

This information sheet provides information about the CARE Act and CARE Act proceedings.

## 1 Why am I being given these documents?

Someone has filed a petition with a court to start a CARE Act case for you. In the case, you are called the *respondent*. The CARE Act applies only to specific people. The petition asks a court to decide if you are one of them. The court has found that you might be. It is asking for more information to help it decide if you are.

### Important information for you:

- You have been appointed an attorney, free of charge.
- Your court-appointed attorney will try to contact you about this case using the last known address or location on file for you.
- You may also contact your attorney at any time. Your attorney's contact information is listed in item 5 of *Order for Care Act Report* (form CARE-105) and item 4 of *Notice of Initial Appearance—CARE Act Proceedings* (form CARE-110). You should have received one of those forms when you got this form.
- You should make sure that your attorney knows how to get in touch with you. Give them your contact information and let them know if it changes.
- You may also choose an attorney to represent you instead of the appointed attorney. If you choose your own attorney, you are responsible for their fees.
- You have the right to an interpreter, free of charge, at every CARE Act court hearing.

## 2 What is the CARE Act?

CARE stands for Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment. The CARE process is a way to get court-ordered treatment, services, support, and a housing plan for adults with schizophrenia spectrum disorders, bipolar I disorder with psychotic features, or other similar psychotic disorders.

The CARE process uses outreach, meetings, and court hearings. The court will decide if you meet the eligibility requirements. One or more county agencies will be part of the process. If you are eligible, they will work with you to identify services and supports you might need.

If you are eligible for the CARE Act, the court will ask you to work with the county behavioral health agency to make a CARE agreement for services and supports. If you do not reach an agreement with the county agency, the court will order a clinical evaluation of your mental health. After reviewing the evaluation, the court will decide if you are still eligible. If you are, the court will order you and the county agency to develop a CARE plan.

## 3 What is CARE eligibility?

To be eligible for the CARE process, you need to be at least 18 years old and have a schizophrenia spectrum disorder, bipolar I disorder with psychotic features, or another psychotic disorder. The disorder you have must be serious. That means it has lasted for a long time, it can make you do things that interfere with your life, and it can make it impossible for you to live on your own for very long without treatment, support, and rehabilitation.

You are not eligible if you are stabilized in a voluntary treatment program. In addition, to be eligible, *either* it must be unlikely that you will survive safely in the community without somebody watching over you and your condition is getting a lot worse, *or* you must need services and supports to keep your symptoms from coming back or getting bad enough that you would probably become severely disabled or would seriously hurt yourself or somebody else. Finally, it must be likely that going through the CARE process will help you and that nothing less restrictive than the CARE process will make sure that you recover and stabilize.

## 4 What is a CARE agreement or CARE plan?

A CARE agreement and CARE plan are written documents that contain services designed to support you. They must be approved by court order. They may include clinical behavioral health care; counseling; specialized psychotherapy, programs, and treatment; stabilization medications; a housing plan; and other supports and services, provided directly or indirectly by local government. These documents cannot give anyone the right to use force to medicate you.



## 4 What is a CARE agreement or CARE plan?

A CARE agreement is a voluntary agreement between you and the county behavioral health agency. If you are eligible for the CARE program, the court will order you and the county agency to try to reach a CARE agreement. The court can change the agreement before approving it. After the court approves the CARE agreement, it can still be changed if you and the county agency agree to change it.

If you cannot reach a CARE agreement, the court may ask you to work with the county to create a CARE plan. A CARE plan is an individualized range of community-based supports and services. It can include the same services and supports as a CARE agreement. You and the county agency will propose one or more CARE plans to the court. The court will order the final CARE plan and can also change it later.

## 5 Who is the petitioner?

The petitioner is the person who is asking the court to start CARE Act proceedings for you.

## 6 Who is the respondent?

The respondent is you, the person whom the court is being asked to start CARE Act proceedings for.

## 7 What happens after the petition has been filed?

The court reviews the petition and decides if you might be eligible for the CARE process. If it thinks you might be, the court may order a county agency to try to contact you, talk with you, and file a written report. The county agency must file the report with the court as soon as practicable, but within 30 court days, unless the court gives it more time. The county will let you and the petitioner know if the court orders a report.

### What happens if the county agency contacts me?

The county agency will ask you about your mental and physical health. It will also ask how your mental health affects your life and what services and treatment you think would be helpful. It will ask if you are willing to work with the county to get connected to those services and treatment options.

### What will the report include?

The county agency will file a report even if it is not able to contact you. The report will include:

- The agency's opinion about whether you meet, or are likely to meet, the CARE eligibility requirements. These include your mental health diagnosis and current condition, whether you need additional services, and whether there are other services that would help you but be less restrictive than a CARE agreement or plan.
- The county's efforts to get you to participate voluntarily in services and whether the county thinks you can participate voluntarily in services.

### What happens after the court receives the report?

After the court receives the report, it will either:

- **Dismiss the proceedings:** If the court finds, based on the petition and the county's report, that you are not eligible for the CARE process or that you are working willingly and effectively with the county agency and have enrolled or are likely to enroll in behavioral health treatment, the court will dismiss the case; or
- **Set an initial appearance (court hearing):** If the court finds that the county's report shows that you may be eligible for the CARE process and the county's contacts with you were not able to connect you with voluntary services and treatment, the court will set an initial appearance.

