

Alameda County
Behavioral Health
Care Services

Quick Guide
for
Families and Friends
Providing Care and Support

**FOR PEOPLE WITH
MENTAL ILLNESS**

What You Need To Know

You Are Not Alone

Revised: March 2010

Dedication

Dedicated to Akio "Joe" Shimizu for his tireless advocacy for family members, and for his idea to create this Quick Guide.

Disclaimer for Services:

Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services provides emergency and crisis support to everyone. Non-emergency services may not be available to you. Private and community based services can offer non-emergency services.

Some of this information may have changed since printed. For the most current information, call the Alameda County Access line at 800-491-9099 or FERC at 888-896-3372.

A Quick Guide to . . .

WHAT'S INSIDE

... For caregivers of adults with mental illness

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The goal of this booklet is to provide resources and information to help families and friends who are caring for a loved one who has a mental illness. It can also help you, the caregiver, find support and resources when you are not sure what to do, and to know that you are not alone.

Many of the resources in this booklet are for individuals and families who are just beginning to sort out the issues of a loved one's mental illness. There are also resources for family members and friends looking for more on-going support such as housing, legal assistance, board and care homes, etc.

This booklet was prepared by Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services (ACBHCS) and representatives of local organizations that conduct education and advocacy and provide mutual support for families of individuals facing mental health issues. This booklet is now updated and published by the Alameda County Family Education and Resource Center (FERC).

The FERC is a new program which provides education, hope and support to the families and caregivers of children, adolescents, transitional-age youth, adults and older adults with serious emotional disturbances or mental illness across all regions of Alameda County.

More specifically, the FERC provides families and caregivers with:

- Information about the mental health service system and how it works;
- Practical advice in navigating complex service-systems;
- Assistance in finding a needed agency or service;
- Encouragement in locating support groups;
- Self-education resources including a variety of pamphlets and articles; and
- A lending library of books, CDs, and DVDs.

All FERC staff members have personal experience as caregivers of people with serious emotional disturbance or mental illness. The FERC is operated by the Mental Health Association of Alameda County, under a contract with ACBHCS. The FERC is funded through the Mental Health Services Act.

Contact the FERC at 888-896-3372 or on the web at www.askferc.org

To download a copy of this Quick Guide, go to either www.askferc.org or www.acbhcs.org

Is It Really Mental Illness?

Serious mental illness is not always easy to recognize. It can sometimes be hard to tell if the person is just going through a rough time or if this is the onset of mental illness. The use of drugs and/or alcohol can also make it difficult to accurately recognize or differentiate signs and symptoms. Research shows that many individuals who have a mental illness also have or will develop co-occurring problems with substance abuse. Many say that they use alcohol and drugs to cope with their illness.

Early Warning Signs

- Your relative, partner or friend is going through a phase where he/she seems withdrawn or emotionally flat.
- He/she may become "paranoid" and believe things that no one else does (delusions).
- He/she may hear or see things that no one else does (hallucinations).
- His/her speech and behavior may become disorganized or unfocused.
- His/her appearance and hygiene may change from neat and well groomed to dirty and ragged.
- He/she may seem unusually argumentative, angry, or even violent.
- He/she may talk about or even attempt to commit suicide.

***If you suspect mental illness,
find professional help and get information.***

It takes a trained mental health professional to diagnose mental illness. To begin the process, if your friend or family member has health insurance, call the number listed in the health plan member's information. If your friend or family member does not have health insurance, call the Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services ACCESS number 800-491-9099.

Don't let fear, stigma, shame or guilt stop you from getting help. People with mental illness can and do recover and lead rich and meaningful lives.

Early detection and treatment can make an enormous difference in terms of outcome, so acting early is crucial. Education is the key. Mental illnesses and problems with substance abuse are treatable. Mental illness is a chemical disorder of the brain just as diabetes is a metabolic disorder of the body.

Services Available to People with Mental Illness

Mental health services range from psychiatric hospitalization to Day Programs to outpatient treatment visits. Understanding different treatment programs can at first seem overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be.

