



CARE Act Communications Toolkit for Counties

# CARE Act Communications Toolkit for Counties

This Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Act Communications Toolkit is intended to help counties raise awareness and educate their communities about the CARE Act. It includes an overview of communications strategies and template materials. The toolkit has been designed to help each county make a plan that fits your capacity, budget, and community needs.

There are a variety of training materials, resources, and information available on the [CARE Act Resource Center](#). Please see the [Contact Page](#) for additional ways to contact Health Management Associates (HMA) for Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) support, including questions about this Communications Toolkit for counties.

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# COMMUNICATIONS OVERVIEW

## Communication Considerations

The following considerations should inform your county's communications plan:

- **Capacity to manage:** Communications is not a "set it and forget it" activity. For example, if you are running social media ads and someone comments with a question or requests help, staff must monitor the ads to respond in a timely manner. Determine if you have the bandwidth internally to set up, manage, monitor, and evaluate your efforts regularly.
- **Relationships:** Consider partner, media, and influencer relationships. Do you have strong existing relationships, or do you need to research and establish them? Consider calling a local reporter to share information about your county's efforts and how you can help with their work (e.g., be a subject matter expert if they are working on a behavioral health story); reach out to a partner community organization and offer to do a lunchtime presentation in their office; or offer trainings to first responder organizations. Investing time into building these types of relationships can facilitate communications extension via partners—they will already be familiar with your efforts, and you will be familiar with theirs to easily identify mutual opportunities to benefit all parties.
- **Social media community:** Evaluate your organization's social media presence and engagement with followers and community members. Understand who is following you (e.g., organizations, professionals, public), what your followers value, and what types of posts they comment on and share. This will help inform your goal-setting and tactics selection/timing.
- **Tactic selection:** Include a variety of communications tactics that work together when possible. For example, you can place informational materials in a health care waiting room and work with the provider to include messaging in their email distribution list. Combining tactics enables you to diversify your communications efforts to reach a variety of individuals within your defined audiences.

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- **Timing and frequency:** Determine whether you want to build upon an existing effort running at the same time or if you want to focus your efforts when no other related communications effort is active. Consider times of the year when it might be best for your efforts to have exposure in your community such as “health holidays” (e.g., May Mental Health Awareness Month). It is also important to be aware of other efforts in the market and avoid oversaturation.
- **Visuals and messaging:** Use consistent messaging to support clarity and aid recall. Identify yourself/the organization promoting the message to convey the source and build trust. See the provided templated materials, which are customizable and can support consistency in CARE Act communications.
- **Call to action:** A call to action (CTA) is the chance to motivate the audience: what are you asking them to do after seeing your communication and why? Perhaps you are prompting the audience to visit your local county CARE Act web page or call for more information about the CARE Act process. If you don’t have a local CARE Act web page, you could provide a link to the [CARE Act Resource Center](#).
- **Measurement:** It’s important to develop a monitoring/evaluation plan across all tactics to analyze the communications success and make modifications as needed. Evaluation metrics may include impressions, clicks, click-through rate, website traffic, number of media stories, print material distribution, etc.
- **Key performance indicators (KPIs):** Ideally, you can measure engagement with your communications by setting a CTA. You can ask the audience to visit your website, for example. Then see how many people did it. Other times, the goal is to show your message to as many people as possible. In these cases, the KPI is the number of impressions delivered. Communications take time, requiring audience recall and (potential) action. **The average person has an attention span of under nine seconds. They may need to see a message seven times before they decide to take action.** Keep this in mind when you are deciding how to evaluate your communications.
- **Budget:** Outside of paid media costs, the following are additional budgetary considerations when identifying communication efforts: staff time and salary; communications contractors; printing; travel expenses (e.g., attending

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community events); and design/transcreation. Typically, plan on allocating approximately 15%+ of your budget to communications, depending on total budget size. If your county is not able to budget for communications, there is still a lot you can do – check out the [Suggested Tactics by Budget](#).

