

CARE Court

San Francisco Fire Commission

August 12, 2026

A civil court process that is designed to connect individuals with specific mental health needs to county behavioral health services. This one-to-two-year process takes place under the oversight of a judge. CARE Court aims to deliver critical interventions including behavioral health services and housing to the mentally ill and vulnerable individuals while preserving self-determination and community living.

Presenters:

- San Francisco Superior Court, Judge Russell Roeca
- San Francisco Department of Public Health, Charlie Newcomb



CARE Court

Community
Assistance
Recovery
Empowerment

- CARE Act Court: **Is NOT** criminal court. **Does NOT** include persons with any mental health conditions
- CARE Court is a **voluntary** program that cannot mandate treatment or medication.
- Each person in CARE Court develops the **CARE Agreement** or **CARE Plan** in concert with their behavioral health team so that supports and services are coordinated and focused on the individual needs of the person it is designed to serve.

Clinical Eligibility

Who is Eligible for Care Court?

- Eligibility is determined on a case-by-case basis. Homelessness and mental illness alone are not enough to meet eligibility requirements. A client must meet all the following criteria to be eligible for CARE:
- Be 18 years of age or older
- Have a diagnosis of : (1) schizophrenia spectrum disorder or another psychotic disorder or (2) bipolar I disorder with psychotic features.
- Be currently experiencing a mental illness that: 1) Is severe in degree and persistent in duration, 2) May cause behavior that interferes substantially with activities of daily living, and 3) May lead to an inability to maintain stable adjustment and independent functioning without treatment, support, and rehabilitation for a long or indefinite period.
- Not clinically stabilized in ongoing voluntary treatment.

Additionally, at least one of the following must be true:

- The person is unlikely to survive safely in the community without supervision and the respondent's condition is substantially deteriorating.
- The person needs services and supports to prevent a relapse or deterioration that would likely result in grave disability or serious harm to the respondent or others.
- The person's participation in a CARE plan or CARE agreement must: Be the least restrictive alternative necessary to ensure the respondent's recovery and stability and be likely to benefit the respondent.

Referral Process

How a person can be referred to CARE Court:

A First Responder will complete and submit the CARE Court Consultation & Referral form and email it to: carecourtconsultation@sfdph.org. Care Court Program Manager will review the form to determine if person is appropriate for CARE Court and meets eligibility. If the answer is yes to both appropriateness and eligibility, then DPH or the referring First Responder can file a petition.

A CARE Act petition filed by a First Responder will be reviewed by the court and if accepted, the Court will order DPH to complete an investigation to determine if the person meets eligibility requirements. If the person meets the requirements, then an initial hearing date is set. The first Responder is the petitioner and is expected to be present at the initial hearing. Note that DPH will be substituted in as petitioner in the initial hearing and the first responder will be relieved of this responsibility.

A CARE Act petition filed by DPH will be reviewed by the court and if accepted, then the Court will set an initial hearing date. DPH will be the petitioner and be present at the initial hearing.

CARE Court is **confidential**, so information cannot be shared unless the person named in the petition gives their consent.

CARE Court Process Post Initial Hearing

A CARE Agreement or Plan will be developed specifying services to be provided to the person named in the petition. The Agreement/Plan is good for 12 months and can be renewed for another 12 months.

After the initial hearing, when all parties agree to move forward with the case, a referral will be made to Intensive Case Management who will provide treatment services that include psychiatry, mental health therapy (individual & group), outpatient substance use disorder treatment, crisis intervention, medication management, peer support and referrals to any service that might be beneficial.

Along with the referral to Intensive Case Management, DPH will assist those persons who are unhoused with accessing shelter. Each day a bed is reserved at a Navigation Center specifically for CARE Court participants; a participant can be placed on the same day the referral is made. CARE Court can also temporarily house a participant in a non-congregant setting, if their mental health symptoms would be worsened by living in a communal shelter environment. If needed, CARE Court participants can be referred to permanent supportive housing and the coordinated entry process is expedited to allow quicker access to permanent housing.

CARE Court Graduation

- Graduation from CARE Court represents a milestone that acknowledges personal recovery, stability, and voluntary engagement after navigating the civil court process.
- Graduation can occur when the objectives of the CARE Agreement/Plan have been achieved and the participant has established relationships with providers.
- Upon successful completion of CARE Court, a Psychiatric Advance Directive can be developed that provides direction regarding how to address the participant's future mental health crises according to the participant's expressed intent.

Resources

- Department of Public Health CARE Court Consultation Line: The CARE Court Consultation line is meant to serve as a resource for potential petitions and to provide guidance around the CARE Court process.
Telephone: 628-217-5171
Email: carecourtconsultation@sfdph.org
- San Francisco Superior Court Access Center, *CARE Court Self-Help Specialist* offers assistance with CARE Act forms and helps with the process of filing a petition with the court.
Email: accesscentercare@sftc.org