There are veteran family members who have gone through what you are experiencing now, and they are willing to help. To learn more about what happens in the various treatment programs, you can call the Family Education & Resource Center (FERC) at 888-896-3372, ask a mental health professional, or attend a family member support group.

To Locate Services

Alameda County has established a central point of contact and coordination through the **ACCESS** Program.
For County Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services call:
ACCESS 800-491-9099

The **City of Berkeley** operates its own mental health system (outpatient services only) for its residents and those of Albany. For mental health services, Berkeley and Albany residents only may call 510-981-5290.

Resources for Accessing Services

- **The ACCESS Program** (Acute Crisis Care and Evaluation for System-wide Services) 800-491-9099 Alameda County Residents may call this number to be referred to all County mental health and substance abuse services.
- **Asian ACCESS**, 510-869-7200, located at 310 - 8th Street, Suite 201, Oakland - a program of Asian Community Mental Health Services provides mental health information and treatment referrals, free one-time mental health screening, and short-term treatment. Staff are fluent in Cantonese, Mandarin and Vietnamese; services in other Asian languages and dialects by arrangement.
- **Casa del Sol**, 510-535-6200, located at 1501 Fruitvale Avenue, Oakland - a program of La Clinica de La Raza; provides bilingual Spanish and bicultural mental health services including individual and family therapy for children, adolescents, and adults.
- **Sausal Creek Outpatient Stabilization Services**, 510-437-2363, located at 2620 26th Avenue, Oakland - operates 6 days/week. Provides voluntary services for adults in acute distress or discomfort as a result of mental illness, difficulty with medications or personal/family crisis.

Hours: Mon through Fri 8AM to 8PM; Sat 8AM to 4:30PM; Sun Closed

New Hours Beginning June 28, 2010

Helping Your Relative, Friend or Partner with Mental Illness

Learn about mental illness

Find information on your relative, partner or friend's mental illness or suspected mental illness. Educating yourself is important for understanding his/her condition; it will also help reduce your own anxiety and confusion.

For free pamphlets and articles, a lending library of books, audio and video presentations or to use one of the available computers to search for resources on the internet, contact FERC at **888-896-3372** or www.askferc.org. Information is also available at your local library.

If you have access to the internet:

- NAMI National: www.nami.org
- NAMI California: www.namicalifornia.org
- National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.org

Ask your relative, partner or friend

Discuss with your relative, partner or friend ideas about how you can help. Talk to him/her about giving permission for his/her mental health care providers to speak with you regarding the mental illness and treatment plans, including medication. This may help you become a more effective advocate and support person in his/her life. It is best to discuss this in advance of a crisis.

If your relative, partner or friend is in an inpatient facility, the mental health care staff is required to ask permission from the patient in order to speak with each family member, partner or friend. By signing a **Release of Confidential Information** form, the patient is consenting to have the mental health staff give his/her caregiver access to information about his/her condition and treatment. Each facility has its own form, which must be signed for each stay in the facility. For an example of how the form may look, see www.dmh.ca.gov/News/Publications/Forms/docs/MH5671.pdf.

As a relative, partner or friend, you are often familiar with the desires, capabilities, strengths and limitations of the person with mental illness. Your knowledge can be helpful and information about your relative or friend's illness, and their response or reaction to medications can be extremely helpful. Be prepared to communicate with providers by providing a copy of your loved one's most recent mental health history (in brief), including medications, the names of other health providers they are seeing, their most common symptoms and any other observations that appear relevant to their care.

If your relative, partner or friend has developed a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) and/or has an Advance Directive for Health Care, you can help assure the mental health facility staff members are aware of this and have a copy.