### Communications Channels

Communication efforts are as varied as the topics, audiences, and communities they serve. Considering your budget and resources available, you may want to incorporate various communications channels into your communication plan. Below is an overview of each:

- **Owned: Content and communication you own or control.** Owned media is an integral element of a holistic effort. Use your website(s), email marketing, social media, newsletters, conferences, and signage to tell your story and engage with your audience(s). This approach builds upon your existing audience by using your assets to expand reach and increase impact.
- **Partner: Cross-promotion to extend visibility.** Partnerships are essential for reciprocal reach extension to target audiences. It is also a successful tactic to foster meaningful collaboration among stakeholders. Partners can include courts, community organizations, provider offices, health care clinics, mental health centers, hospitals, libraries, community recreation centers, churches, etc. For partners, make messages and content simple, thorough, and convenient. The easier it is for partners to share your information, the more likely they will.
- **Earned: Exposure you have earned through word-of-mouth.** Earned media is an effective way not only to extend reach but also to add depth, commentary, and storytelling to your communication efforts. Incorporating earned media requires designated people who are approved to speak on behalf of your organization about the CARE Act with the public media. Designated people are typically called “spokespeople” and can range from individuals willing to share their stories to licensed experts on the topic. Consider featuring stories in newsletters, as opinion editorial (op-eds), and relevant blogs and media sites. Earned media also includes grassroots outreach to community-specific media such as neighborhood-specific online groups, meet-ups, and private Facebook groups.

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- Paid Media: Pay for placement or promotion.** Paid media is an effective tactic to target specific audiences who may be interested in the CARE Act and not exposed to it otherwise. Paid media works best when it is focused, well planned, effectively executed, and includes a compelling CTA.

Channel	Examples	Measurement
Owned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Website.</li> <li>Newsletters.</li> <li>Social media.</li> <li>Conferences / meetings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Website analytics such as total users, sessions, and engagement rate.</li> <li>Newsletter list subscriptions including reach, clicks, and opens.</li> <li>Social engagement including comments, shares, and likes.</li> <li>Attendance, impressions, and anecdotal feedback.</li> </ul>
Partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Toolkit of materials (e.g., fact sheets, talking points, social media content, flyers).</li> <li>Partners can include community organizations, provider offices, health care clinics, mental health centers, hospitals, libraries, community recreation centers, churches, Judicial Council of California (JC) Self-Help Centers, police and sheriff's offices, housing partners, local National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) affiliates, city officials, county bar associations, or advocacy groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Material usage and delivery tracked by partner.</li> <li>Promotional item distribution such as quantity, types of events, and public response.</li> <li>Anecdotal response from partners and partner referrals.</li> </ul>

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Channel	Examples	Measurement
Earned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Op-eds.</li> <li>● Press releases.</li> <li>● Blog posts.</li> <li>● Grassroots outreach to community-specific media such as Nextdoor, private neighborhood Facebook groups, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Media mentions.</li> <li>● Media placement.</li> <li>● Media impressions such as circulation and audience size.</li> <li>● Grassroots social engagement including comments, shares, and likes.</li> </ul>
Paid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Digital: Google Ads, display ads, geofenced ads, social media paid ads, etc.</li> <li>● Public transit: Bus internal and external signage.</li> <li>● Out of Home (OOH) - Billboards, bus stop shelter posters and benches, etc.</li> <li>● Direct mail.</li> <li>● Outreach event sponsorship/booth.</li> <li>● Signage and videos in offices and waiting rooms.</li> <li>● Ad in religious or community publications and newsletters.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reach, frequency, and impressions.</li> <li>● Click-through rate, cost per click, and social insight analytics.</li> <li>● Added value.</li> </ul>

## Suggested Tactics by Budget

Below are example tactics to consider based on your budget and capacity. The provided resources are included in this toolkit.

### Limited Funding

- Share the provided talking points throughout your organization and with partners to support consistent messaging to aid comprehension internally and externally.
- Use the provided social media graphic template and copy to customize for your county. Post social media copy and images on your organization's page on a monthly basis.
- Use the provided press release template to share your county's efforts to implement the CARE Act in local media.
- Draft an op-ed about your county's CARE Act process and resources and share it with a local newspaper editor. If you haven't connected with the editor before, this is a great time because you have the op-ed to offer them.
- Customize and post the provided flyer in key areas in public spaces that allow public postings.
- Connect with a partner organizations or businesses in your community and ask them to include a blurb about your county's CARE Act implementation in an e-newsletter, mailing, or social media post, using the provided talking points, social media, and/or flyer.

### Some Funding

- Customize the flyer template provided for your county. Connect with providers and clinics in your area and offer to print and deliver informational flyers to put in their waiting rooms.
- Use the provided social media graphic template and copy to customize for your county. Put a small amount of funding towards boosting your social media posts for increased reach.

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- Run a small Google Ads buy and bid on certain keywords such as substance use treatment, schizophrenia, mental health, and crisis support. You can target your ads using filters like zip codes, age, or income level.

### Robust Funding

- Contract with a communications agency to develop a comprehensive communications strategic plan for your county. This plan could incorporate strategy, planning, creative development, channels, scheduling, monitoring, and evaluation.
- Identify hot spots in your community where your audience often goes and buy bus shelter ads in nearby locations.

