



CARE: A Pathway to Hope and Healing

Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment in Santa Cruz County





What is CARE?

The **Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Act** creates a new pathway to deliver mental health and substance use disorder treatment and support services to eligible individuals who have untreated schizophrenia spectrum or other psychotic disorders.

The CARE Act allows the Court to order the County to provide behavioral health treatment in community-based settings.

The individual enters this pathway when a petitioner requests court-ordered treatment, services, supports, and housing resources under the CARE Act, for an eligible individual (or “respondent”).



CARE Act will be available to eligible Santa Cruz County residents starting **December 1, 2024.**



What CARE is NOT

CARE is **not** a conservatorship.

- Medications, treatment, and placement cannot be forced.
- The entire process is voluntary.

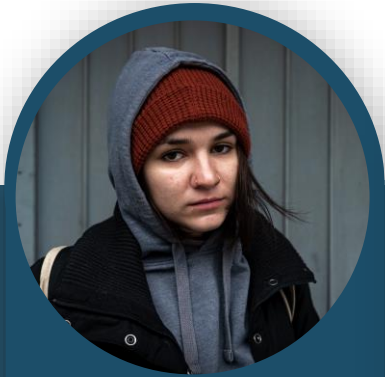
CARE is **not** a cure for homelessness.

- Housing is not guaranteed.

CARE is **not** for all people with mental illness.

- The CARE Act addresses only a very specific set of psychotic disorders.

Overview of CARE Act Roles



**Participant/
Respondent**



Petitioner



**Santa Cruz
County
Behavioral
Health**



**Community
& Service
Providers**



**Court
Partners**



Respondent

Potential participants/respondents are adults with a diagnosis of Schizophrenia Spectrum or other psychotic disorders who:

- Have severe and persistent symptoms that interfere substantially with primary activities of daily living (ADLs),
- Are unable to maintain functioning,
- Are not stabilized,
- Are either
 - Unlikely to survive safely/independently and the condition is deteriorating OR
 - In need of services and support to prevent further deterioration,
- Are able to participate in a CARE agreement/plan as the least restrictive alternative to ensure their stability, and
- Will likely benefit from the CARE process.

“Respondent” is a legal term to refer to the person participating in the CARE Act Process. You’ll hear this term being used in the court room and potentially other settings.

Respondents will be represented by a lawyer from the Public Defender's Office.

For more information, visit the [CARE Act Eligibility Criteria](#) brief and [Eligibility in Practice](#) training materials.

CARE Eligible Diagnoses

Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders

- Schizophrenia
- Schizoaffective Disorder
- Schizophreniform Disorder
- Other Specified Schizophrenia Spectrum and Other Psychotic Disorder
- Unspecified Schizophrenia Spectrum and Other Psychotic Disorder

Other Psychotic Disorders

- Brief Psychotic Disorder
- Delusional Disorder
- Schizotypal Personality Disorder
- Substance/Medication Induced Psychotic Disorder
- Catatonia Associated with Another Mental Disorder
- Unspecified Catatonia

Diagnoses Not Meeting Eligibility*

- Psychotic Disorder Due to A General Medical Condition
- Catatonia Associated with another Medical Condition
- Major Depression with Psychotic Features
- Bipolar Disorder with psychotic features
- Any Substance Related Disorder not listed above

*Unless accompanying another eligible diagnoses

Petitioner

A petitioner could include:

- Family members
 - Limited to a parent, spouse, sibling, child or grandparent
- A mental health professional or other service provider who is treating or has recently treated the client/respondent
- The director of a hospital in which the client/respondent was recently or is hospitalized
- County Behavioral Health agency
- First responders
- Homeless outreach worker
- A roommate/housemate
- The client/respondent

For more information, visit [CARE Act Resources For Petitioners](#).



Santa Cruz County Behavioral Health

- Agency assigned to engage with the client/respondent as they enter into the different pathways of a CARE agreement
- Behavioral Health (BH) creates an initial report, conducts clinical evaluation, engages the client in the mental health treatment, and connects the client with other services and supports.
- CARE participants will be assigned to a BH coordinator who will ensure that they receive services to support unmet needs, either through the Specialty Mental Health Clinic or through community providers.

For more information, visit the [CARE Act Fact Sheet](#) and [2022 California Welfare and Institutions Code](#).