For more information about WRAP see the Mary Ellen Copeland Center at <http://www.mentalhealthrecovery.com/> or PEERS at <http://www.peersnet.org/>

Building a successful partnership between you, your loved one and the healthcare professionals is an essential component of good treatment. Here are some suggestions:

1. If the Release of Confidential Information is signed, arrange for a meeting with the provider(s) and request ample time.
2. In preparing for the meeting, write down questions and/or concerns. Review these with the provider(s) making sure to ask for clarification if you do not understand the answers. Always ask again if you don't understand.
3. If your loved one consents to this, bring another friend or family member along as it is easier to remember what was said with another person listening.
4. Take notes and review them with the provider at the end of the meeting. Ask for a follow-up meeting, if needed.

Be aware of your effect on your loved one

People who have a mental illness may have difficulty interacting with others and need their family members and friends to be very patient, and to communicate clearly. It can be challenging to find helpful ways to interact with a person who is symptomatic, especially when you are both already stressed. There are good articles and books on this subject, and people who have "been there" can brainstorm with you. The FERC Family Advocates and the members of NAMI are good resources for advice about how to communicate effectively with your loved one.

Know the signs of relapse and when to seek help

Family member support groups and mental health professionals can offer important tips and help you learn the signs of relapse. This is especially useful so that you can assist your friend or family member in reaching help before a serious crisis. Recognize your loved one's specific early warning signs.

Learn about medications

Psychiatric medications vary in their impact on individuals with mental illness. It is helpful for you, as a caregiver, to learn more about medications. This includes:

- Understanding the different types of medications for each illness.
- Becoming familiar with the different types of medications that may be prescribed for your relative or friend. NAMI's national website is a great resource: http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=About_Medications
- Recognizing that it may take time to find the right medication and the right dose.
- Learning about medication side effects in order to understand how the side effects may impact your relative or friend.
- Being alert to whether your relative or friend is taking prescribed medication and reporting any non-compliance, side effects or lack of response to the doctor.
- Being aware of the refill information and developing a crisis plan in case medications are lost or run out.

Keep a Record

It is very helpful to keep records of your relative or friend's mental illness history and his/her experiences in the mental health service system. Keep records in chronological order, and include all significant events (approximate date of onset, evaluations, crisis calls, medications, mental health professionals, treatment facility specifics, outcomes, etc.). It is worth noting anything that seemed particularly helpful or detrimental to your relative, partner or friend. If your loved one experiences a future crisis and is in need of services from an agency that may not know his/her history, an accurate record can be invaluable toward his/her receiving the treatment best suited to his/her specific needs.

*If Your Relative, Friend or Partner
Doesn't Want Help*

It is not unusual for a person with mental illness to refuse help. He/she may not believe there is anything wrong with him/her, or be afraid of what may happen if he/she asks for help, or may have had a bad experience with the mental health system. In some cases, you may find a way to negotiate with your loved one to help them get care. In other cases, you may find yourself in a situation in which you need to consider involuntary care, despite the potential impact this may have on your loved one and family.

Under California law, an adult may not be forced to accept treatment unless the person, as a result of mental illness, is:

- A danger to other people,
- A danger to him or herself (suicidal), or
- Gravely disabled, as demonstrated by being unable to provide for clothing, food or shelter.

If a person meets one of the criteria listed above, he/she can be taken to a designated psychiatric facility and held involuntarily for up to 72 hours for evaluation and treatment. This is called a "5150" after the section of the Welfare and Institutions Code under which it is authorized.

If the treating staff believes that your relative or friend meets the criteria for a continued hold, he/she can be held involuntarily for up to 14 days of additional treatment, under Welfare and Institutions Code "5250". People held on a "5250" must receive a hearing within 4 days to review whether there is probable cause to continue their involuntary treatment.

For more information on involuntary treatment, call Patients' Rights Advocates at 800-734-2504.

*If you are looking for advice on how to
assist someone who doesn't want help, you can call*

FERC at 888-896-3372

ACCESS at 800-491-9099, or

The Berkeley Family Advocate at 510-981-7668
(Berkeley-Albany residents only).

