

What is CARE Act?

- The Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Act is a new state law meant to address and treat those with severe mental health disorders by allowing the court to order the county to provide behavioral health treatment in community-based settings.
- Eligible residents are those with a diagnosis of schizophrenia, bipolar I disorder (*with psychotic features*) 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 Act 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 the CARE program?

The program is focused on individuals, 18 years of age or older, with a diagnosis of schizophrenia, bipolar I disorder (with psychotic features) or other psychotic disorders, who are substantially deteriorating and unlikely to survive safely in the community without supervision. In addition, CARE Act 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 the CARE program. A petition can be filed by a family member, first responder, provider/clinician, public guardian, authorized representative of the county behavioral health services, 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 the CARE program, the individual is assigned a representative who will work with Behavioral Health Services 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 plan. The individual will receive services under their plan for approximately one year. Periodic review hearings assess the progress and ensure accountability.



How can I refer my loved one to the CARE Act Program?

Riverside County residents who need more information about the CARE Act program and who qualifies can call (800) 499-3008 or visit <https://www.ruhealth.org/behavioral-health/care-act>. Anyone, including family, county, and community-based social service providers can call for more information about the CARE Act.

What if my loved one doesn't qualify for the CARE Act program?

Not everyone will qualify for the CARE Act program, but everyone is encouraged to seek help themselves or for a loved one by calling the Riverside University Health System – Behavioral Health's CARES Line at 800-499-3008.

Are there any costs for enrolling in the CARE Act program?

There is no cost to the individual participating.

What is the court process?

A petition for an individual who potentially meets the criteria for the CARE Act program must be filed with the Superior Court. If a judge determines that the individual for whom treatment is sought appears to meet the criteria, Riverside University Health Systems - Behavioral Health 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 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 the CARE Act program 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?

The CARE program is not a conservatorship and is less restrictive than a conservatorship.



What if my loved one doesn't complete or drops out of the CARE Act program?

If your loved one does not complete the CARE Act program, they will return to the traditional mental health care system and no longer receive the specialized support of the CARE Plan. 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 Riverside University Health System CARES Line at (800) 499-3008 for your help and support during such transitions.

Is there a penalty if my loved one drops out of the CARE Act program?

If a participant decides to leave the CARE Act program, 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 the CARE Act program 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 Act 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 the CARE Act program 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 Act program, call the Riverside University Health System CARES Line at (800) 499-3008 or visit <https://www.ruhealth.org/behavioral-health/care-act>.

Riverside Superior Court Self Help Legal Services is available to explain CARE Court legal procedures and provide guidance on court forms. These services can be obtained by calling 951-274-4499 or 760-393-2163 or visiting riverside.courts.ca.gov/CAREAct.

