


Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment Act

First Responders & the CARE Act



The Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Act established a new civil court process that facilitates access to a broad range of services and supports to people who have schizophrenia spectrum and other psychotic disorders and meet other CARE eligibility criteria (see [The CARE Act At a Glance](#) brief). Referring someone to CARE is an acknowledgement that a person may benefit from access to services. First responders (e.g., a peace officer, firefighter, paramedic, emergency medical technician, mobile crisis response worker, homeless outreach worker) can [lead this connection](#) to services by initiating a petition or referral, as outlined below.¹

First Responders & Petitions

How can first responders serve as petitioners?

If a first responder consistently interacts with someone that appears to have symptoms of untreated schizophrenia spectrum or other psychotic disorders and appears to meet the other [CARE eligibility criteria](#), they may consider initiating a [CARE petition](#). First responders can start by identifying the local court accepting CARE petitions (see [County Directory](#) for CARE-specific county court sites), then fill out the petition forms (electronically or via physical copy, depending on the court's processes). [Self-Help Centers](#) can provide legal information about CARE petitions and resources to people who do not have legal representation.

The petition helps a judge determine an individual's possible [eligibility for CARE](#). Petitioners do not need to know the diagnosis or prove eligibility. Instead, petitioners should document behaviors and interactions they observe that may inform a diagnosis and

possible eligibility. The county behavioral health (BH) agency will follow up after the initial petition to complete an assessment, establish a diagnosis, and evaluate eligibility.

After the petition is filed, the original petitioner should be present and make a statement at the initial appearance. Remote appearances are common across courts. At the initial appearance, the county BH agency will then take the place of the original petitioner.

Can first responders refer individuals to another petitioner?

In some cases, first responders may choose to refer an individual to another organization, who will then file the petition. These may include the county BH agency, local health care providers, hospitals, law enforcement agencies, and housing providers. Some counties have formally established a referral relationship, meaning that first responders make a referral to the county BH agency to file a petition.

¹ The CARE Act is being implemented in cohorts, with the first cohort of seven counties launching in 2023 (Glenn, Orange, Riverside, San Diego, Stanislaus, Tuolumne, and San Francisco), and the remaining counties launching by December 2024.

Interacting with the CARE Population

First responders often interact with people who are CARE eligible. First responder organizations should consider training on supporting people with serious mental illness. Education helps first responder teams who work with this population. Examples of topics that would be helpful for first responders to learn about include:

- Features and symptoms of serious mental illness and psychosis. (See the series on [Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders & Evidence-based Care for Volunteer Supporters](#))
- How to manage racial and cultural biases. (See the training on [Addressing Implicit Bias for Behavioral Health Agencies](#))
- De-escalation techniques and a trauma-informed, harm reduction approach. (See the series on [Trauma-informed Care for County Behavioral Health](#))

🔍 Lessons Learned from the Field

In a [First Responders & the CARE Act](#) training and open forum, first responders provided the following lessons, strategies, and successes that can be replicated across counties as CARE is implemented:

- The CARE process helps first responders connect individuals to treatment, services, and supports.
- Build collaboration; establish liaisons between first responders and the county BH agency.
- Understand the basics; don't worry about knowing everything. Focus on documenting what is observed.
- Recognize and communicate that this is a civil court process, not a criminal process.

🔗 Additional Resources

Consider viewing the training materials on [CARE-Act.org](#) under training materials; key resources are pinned to the top.

For more information on the CARE Act petition process and petition forms, please visit the [Information for CARE Act Petitioners](#) section on the CalHHS website, as well as [Information for Petitioners – CARE 050](#), [Information for Respondents – CARE 060](#), [How to File the CARE – 100 Form](#), the [CARE 101 form](#), and the [CARE Act Resources for Petitioners One-Pager](#).

For help with questions about the petition process, contact CAREAct@chhs.ca.gov.

➡ Statute Language & Citation

- Court process: [California Welfare and Institutions Code \(W&I Code\) section 5977](#)
- Eligibility: [W&I Code section 5972](#)
- Petitioning (highlights first responder language): [W&I Code section 5974](#)