



# CARE Court FAQs

## What is CARE Court?

- The Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Court is a new state law meant to address and treat those with severe mental health disorders by allowing the Superior Court to order the county to provide behavioral health treatment in community-based settings.
- Eligible residents are those with a diagnosis of schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders who are substantially deteriorating and unlikely to survive safely in the community without supervision.
- Voluntary treatment is always preferred, with or without a CARE Plan. Voluntary engagement is encouraged throughout the CARE Court process.
- The program prioritizes self-autonomy and civil liberties, providing free legal representation to individuals subject to a petition. Forced medication is not part of this program, nor does the program penalize individuals, either in a civil or criminal manner, for non-compliance.

## Who qualifies for CARE Court?

The plan is focused on individuals, 18 years of age or older, with a diagnosis of schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders, who are substantially deteriorating and unlikely to survive safely in the community without supervision. In addition, CARE Court is designed to help divert individuals from entering into more restrictive conservatorships or incarceration.

## How does it work?

A court petition is required to start the process of assessing an individual's eligibility for CARE Court. A petition can be filed at the Superior Court by a family member, first responder, provider/clinician, public guardian, authorized representative of Behavioral Wellness, adult protective services, or the respondent. A judge will initially determine whether the person for whom treatment is sought is eligible.

When a participant is accepted into CARE Court, the individual is assigned a representative who will work with the Behavioral Wellness department to develop a plan or agreement tailored to the participant's needs. The CARE Plan includes community-based resources such as peer support, counseling, stabilization medications and housing.

The individual is then ordered by a judge to follow the CARE Plan and be provided the resources outlined in the CARE Plan. The individual will receive services under their plan for approximately one year. Periodic review hearings assess the progress and ensure accountability.

24/7 Access Line  
888-868-1649



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## How can I refer my loved one to CARE Court?

- Santa Barbara County residents who need more information about CARE Court and who qualifies can call (888) 868-1649 or visit <https://www.countyofsb.org/4190/CARE-Court>
- Anyone, including family, county and community-based social service providers can call for more information about CARE court.

## What if my loved one doesn't qualify for CARE Court?

Not everyone will qualify for CARE Court, but everyone is encouraged to seek help for themselves or for a loved one by calling the Behavioral Wellness 24/7 Access Line at **888-868-1649** for help or linkage to services.

## Are there any costs for enrolling in CARE Court?

There is no cost to the individual participating.

## What is the court process?

A petition for an individual who potentially meets the criteria for CARE Court must be filed with the Superior Court. If a judge determines that the individual for whom treatment is sought appears to meet the criteria, County of Santa Barbara Department of Behavioral Wellness will be notified, and an attorney will be appointed to represent the individual. Together, all parties will work to develop a CARE Plan to meet the individual's outpatient treatment needs. A CARE Plan is specifically tailored and can include clinically prescribed treatment with supportive services, medications, and a housing plan. If a CARE Plan is ordered, it will last for 12 months with periodic court reviews. A CARE Plan can be renewed once for an additional 12-month period if necessary. Following the expiration of the CARE Court process, an individual who is willing to engage can continue to participate in available treatment plans.

## Will my loved one be able to make their own decisions?

One of the fundamental principles of CARE Court is to empower individuals to make self-directed decisions about their own treatment and recovery. Participants work collaboratively with a CARE Supporter and legal representative to create a personalized CARE Plan that fits their unique needs and circumstances. The emphasis is on supporting individuals in making informed decisions and building a recovery-oriented life. It's important to note, however, that while the program promotes self-determination, it also operates within a framework of court-ordered support to ensure the health and safety of participants.

## Is this a conservatorship?

CARE Court is not a conservatorship and is less restrictive than a conservatorship.

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## What if my loved one doesn't complete or drops out of CARE Court?

If your loved one does not complete the CARE Court program, they will return to the traditional mental health care system and no longer receive the specialized support of CARE Court. However, each situation is unique, and the implications can vary based on the individual's circumstances and the reasons for discontinuation. Importantly, it's crucial to encourage the person to continue engaging with available mental health resources and consider discussing the best alternative care options with a mental health professional.

You can always contact the **Behavioral Wellness 24/7 Access Line** by calling **888-868-1649** for help and support during such transitions.

## Is there a penalty if my loved one drops out of CARE Court?

If a participant decides to leave CARE Court, there's no penalty. Instead, they would return to standard mental health care or may be referred by the court for a conservatorship. Individual circumstances will determine the next steps.

## Can CARE Court make my loved one take and stay on their medication?

Stabilization medications may be provided to manage symptoms and promote recovery as part of the Care Plan. In certain circumstances, stabilization medication may also be ordered by the court. However, it's important to note that forced medication is not part of this program.

## How soon can my loved one get into housing?

Housing security is an important element of the CARE Court program. Housing is based on the individual's specific needs, the availability of suitable housing options, and other relevant factors. It's important to remember that every participant's journey is unique, and our goal is to provide the best possible support for each individual.

## Will my loved one receive legal representation? Is this a criminal legal matter?

While CARE Court is not a criminal process, there is a requirement that counsel be appointed to all individuals. This ensures that your loved one's legal rights are understood and protected throughout the process.

## How can I get more information? What phone number can I call?

For more information on the CARE Court program, please call (888) 868-1649, visit <https://www.countyofsb.org/4190/CARE-Court>, or click the QR code below.



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