

# CARE Act

## Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment Act

### CARE Act's Court-Supported Model for Voluntary Participation

The Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Act provides community-based behavioral health services and supports through a civil court process for individuals who are experiencing a **serious mental disorder** and who meet other **eligibility requirements**. To understand the distinct role of CARE within the broader behavioral health system, it is important to consider how the CARE process differs from other voluntary behavioral health services and how its structure promotes sustained, voluntary engagement.

FAQ: **How does the CARE process differ from other voluntary behavioral health services, and how does CARE promote voluntary engagement?**

CARE provides access to wraparound treatment and prioritization to services (including housing) through a structured, court-supervised framework that fosters sustained engagement, continuity of care, and accountability. Although CARE involves a civil court process, respondent participation and engagement in this process is voluntary. The individual's right to make independent choices about the treatment and supports offered, and their participation in those services, is acknowledged and respected throughout the CARE process.

## Approaches to Encourage Engagement

The following approaches encourage engagement of both the individuals and the counties in the CARE process:

- **Trauma-informed, recovery-oriented approach.** Counties have taken deliberate steps to include peer support workers in CARE, prioritize person-centered planning, integrate wraparound service models, and shape courtroom practices to be non-adversarial and collaborative. These elements are often critical for promoting engagement for individuals who may have had negative experiences with court systems in the past.
- **Sustained and persistent outreach and engagement.** County behavioral health agencies have reported that CARE encourages repeated engagement over time. Continuous engagement efforts allow teams to build rapport, assess needs, and adjust supports as circumstances change.

## How CARE is Unique

The difference between CARE and other voluntary behavioral health programs:

- **Judicial oversight.** CARE is a civil—not criminal—court process and does not involve criminal penalties or contempt sanctions. Through regular court hearings a judge will set expectations around continued CARE participation and ongoing voluntary engagement, and this can help increase engagement in services and supports. Court involvement can enhance engagement while still upholding the voluntary nature of participation, often described as the “black robe effect”.
- **County accountability and ability to submit administrative claims.** Counties have a legal obligation to offer an individual the services and supports included in a CARE agreement or CARE plan. CARE fosters mutual expectations and ensures that county services remain available, even when engagement is challenging or inconsistent. By allowing counties to [submit administrative claims for reimbursement](#), CARE recognizes and compensates the staff time required to build and sustain this level of engagement.

## Additional Resources

Consider viewing the training materials on [CARE-Act.org](https://www.care-act.org) under training materials, including the [Trauma-informed Care for County Behavioral Health](#) training series.