**Note:** The court has appointed an attorney for you. The attorney will contact you at the beginning of the CARE Act process. If the court sets an initial appearance, the county will give you notice of the date, time, and place of the hearing along with additional information.



**8** What happens at the initial appearance and the hearing on the merits?

**At the initial appearance:**

- You may replace your court-appointed attorney with an attorney that you choose.  
**Note:** If you choose your own attorney, you are responsible for their fees, if any.
- You have the right to appear in person. You can choose to give up your right to attend personally, and your attorney can appear on your behalf.
- If you do not tell the court, either by yourself or through your attorney, that you are choosing not to attend and you do not appear, the court may have a hearing without you. To do that, the court needs to find that reasonable attempts to encourage you to appear have failed and that having a hearing without you would be in your best interests.
- The petitioner must be present at the initial appearance, or the court may dismiss the petition.
- A representative from the county behavioral health agency will be present.
- If the original petitioner is not the director of a county behavioral health agency, the court will replace the original petitioner with the director of the county behavioral health agency or their designee, who will then take over as the petitioner.
- If you are enrolled in a federally recognized Indian tribe or are receiving services from an Indian health care provider, a tribal court, or a tribal organization, the law allows a representative from the program, the tribe, or the tribal court to be present if you consent. The county must give notice of the initial appearance to the tribal representative.
- The court will set a hearing on the merits of the petition.
- The hearing on the merits of the petition may happen at the same time as the initial appearance but only if you (the respondent), the petitioner, and the court all agree.

**At the hearing on the merits:**

The court will decide if you meet the CARE Act requirements. The court will consider the petition, the report from the county agency, and all evidence properly presented to it, including evidence that you provide.

- **If the court finds that you *do not* meet the CARE Act requirements:** The court will dismiss the petition. The original petitioner may be able to file a new petition if something changes unless the court finds that the original petition was not filed in good faith.
- **If the court finds that you *do* meet the CARE Act requirements:** The court will order the county behavioral health agency to work with you, your attorney, and your supporter, if you have one, to connect you with behavioral health treatment. You all will need to decide if you and the behavioral health agency can reach a CARE agreement. The court will set a case management hearing.

**Note:** If you are enrolled in a federally recognized Indian tribe and you want a tribal representative to attend the case management hearing, the county behavioral health agency will let the tribe know the date, time, and place of the hearing.

**9** What rights do petitioners have?

The original petitioner has the right to go to the hearing on the merits and make a statement. If the original petitioner lives with you; is your spouse, parent, sibling, child, or grandparent; or is someone who has authority to act as your parent, the court will continue to give them notice about the case, unless the court decides that notice would be harmful to you. In addition, if you agree, the court may allow that person to participate in your CARE Act process.

If the original petitioner is not someone listed above, the court will not give them additional rights.



**10 What rights do respondents have?**

You have the right to be informed of what is happening in your case. You have the right to participate in your case. You have the right to an attorney and a supporter at all stages of the process. You have the right to an interpreter if you need one. You have the right to keep confidential all CARE evaluations, reports, documents, and filings. You also have other rights that are described in *Notice of Respondent's Rights* (form CARE-113). You will get a copy of that form when you get notice of any court hearing in the CARE Act process.

**11 What if I disagree with a court order?**

You have the right to ask a higher court to review a court order in the CARE process. This is called an *appeal*. Talk with your attorney if you think you want to appeal a court order. To get more information, read *Information on Appeal Procedures for Unlimited Civil Cases* (form [APP-001-INFO](#)).

**12 What is a "supporter"?**

You have the right to choose a person to support you throughout the CARE Act process. The CARE Act calls that person a *supporter*. The supporter helps you understand, communicate, make decisions, and express your preferences. You can choose to have your supporter with you at meetings, appointments, or court hearings.

**Your supporter must:**

- Respect your values and beliefs and support your preferences as well as they can.
- Communicate with you to help you understand and make informed decisions.

**Your supporter must not:**

- Act independently from you.
- Make decisions for you or on your behalf unless necessary to keep someone from immediately getting hurt.
- Sign documents for you.

**You have a right to have a supporter throughout the CARE Act process.**

**13 What if I don't speak English?**

You have the right to an interpreter at all CARE Act court hearings. Let your attorney know that you will need an interpreter for court hearings. When you go to court, tell the judge you need an interpreter if you or your attorney haven't already asked for one. You can also use *Request for Interpreter (Civil)* (form [INT-300](#)) or a local court form or website to request an interpreter. For more information about court interpreters, go to <https://selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/request-interpreter>.

**14 What if I have a disability?**

If you have a disability and need an accommodation while you are at court, you can use *Disability Accommodation Request* (form [MC-410](#)) to make your request.

You can also ask the Americans with Disabilities Act coordinator in your court for help. For more information, see *How to Request a Disability Accommodation for Court* (form [MC-410-INFO](#)) or go to <https://selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/jcc-form/MC-410-INFO>.