy behaviors to manage their stress (49 percent listen to music, 41 percent read and 36 percent watch television or movies).

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Among Americans who received lifestyle change recommendations from a health care provider, few reported that their health care provider offered support to help them make lasting changes — only 46 percent were given an explanation for recommended lifestyle changes; only 35 percent were offered advice or shown techniques to help make changes; and only 5-10 percent were referred to another health care provider to support the adoption of lifestyle changes. In general, people cited a number of barriers in their efforts to make lasting lifestyle and behavior changes — lack of willpower (33 percent); not enough time (20 percent); and lack of confidence (14 percent). More than one in ten people cited stress as the barrier preventing them from making lifestyle and behavior changes (14 percent of adults reported they are too stressed to make these changes).

More than the rest of the nation, Los Angeles residents said they were prevented from following through with lifestyle change recommendations due to a lack of willpower (41 percent vs. 33 percent nationally). And 7 percent of those in Los Angeles (vs. 14 percent nationally) said they were too stressed to follow through with lifestyle change recommendations.

The California Psychological Association offers these tips to help manage chronic stress:

- **Set limits.** List all of the projects and commitments that are making you feel overwhelmed. Identify those things that you absolutely must do in order to survive. Cut back on anything non-essential.
- **Tap into your support system.** Reach out to a close friend and/or relative. Let them know you are having a tough time and accept their support and guidance. There is no need to face challenging life circumstances alone.
- **Make one health-related commitment.** One small step like cutting back on your caffeine consumption can have a positive effect. Studies show that without caffeine, people report feeling more relaxed, sleeping better and having more energy. Regular aerobic exercise, such as taking a brisk walk can lessen your anxiety and reduce your stress.
- **Strive for a positive outlook.** Looking at situations more positively, seeing problems as opportunities, having realistic expectations, and refuting negative thoughts are all important aspects of staying positive and trying to minimize your stress.
- **Seek additional help.** If feelings of chronic stress persist, or you are experiencing hopelessness or trouble getting through your daily routine, seek consultation with a licensed mental health professional, such as a psychologist. Psychologists are trained to help you develop strategies to manage stress effectively and make behavioral changes to help improve your overall health. For additional information on managing stress, visit www.apahelpcenter.org.

Methodology

The 2009 *Stress in America* research was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of the American Psychological Association between July 21, 2009 and August 4, 2009 among 1,568 adults aged 18+ who reside in the U.S. and an oversample of 205 adults aged 18+ who reside in Los Angeles. In the 2008 research, 256 Los Angeles residents were included in the oversample. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated; a full methodology is available.

The American Psychological Association, in Washington, D.C., is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. APA's membership includes more than 150,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance

psychology as a science, as a profession and as a means of promoting health, education and human welfare.

The California Psychological Association is the professional organization representing psychology and psychologists in the state of California. With more than 4,000 members, CPA supports psychologists through advocacy, education, and professional support and development. Please contact Jo Linder-Crow, PhD, Executive Director (jlindercrow@cpapsych.org).

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