Community & Service Providers

- Santa Cruz County has different types of potential housing providers that may engage with CARE Act clients, including but not limited to:
 - Housing First Models, including
 - Bridge/Interim Housing Models
 - Rapid Rehousing
 - Permanent Supportive Housing
 - Behavioral Health Bridge Housing (BHBH) funding

For more information, visit the [CARE Act Fact Sheet](#) and [2022 California Welfare and Institutions Code](#).



Role of First Responders and Other Professionals

1) As the Petitioner:

- Consult with your agency's counsel to complete court forms.
Note: Self-help centers only assist individuals.
- First responders as petitioners are replaced by County Behavioral Health (BH) at the initial appearance.
- Original petitioner should be present and can make a statement at the initial hearing.

2) As a referral source:

- In some cases, you may refer to other organizations:
 - County Behavioral Health
 - Health care, hospitals, or emergency departments
 - Community services providers
- Consider identifying liaisons to support communication.



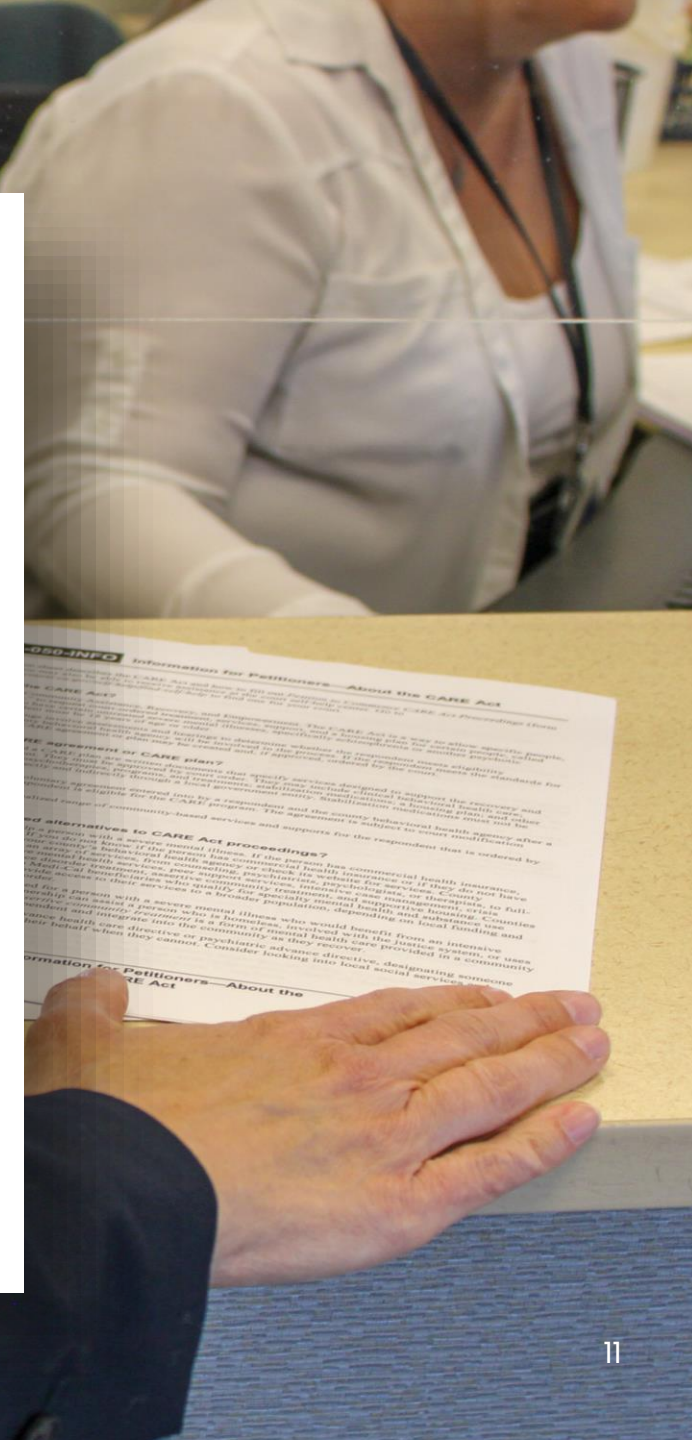
Key Considerations **Before Filing** a CARE Petition

CARE does **not** apply to people who are already voluntarily engaged in Behavioral Health services.

