

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

1. What is the goal of CARE Court?

The goal of CARE Court is to leverage the voluntary civil court process to provide mental health intervention and other essential resources and services to adults with a medical diagnosis of a disorder within the class of “schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders” as defined in the “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, text revision.” When left untreated, this class of mental health disorders can lead to deteriorating conditions and contribute to an individual’s difficulties to survive safely in the community without supervision.

2. How does CARE Court work?

The process begins with a family member, first responder, or other qualified individuals/entities filing a petition to begin the process of assessing the individual’s eligibility for CARE Court. A judicial officer will determine whether an individual is eligible.

Upon acceptance of the petition, the individual is assigned an attorney who will work with the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) to develop either a CARE Agreement or CARE Plan tailored to the participant’s needs. The individual may voluntarily enter into the CARE Agreement or may have a judicial officer order a CARE Plan to provide resources outlined in the CARE Plan.

The CARE Agreement or CARE Plan may include offers of community-based mental health resources and housing. Under both, individuals can receive services for approximately one year, up to a maximum of two years. Review hearings will be scheduled periodically to assess the individual’s progress and monitor accountability of service providers.

3. Are there any costs to filing my CARE Court petition?

There is no cost to file a CARE Court petition.

4. Is legal assistance available for CARE Court participants?

Yes, the court is required to appoint counsel for CARE Court participants (at no cost to the participant), unless they have retained their own counsel. This ensures that the participants understand their legal rights and are protected throughout the process. The process also allows for participants to have a volunteer supporter accompany them throughout the process. The supporter’s role is to assist in the respondent’s decision-making throughout the CARE process, helping them to understand, make, communicate, implement, or act on their own life decisions during the CARE process, including a CARE agreement, a CARE plan, and developing a graduation plan.

5. Is this a criminal legal matter?

CARE Court is a civil process and not a criminal process. Participation is voluntary.

6. Is CARE Court a conservatorship?

No, CARE Court is not a conservatorship. A conservatorship is a legal action in which a judge appoints someone to act or make decisions for another person in need of help. CARE Court’s goal is for every participating individual to graduate and live a full and autonomous life. CARE Court enables the participant to work with mental health specialists, housing specialists, their petitioners, and the judicial officer to develop a CARE Plan to improve their long-term health, so that they can live successfully and independently in the Los Angeles County community.

7. Will individuals participating in CARE Court be able to make their own decisions?

CARE Court empowers individuals to make self-directed decisions about their own treatment and recovery. Participants work collaboratively with a CARE supporter and legal representation 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. However, while the CARE Court promotes self-determination, it also operates within a framework of court-ordered support to ensure the health and safety of the participants.

8. Can CARE Court require a participant to take and stay on their medication?

Stabilization medications may be offered and recommended to manage symptoms and promote recovery as part of the CARE Plan. In certain circumstances, stabilization medication may be recommended but involuntary administration will NOT be ordered.

9. What if someone doesn't qualify for CARE Court?

Regardless of eligibility for CARE Court, seeking help is paramount. The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) provides a comprehensive array of mental health services and resources. Even if CARE Court isn't a fit, individuals may still be connected to other programs better suited to their situation. To learn more, please visit www.dmh.lacounty.gov or call the 24/7 Help Line at (800) 854-7771. For immediate behavioral health emergencies, dial the 24/7 suicide crisis hotline at 988.

10. What will happen if someone isn't successful in CARE Court?

If someone does not complete their CARE Agreement or Plan through CARE Court, they may lose access to the specialized support and prioritization CARE Court offers. Each situation is unique, and the exact implications vary based on the individual's circumstances and the reasons for discontinuation. Importantly, it is crucial to encourage the individual 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 Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health's 24/7 Help Line at (800) 854-7771, or call/text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline for immediate help.

11. Is there a penalty if someone drops out of CARE Court?

There is no court penalty if a participant decides to leave CARE Court, except that the individual may have their CARE Court matter dismissed. Individual circumstances will determine the next steps.

12. Can CARE Court secure housing for participants?

Housing security is an important element of CARE Court. Housing specialists will examine the individual's specific needs, the availability of suitable housing options, and other relevant factors. It is important to remember that every participant's journey is unique, and the goal of CARE Court is to provide the best possible support, including housing options for participants.

13. Will CARE Court solve the homelessness crisis in LA County?

The CARE Act prioritizes housing and treatment access for the CARE Court population, but housing status is not part of the criteria for CARE Court eligibility. Instead, CARE Court addresses a very specific audience – primarily, adults with a diagnosis of schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder or other psychotic disorders, and who are rapidly deteriorating and unable to care for themselves in community. While not automatic qualifiers, homelessness and housing instability is expected to co-occur among the population served by CARE Court.

14. How can I get more information on CARE Court?

For more information on CARE Court, visit www.lacourt.org/CARE. Persons without an attorney who need additional information or assistance with filing a petition may come in person to any Court self-help center [add self-help center link here] or petition call the Court's Self-Help Center phoneline at (213) 830-0845. The phoneline is available 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Monday – Friday, except Court holidays.