



SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA

COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ
COLLABORATIVE COURTS OFFICE
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Behavioral Health Court Information Sheet

What is Behavioral Health Court?

Behavioral Health Court (BHC) is a post-adjudication review court. This “problem-solving court” is designed to connect you to services in the community to keep you healthy, in compliance with your probation terms, and out of jail. BHC strives to help you improve your life by increasing your support networks, helping you to avoid unhealthy patterns of behavior, and by assisting you in identifying and achieving your goals. This is accomplished through a collaborative team-based approach. The Judge, Probation, Behavioral Health staff, District Attorney, Defense Counsel, and service providers all work together during your participation in BHC to ensure that you receive the support and services you need to accomplish your goals and stay on track. You may have had challenging experiences with the court process previously; BHC is intended to facilitate a more collaborative and supportive environment and experience.

Who is Eligible?

Behavioral Health Court serves individuals on formal probation who are living with severe mental health condition. It is specifically targeted to serve those whose mental health significantly impacts their lives and daily functioning. Participants must have Santa Cruz County Medi-Cal and meet the eligibility criteria for Specialty Mental Health Services which includes being diagnosed with a serious mental health disorder (as identified in the DSM-5), struggle with a functional impairment, and have a mental health history demonstrating that without treatment the participant is at imminent risk for increased symptoms and criminal behavior. This is a voluntary program and you must agree to the following terms: participate in mental health programming as recommended by the BHC team, take all medication(s) as prescribed, abstain from all mind-altering substances including alcohol and marijuana, submit to testing, and follow directives of County Behavioral Health and Probation. Once you agree to participate the above terms become part of your formal probation.

Why Should I Participate?

Behavioral Health Court has been shown to improve the quality of life for those who participate. You will be offered services based upon your needs and goals. You will work closely with your case coordinator and probation officer to ensure that you can access these services as you work towards achieving your individual goals and successful completion of probation. Previous participants in BHC have experienced fewer days spent in jail, fewer days spent in the hospital and fewer days of homelessness. Some BHC participants have been able to complete community service hours to pay off fines; others have had their probation terminated early. Additionally, participants learn new strategies to cope with the difficulties in their lives, and can establish a positive and collaborative relationship with the justice system and their community.

What is Expected of Me?

As a member of BHC you are expected to collaborate closely with your coordinator, probation officer, and the BHC team to develop and implement a case plan that outlines a path for success. Case plans are individualized to meet your needs and will contain a considerable amount of structure that includes appointments with your probation officer, case coordinator and psychiatric provider, as well as pro-social activities including participation in the Avenues program, NA/AA meetings (as appropriate), regular urinalysis testing (as appropriate), participation in outpatient and/or residential treatment programs, residence at approved housing, and other services based upon your individual strengths and needs. It is important to note that medication support is a vital part of the majority of BHC participant's case plans. Following your doctor's orders to take all medication as prescribed is mandated. Participation in Behavioral Health Court is voluntary but it becomes a condition of your probation to follow directives of county specialty mental health and probation once you agree to participate.

Rewards/Sanctions

The goal of the BHC team is to provide support and celebrate your accomplishments. Rules and requirements of BHC are also conditions of probation and there are consequences, both good and bad, for your conduct during your participation in BHC. Depending if you are complying with your case plan, and meeting the expectations of the court, your case coordinator and your probation officer, you will be rewarded or sanctioned in a number of different ways.

Rewards:

- Gift Cards
- Bus Passes
- Less Frequent Court Appearances
- Less Restrictive Treatment Recommendations
- Support for you to Pursue Individualized Pro-Social Activities/Employment
- Conversion of Fines/Fees to Community Service Hours
- Early Completion of Probation

Sanctions:

- More Restrictive Treatment Recommendations
- Increased Frequency of Court Appearances
- Remands
- Termination from BHC and Return to Regular Criminal Court