

# Assembly: Fast Facts

## Area 3 • Assembly of the American Psychiatric Association

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### Top Ten FAQs about Reference Committees

**1. What is a reference committee?** A reference committee is a committee that evaluates and holds hearings on main motions (proposals) that are being considered at an organization's convention, that is, a series of consecutive meetings to conduct business, and refers them back to the voting body with a recommended course of action for each proposal referred to it.

**2. What is the purpose of reference committees?** The purpose of reference committees is to more efficiently conduct a large amount of business by covering proposals in detail and providing members more opportunity to present their views via hearings that time does not permit during a plenary session, and thus, results in the voting body being better informed about the facts of a proposal.

**3. How does the Assembly use reference committees?** The Assembly has reference committees that convene at the May and fall meetings of the Assembly and consider proposals, that is, action papers and position statements. The Speaker determines the number of reference committees.

**4. Does each Assembly reference committee focus on any matter under consideration or on matters pertaining to specific subjects?** The Assembly reference committees focus on specific subjects. Each of four reference committees focus on one of the four new APA strategic priorities – Advancing Psychiatry, Supporting Research, Education and Diversity as –  
1: Advancing Psychiatric Care 2: Advancing Psychiatric Knowledge and Research 3: Education & Lifelong Learning  
4: Diversity & Health Disparities. A fifth reference committee focuses on Organization & Membership

**5. How are action papers and position statements assigned to the reference committees?** The Assembly Rules Committee reviews each action paper and position statement and refers them to a reference committee based on their subject matter and the reference committee's assigned strategic priority. The Rules Committee may approve a proposal by consent. But these items are also assigned because if only one Assembly member requests an item be removed from the consent calendar then that item needs to go through the reference committee process.

**6. Who are the members of the reference committees?** Each reference committee consists of one member from each area and one member from each of the following groups – Assembly Committee of Representatives of Subspecialty and Sections (ACROSS), Committee of Early Career Psychiatrist Representatives, Committee of Resident-Fellow Member Representatives (ACORF) and Committee of Representatives of Minority/Underrepresented Groups.

**7. How are the reference committee members selected?** The Speaker of the Assembly appoints the chairs and members of the reference committees from a list of Assembly members, whose names are submitted by their area representatives or their group chairs.

**8. When do reference committees meet at the Assembly?** The five reference committees meet simultaneously in the afternoon of the first day of the Assembly for usually three hours.

**9. What is the procedure of a reference committee?** Prior to the Assembly, the members of each reference committee study the matters assigned to their committee. At the Assembly, each reference committee convenes in open session and hears viewpoints – in favor and not in favor - on each proposal assigned to it, including any that are no longer on the consent calendar. During the hearing, members of the reference committee may ask questions of those presenting their views but there is no debate. After the hearing, the reference committee deliberates on the each matter either in closed session or with allowing non-committee members to be present to hear but not participate in the deliberations. The committee may amend an action paper. The reference committee votes on recommendations. The chairperson presents the recommendations along with the justifications and brief summary of the committee's discussion to the Assembly at a plenary session.

**10. What may a reference committee recommend to the Assembly about the proposals it considered?** Regarding action papers, a reference committee may recommend that it be adopted, not adopted, amended, or otherwise disposed of. For new position statements, a reference committee may recommend it be adopted, not adopted or referred back to the originating body, for example, a Council. For existing position statements that are being considered for retirement, a reference committee may recommend that it be retired, not be retired or referred to the appropriate body for revision. Although a reference committee's recommendation might carry weight for the vote by the Assembly, the recommendation is only advisory.