Dealing with a Crisis

Some crisis situations are emergencies

Dial 911
IF IT IS AN EMERGENCY

If your family member or friend is:

- **Threatening to harm himself/herself, you, or another person**
- **Exhibiting violent, out of control behavior.**

If it is an emergency and the police are called:

If you can, meet the police officers outside before they interact with your loved one. Brief them on what has been going on and the emotional state of your loved one. If you have helpful suggestions based on past experiences, tell them 'what may work best' in dealing with your loved one.

Prepare your home before their arrival. **Remove any items that could be used or perceived as a weapon.** Be direct and open. Do not exaggerate the situation or leave out relevant information.

Be prepared to give a brief history of what the behavior of your loved one has been like. Include information about prior 5150s. This is often best given to the police in a brief written form (see 'Keep a Record' on page 6 and 'AB 1424 Information' on page 13 of this booklet for details about this record).

If the police believe that the person meets one or more of the three criteria listed on the preceding page, they will place him/her on a 5150 and arrange for the person to be transported (typically by ambulance) to a designated facility for psychiatric evaluation and treatment. The individual can be held at a designated facility for up to 72 hours. Be sure to ask the ambulance driver or the police where your friend or relative is being taken.

If the person is in crisis, but the situation does not appear to be an emergency, here are some resources to try:

Sausal Creek Outpatient Stabilization Clinic:

Offers crisis intervention telephone and walk-in services 6-days-a-week for adults who are having difficulties and need help immediately. Services include assessments, medication management, counseling, help with obtaining other services and general support. Services are provided on a voluntary basis.

- **510-437-2363**
- 2620 26th Avenue (cross street is E. 27th Street) in Oakland
- Hours: Mon through Fri 8AM to 8PM; Sat 8AM to 4:30PM; Sun Closed
- ****New Hours Beginning June 28, 2010****

Crisis Support Services of Alameda County, 24-hour Crisis-line (all ages)

- **800-309-2131**
- www.crisissupport.org

National Suicide Prevention, 24-hour hotline (all ages)

- **800-SUICIDE (800-784-2433)**

John George Psychiatric Pavilion:

Alameda County's psychiatric inpatient hospital offers psychiatric emergency services and acute inpatient services for adult mental health clients. Operates 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week. Services are provided on a voluntary and involuntary basis. This is where most people placed on a 5150 are taken for evaluation and treatment.

- **510-346-7500**
- 2060 Fairmont Drive in San Leandro

Berkeley Mobile Crisis Team:

Provides mobile crisis response for Berkeley and Albany residents and intervention services in Berkeley and Albany for issues such as suicide, homicide, threats, drug abuse, and evaluation for psychiatric hospitalization. Operates seven days per week from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m., except on Tuesdays, the hours are 4 p.m. to 11 p.m.

- <http://www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/ContentDisplay.aspx?id=15662>
- **510-981-5254**

ACCESS Program (Acute Crisis Care and Evaluation for System-wide Services)

Alameda County Residents may also call this number to be referred to all County mental health and substance abuse services.

- **800-491-9099**

Crisis Response Program

Serves Alameda County residents who do not reside in Berkeley or Albany. Provides telephone and limited walk-in crisis intervention, psychiatric assessment and evaluation and temporary medication support. The Crisis Response Program has offices in Oakland, Fremont and San Leandro which are open Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The program also has offices in downtown Livermore and Pleasanton; these are open three days per week.

- **800-491-9099 (The Crisis Response Program is reached through ACCESS)**
- The downtown Oakland Mobile Crisis Team responds to requests from the Oakland Police Department, other agencies and individuals for assistance with mental health evaluations of adults in the community (staff permitting). Operates from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

If the person is NOT in crisis and wants help:

- If he or she has private medical insurance, call the insurance company and ask for a referral to a psychiatrist or a therapist
- If he or she has Medi-Cal, Medi-Care or does not have any insurance, Alameda County Residents may call the **ACCESS Program** (Acute Crisis and Evaluation for System-wide Services) at **800-491-9099** for referrals to a therapist, psychiatrist or other mental health and substance abuse resources.

Taking Care of Yourself

The journey for a caregiver can be long and complex, but there are resources to help along the way. Sometimes, while the relative is hospitalized, family members need to rest, get some sleep and re-collect themselves.