- Before filing a CARE petition, consider reaching out to Behavioral Health. They can help assess if someone meets the necessary criteria.

Petitions must include documentation of a **qualifying disorder** and one of the following:

- Affidavit of a Behavioral Health clinician OR
- Proof of two recent hospitalizations for intensive treatment (“5250” or “14-day hold”).



How Does the CARE Process Work?

- 1** The CARE process begins with the filing of a **petition**.
Petition may be filed by family members, healthcare or social services workers, first responders, or Santa Cruz County Behavioral Health.
- 2** The Court determines **eligibility**.
- 3** If eligible, the Court will work with the participant/respondent and their attorney to create a voluntary **CARE agreement** or a court-ordered CARE plan that connects them with **services**.
- 4** There will be regular status review hearings to **review** progress and challenges.
- 5** After 12 months, the respondent may **graduate** from the program or **continue** for another year.



After graduating from the CARE process, the respondent remains eligible for ongoing treatment, services, and housing to support long-term recovery.

What's in a CARE Agreement or CARE Plan?

CARE Agreement/Plan

- Each Participant/respondent will have an individualized CARE Plan specific to their needs.
- Services may include the following:
 -  Behavioral health services
 -  Medically necessary stabilization medications
 -  Housing resources & supports
 -  Funded social services, including those available to indigent California residents

For more information, visit the training [Overview of CARE Agreement & CARE Plan](#) and [California Welfare and Institutions Code \(W&I Code\) section 5982](#).

Additional considerations:

- Respondent and County BH Agency will both be expected to comply.
- Judge can order prioritization of services and supports.
- Services are subject to funding and federal/state laws.

How to Learn More about CARE Eligibility



For individuals in our community:

- Contact the **Santa Cruz County Law Library** in Santa Cruz or the **Santa Cruz Superior Court Self Help Center** in Watsonville.
- Both locations provide guidance on CARE eligibility, the CARE process, and support with completing and reviewing the CARE Petition.
- Services can be provided in-person or remotely.
- Visit lawlibrary.org and santacruz.courts.ca.gov/self-help for contact information and hours.
- Or call 831-420-2205 (Law Library) or 831-786-7200 option 4 (Self Help Center).

For more information, visit the [CARE Act Fact Sheet](#) and [2022 California Welfare and Institutions Code](#).



How to File a CARE Petition in Santa Cruz County

Individuals can visit either:

- Santa Cruz Law Library (basement of 701 Ocean Street, Santa Cruz)
- **or** Watsonville Self Help Center (1 Second Street, Room 301, Watsonville) to:
 - Learn about eligibility
 - Obtain court forms
 - Get help completing and reviewing the forms

File completed court forms:

- In person in Room 110, Civil Clerk Office (701 Ocean Street)
- **or** Online using efile
- After filing, most respondents will be represented through the Public Defender's office.
- *Remember: CARE is a completely voluntary and confidential process.*



Court Partners

The following legal partners will help ensure that CARE is legally followed in the best interest of each respondent:

The Judge:

- Is neutral arbiter and
- Will strive to conduct CARE proceedings in informal, non-adversarial atmosphere.

County Counsel (attorney):

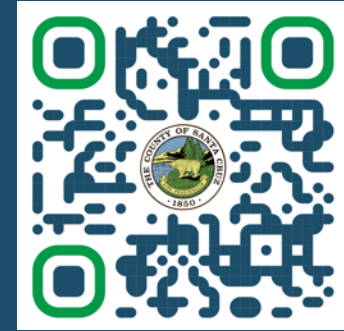
- Will advise and represent County Behavioral Health and
- Ensure that all legal forms & documents are properly filed.

Public Defender (attorney):

- Is a Court-appointed lawyer, regardless of ability to pay and
- Will represent the Respondent's interests and rights in the courtroom and provide other supportive services.

For more information, visit the [CARE Act Fact Sheet](#) and the [Legal Roles in the CARE Act](#) brief.





santacruzcountyca.gov/CARE

Where Can I Learn More About CARE?

If you think the CARE Act could help someone you care about, find additional information and resources at:

Santa Cruz County CARE Act:

- Website: santacruzcountyca.gov/CARE
- Email: CAREact@santacruzcountyca.gov

Other CARE Act Resources:

- [CARE Act Resource Center](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)