Keep in mind that using complementary tactics aids recall, prompts action, and reinforces identity. Multiple tactics work together to create a comprehensive and strategic communications plan.

### Best Practices

#### Strategic Plan

Your communications strategic plan outlines longer-term goals and incorporates the following:

- **Goal setting:** A plan makes everything easier. Invest time now in planning for more efficiency later on. Know what to do at any point in the process.
- **Why you're doing this work:** Outlines long-term sustainable actions to build awareness and educate your community about the CARE Act process. Empowers accurate targeting/connection with your audiences.
- **Accurate targeting/connection with your audiences:** Provides structure to determine whom you need to reach and how.
- **Evaluation, capacity, and budget:** Makes communications efforts more efficient, effective, and lasting.



## Work Plan

A communications work plan is focused on the specific actions and implementation of the strategic plan.

- **Identify your plan purpose:** Your plan depends on what you're trying to accomplish with your communications strategy. Breaking down your plan into shorter time periods of months or weeks can help with tackling longer-term goals.
- **Define your audience:** When thinking of CARE Act stakeholders, including the general public, it is important to create an audience profile to identify the best channels and methods to connect with them.
- **Message and visual creative development:** This can be a resource-intensive part of your planning. Materials and resources are provided in this toolkit to help streamline this process for you.
- **Identify communication channels:** Select the communication channels and tactics that best fit your budget, capacity, and identified goals.
- **Plan for monitoring and evaluation:** Develop a monitoring and evaluation plan across all channels. Discuss evaluation strategies upfront, while your plan is in development. Evaluation can help you improve what is working or adjust what isn't working.

Even the best researched effort may need tweaking once it has been launched. Use the data identified in your evaluation plan to refine and adjust. If something isn't working, try making a small alteration and continue to look at the data. Changes may include changing the day and time that you post social media content to get more engagement, or adding to your messaging based on questions you are receiving from your audience(s).

## Accessibility

Accessibility and inclusion are essential in communications. Ensure that you are following federal, state, and local regulations in your communications, materials, and website.

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- **Language:** Translating and/or transcreating your communications materials into multiple languages improves your communication with a diverse range of audiences from various cultures. The provided templated materials have been made available in:
  - English
  - Spanish
  - Simple Chinese
  - Tagalog
  - Vietnamese
- **Comprehension:** Plain language is communication that is clear, accessible, and useful. Use plain language and a 7<sup>th</sup> grade reading level or below when possible. We recognize the subject matter presents a challenge when referring to specific legal and diagnostic terms. See below for helpful resources:
  - [Public Health Collaborative](#): A helpful guide with plain language principles, simple techniques that can make your communications more accessible, and resources to learn more about plain language.
  - [Hemingway](#): A cost-effective tool that identifies and assists with lowering the reading level of written material. They offer a free trial period.
- **Alternative format:** Consider that you may need to provide material upon request in alternative formats to allow individuals who are blind or visually impaired, and other individuals with disabilities, with communication materials in their requested alternative format(s) such as braille, audio format, large print, and accessible electronic format.
- **Remediation:** To remediate a document means improving its accessibility and usability. This includes creating a document that is inclusive in format, design, and tagged for assistive technology. This is not an exhaustive list, but a few key best practices for document remediation include:
  - A proper and meaningful title for the document.
  - Consistent use of Heading structure (e.g., Heading 1, Heading 2, Heading 3).
  - PDF remediation with tagged content for screen readers.

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- Alternate Text (Alt Text) for images.
- Use of bookmarks.
- Format embedded links.

## Materials & Resources

### Materials

**Please see the CARE Act templated materials provided for you to customize and use in your county.** The materials include:

- Press release template.
- Talking points document.
- Flyer template (8.5"x11").
- Social media graphic template & copy.
- Stock image considerations.
- Website guidance document.
- Website banner (1600x400 px).
- Overview of CARE Act and Process presentation template.

### Resources

#### CARE Act Links

- [CARE Act Resource Center](#) (website)
- [CARE Act County Websites Directory](#) (website)
- [NAMI CARE Act Website](#) (website)
- [Self-Help Centers](#) (locator)

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- [NAMI Partnership](#) (locator)

### Communications

- [Planning process thought-starters](#) (padlet): A free resource with thought starters to help you create your work plan.
- [Canva](#): A free-to-use online graphic design tool.
- [Pixlr](#): A free web-based photo editing and design tool.
- [Sprout Social](#): A paid social media management tool offering a free newsletter with social media tips and resources.