If you are trying to help a relative, partner or friend who is not functioning well and appears to have a mental illness, the first thing you need to know is **You Are Not Alone**. Mental health professionals and other service providers are available to help. Also, experienced family caregivers are willing to share what they have learned and to lend emotional support to new family caregivers.

It's Normal to Feel Stressed-out, Confused and Agitated.

Caring for a relative or friend with mental illness can be a considerable challenge for families and caregivers. The challenge can include finding financial assistance, housing or transportation, as well as arranging the appropriate treatment for your relative or friend with mental illness.

Family members and caregivers may feel frightened, fatigued, hopeless, alone and depressed. However, advocacy and emotional support are available, as well as assistance in solving problems and finding resources. The programs listed below are run by family advocates who have had personal experiences similar to yours as family members of loved-ones diagnosed with a mental illness.

Family Advocates are available by calling:

- FERC, 888-896-3372
- Family Caregiver Advocate, 510-835-0188, for family members / caregivers with loved ones admitted to John George Psychiatric Pavilion
- Berkeley/Albany residents may call the Family Advocate for the City of Berkeley, 510-981-7668

You do not have to do this alone.

Getting support from others who have confronted similar challenges can be one of the best things you can do for yourself. Listed on the next page are several support and advocacy groups.

Support, Education and Advocacy Groups

Education and Advocacy Groups

NAMI - Alameda County

954-60th Street, Suite 10, Oakland, CA 94608
9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday – Friday
510-835-0188
www.nami-alamedacounty.org

NAMI - East Bay

980 Stannage Avenue, Albany, CA 94706
510-524-1250 (Office is staffed by volunteers; please call before going to the office address.)
www.nami.org/sites/namieastbay

NAMI – Tri-Valley

Livermore, CA (No Office)
P.O. Box 5563, Pleasanton, CA 94566
925-980-5331
www.nami-trivalley.org

Family Support Groups

Free family support group meetings are held around Alameda County. Some members are new and others have years of experience; participants learn from each other. FERC keeps track of family support groups and publishes updated schedules. You can find an up-to-date detailed listing at www.askferc.org or by calling 888-896-3372.

Language and Culturally Specific Support Groups:

Chinese-Language Family Support Group

Call Asian Community Mental Health Services at 510-451-6729

African American Family Support Group

Call the Mental Health Association 510-835-5010

Finding Information from Hospitals and Mental Health Professionals

If your relative/friend has been hospitalized . . .

Naturally, you are concerned and have an understandable desire for information. You may also have helpful information to share. In fact, it is likely that no one knows the situation like you do.

If the patient is 18 or over, confidentiality laws protect his/her right to privacy. This means that your relative, partner or friend must authorize the treatment facility to contact or disclose information to you before they are allowed to involve you in these ways. As stated on page 4, a separate Release of Confidential Information form must be signed for each admission, and for each individual seeking to be involved in the care.

YOU CAN GIVE INFORMATION, EVEN IF YOU CAN'T RECEIVE IT

AB 1424 is a California law requiring that relevant information provided by the patient's family about the historical course of a patient's mental disorder be considered in the legal process when determining whether probable cause exists to involuntarily detain a person for up to 72-hour for evaluation and treatment or for up to 14 days of additional treatment.

Filling out the AB 1424 form developed for use in Alameda County is the best way to assure that your particular, personal understanding of your loved one's situation can be considered. Alameda County's AB 1424 Form is available on-line at:

<http://www.acbhcs.org/Docs/docs.htm>. If feasible, you should fill out the form in advance, keep the information current and have extra copies on hand. If the police or other professionals are called to determine if your family member shall be detained and treated involuntarily ("5150"), give a copy of the AB 1424 form to them to take to Psychiatric Emergency Services. You also can deliver or fax the form.

