



Connie Beck, Director  
Social Services | Public Health | Behavioral Health

## news release

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July 1, 2022

### Adult Outpatient Treatment pilot program to launch today

An Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) pilot program for people experiencing mental health crises will launch today, thanks to a partnership with the Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) Behavioral Health Branch and nonprofit Environmental Alternatives (EA).

EA is a community-based organization that contracts with counties across Northern California to provide an array of services including mental health and foster care.

AOT is a program for individuals diagnosed with serious and persistent mental illness, like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, who are in crisis or recovering from a crisis caused by mental illness and for whom voluntary services are not working.

DHHS Behavioral Health Deputy Branch Director Jack Breazeal said individuals might be referred to AOT after multiple visits to Sempervirens psychiatric hospital and/or jail in conjunction with unsuccessful engagement by the individual in traditional outpatient services.

When an individual is referred to the AOT program, EA will conduct outreach to engage the individual, and the referred individual will be offered services and supports to help stabilize their mental health and address ongoing treatment barriers.

Individuals can be referred to the AOT program by a qualified mental health professional, law enforcement, qualified community partners and adults living with the referred individual. The AOT program is designed to help support and stabilize individuals diagnosed with a serious mental illness through a program that is less restrictive than inpatient hospitalizations and conservatorship to prevent the need for higher levels of care.

As the program kicks off, Breazeal said staff hope to have 10 people in the program at any given time with the goal of helping approximately 30 people in the first year. “Ultimately it is up to Behavioral Health staff who will be referred to EA for services, and we will reserve our limited slots for those who have repeated episodes of inpatient hospitalization and/or incarceration and have struggled to engage effectively in outpatient services.”

The program is the result of a California state law known as Laura’s Law which allows for court-ordered assisted outpatient treatment. Individuals who refuse to participate in the AOT program on their own may be directed by the courts to participate in the program. While there are no legal ramifications to an individual refusing to participate, involving the courts and a judge often makes it more likely for individuals to comply with treatment recommendations.

“We look forward to this program and our increased ability to help individuals in our community who we recognize are in need of services but can be reluctant to seek them,” Breazeal said. “In collaboration with the courts we are hopeful that this program will allow for a greater opportunity and access to assist individuals get the treatment they need.”

Local implementation of the program will be evaluated after the first year. [Click here to learn more about the Assisted Outpatient Treatment program.](#)

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