



County of Santa Cruz



HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

Behavioral Health Division

Administration

1400 Emeline Ave. Building K, Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Phone: (831) 454-4767 Fax: (831) 454-4663

Salud Mental y
Tratamiento del Uso
de Sustancias

Press Release

For Immediate Release

Contact: Sandra Hughes

Date: December 18, 2024

Sandra.hughes@santacruzcountyca.gov

CARE ACT PROVIDES A NEW PATH TO HOPE AND HEALING FOR ELIGIBLE SANTA CRUZ COUNTY RESIDENTS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

The **Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Act** program is now available for all Santa Cruz County residents who meet certain eligibility requirements. This statewide initiative creates a new pathway in California to deliver mental health and substance use disorder treatment in addition to supportive services to community members with untreated schizophrenia spectrum or other specific psychotic disorders.

The CARE Act creates a State-mandated civil court process that incentivizes qualifying individuals to voluntarily engage in behavioral health treatment so that they may stabilize in a community setting. CARE Act participants will also have priority at the County's new bridge housing facility upon completion. In Santa Cruz County, expected CARE Act enrollment is approximately 30-40 individuals per year.

CARE Act participation is voluntary. A CARE Act petition may be initiated by someone struggling with symptoms of qualifying mental health disorder, their family member, a healthcare or social services worker, first responder, or member of the Santa Cruz County Behavioral Health team acting on an individual's behalf. The filing of a CARE Act petition is the first step in requesting court-ordered treatment, services, supports, and housing resources under the CARE Act. Community members who are subjects of CARE Act petitions will be appointed legal counsel and may exit the process at any time. In Santa Cruz County, the Office of the Public Defender will represent individuals participating in the CARE Act process.

CARE Act participants will work with their counsel to create a personalized voluntary CARE agreement that connects them with stabilizing services. If a CARE agreement cannot be

reached, the CARE Act outlines a procedure the court may follow to establish a CARE plan. CARE Act participants will engage in regular status review hearings to review their progress and challenges. After 12 months, participants in the CARE Act process may graduate from the program or can continue for another year.

Enrollment for the CARE Act in Santa Cruz County started on December 2, 2024. One individual is already enrolled in the program, and the court is working with another in the queue.

“The CARE Act is a collaborative effort involving several Santa Cruz County departments and community partners. In the last few months, we have focused on outreach to explain what the CARE Act is, who is eligible, and how the process works,” said Karen Kern, Deputy Director of Santa Cruz County Behavioral Health. “Our staff members have made both in-person and virtual presentations for the City Councils in both Santa Cruz and Watsonville, the County Board of Supervisors, as well as other agencies, non-profit organizations, and community groups.”

“The court appreciates the collaborative efforts between the County and the court to launch the CARE Act, an important state initiative. This program provides a vital pathway for individuals in our community living with mental illness to receive the supportive services they need,” said Sasha Morgan, Court Executive Officer for the Santa Cruz County Superior Court.

For more information about the CARE Act and eligibility requirements, please go to santacruzcountyca.gov/CARE, send an email to CAREact@santacruzcountyca.gov, or visit the Santa Cruz County Law Library in Santa Cruz or the Santa Cruz Superior Court Self Help Center in Watsonville.

###