When you can't find out specific information about your loved one, don't get discouraged. Call FERC! 888-896-3372. There is still a great deal you can find out, such as:

- General information about the condition you know or suspect your relative/friend has (i.e. schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression, etc.).
- The types of mental health treatments provided for various conditions, including medications.
- Information about how the caregiver can help when someone has, or is thought to have a mental illness.
- Information about support systems available for family members.

If your friend or relative is in John George Psychiatric Pavilion

A Family Caregiver Advocate, based in the Mental Health Association office at 954 60th St. in Oakland, is available to answer questions and offer assistance for anyone whose friend or family member is at John George Psychiatric Pavilion. Call 510-835-0188.

The Family Caregiver Advocate is stationed at the Mental Health Association office on Monday – Thursday from 11:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Friday. She is at John George Psychiatric Pavilion on Monday - Thursday from 5:00 -7:30 p.m., where she can assist family caregivers in completing AB 1424 forms. (For assistance when your friend or family member is in any other in-patient facility call FERC).

Need More Answers?

***My relative/friend is mentally ill and has disappeared.
What do I do?***

Contact your local police department's Missing Persons office.

***I think my relative/friend has been taken to jail.
Whom do I call?***

See "My Family Member Has Been Arrested – What Do I Do?" at www.acbhcs.org/jail/jail.htm or on the FERC website at www.askferc.org. Or you can call the Santa Rita Jail Mental Health Intake unit 925-551-6905.

What if I have a complaint?

If you have a complaint about the quality of care or questions about what services you are eligible for, call the Consumer Family Assistance Desk at 800-779-0787
All other complaints should be directed to the Patients' Rights Advocacy Program at 800-734-2504

Understanding Patients' Rights

Patients' Rights

In the hospital the person has the right to:

- Wear his/her own clothes
- Keep personal items
- Keep a reasonable amount of money
- Have access to letter writing materials and stamps
- Use the phone
- See visitors
- Receive unopened mail
- Have private storage space

These rights may be denied only for "good cause." For example, no drawstrings are allowed in inpatient psychiatric facilities for safety reasons, and if you do bring clothing with drawstrings, the staff may remove the item. Any time a right is denied, the individual is entitled to an explanation of the reason(s) for the denial. Documentation must follow as soon as the right is denied. Notify a Patients' Rights Advocate if you feel your friend or family member's rights have been wrongly denied by calling 800-734-2504.

There are other patients' rights that are helpful for caregivers to know about such as:

- All patients have access to a Patients' Rights Advocate
- All patients have a right to retain an attorney if they choose to do so.
- Involuntary patients have the right to refuse or accept medication after an informed consent process. However, if the attending psychiatrist believes the patient is unable to make an informed decision, the doctor can file a petition to administer medication on an involuntary basis. The petition is reviewed at a capacity hearing by a hearing officer who decides whether the patient has or lacks the capacity to give informed consent. This ruling can be appealed.
- Patients have the right to complain if they feel treatment is unsatisfactory.

**For more information, call the
Patients' Rights Advocacy office at 800-734-2504.**

Securing Disability Benefits

If your relative or friend is unable to work due to mental illness, he or she may be eligible for disability benefits.

State Disability Benefits

If your relative/friend has worked recently, he/she may be eligible for State Disability Insurance (SDI). A doctor's statement of disability will be required. Call the California Employment Development Department for information.

State Disability Insurance Program:

- English 800-480-3287
- Spanish 866-658-8846

Social Security Disability Benefits

Individuals with a disabling mental illness may apply to the Social Security Administration for federal cash benefits (Supplemental Security Income, SSI). This can be a long process and requires documentation of the mental illness, hospitalizations, treatment programs, etc. To locate a Social Security Administration office near you, call 800-772-1213.

The Mental Health Advocates Program can help people with a disabling mental illness in securing financial benefits. Call 510-835-5532.

Thanks for the assistance!

Members of the Alameda County Family Coalition, the African American Family Support Group and of NAMI Alameda County,
NAMI East Bay and NAMI Tri Valley contributed to this revised edition (March 2010) of the Quick Guide.

Notes

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