

Assertive Community Treatment

Implementation Resource Kit



DRAFT VERSION

2003

Information for Consumers

Who is assertive community treatment for?

Assertive community treatment is for people who experience the most severe and persistent symptoms of mental illness. That is, people who have frequent episodes of very severe symptoms that are difficult to manage or symptoms that never go away. Because of the severe nature of these symptoms, these individuals also have a lot of trouble simply taking care of their basic needs, protecting themselves, keeping safe and adequate housing, or staying employed. People who receive assertive community treatment services often have spent a lot of time in hospitals or living on the streets because of their illness. They also are often people who have a problem with drugs or alcohol or who have been in trouble with the police because of their illness.

How is assertive community treatment different from other services?

Team approach

An assertive community treatment team is a group of 10 to 12 practitioners who work as a team. Teams consist of psychiatrists, nurses, mental health professionals, employment specialists, and substance abuse specialists. Teams may also include a person with a mental illness or a family member of a person with a mental illness.

Continuous care

With assertive community treatment, you won't have to keep "breaking in" new providers. You'll work with the team members who have the best skills at any given time to provide the support you need to reach your goals. Overtime, you will get to know and work with many

different team members and they will get to know and work with you. What's good about this is that if there's a team member you don't particularly care to work with, you can work with someone else on the team. Also, if someone on the team goes on vacation or quits, you don't have to change providers or start over again with someone else.

Personalized care

An assertive community treatment team only works with a relatively small number of people (about 100). That way they can provide very personalized care. And because the team only works with a small group of people, they can provide as much support as you need or want. If you need support every day, you can get support every day.

Flexible care

Rather than having people come to an office or clinic just once or twice a month, members of the team fit their schedules around the needs of the people served by the team. If you have a problem today, you can get help today. You don't have to wait until your next appointment.

Support where it's needed most

Most of the contacts you have with members of the team will be in community settings. That means that if you're experiencing a lot of symptoms, and having trouble getting yourself organized to get out and around, or getting to the clinic is just too overwhelming, someone will come see you at your home or in a nearby community setting.

No time limit on services

Services are provided in community settings because that's where a lot of people need help and support. Whether it's help getting up and getting through the day, finding a place to live, applying for food stamps, going back to school, or getting a job, team members can provide practical, side-by-side support to help you figure out how you want to handle things. They will help you as much or as little as you want or need.

Some mental health programs have a limit on how long people can receive their services. It might be 30 days, or 60 days, or even 90 days. But, with assertive community treatment, there's no limit on how long you can receive services. That means that the assertive community treatment team is there for you as long as you need or want the support. An assertive community treatment team never discharges someone because they're "too difficult" or don't make "progress." The team is there to support you no matter what.

Areas in which assertive community treatment teams provide assistance

Daily Activities

- ▷ Grocery shopping and cooking
- ▷ Purchasing and caring for clothing
- ▷ Using transportation
- ▷ Social and family relationships

Family Life

- ▷ Crisis management
- ▷ Counseling and psychoeducation for family members
- ▷ Coordination with child welfare and family service agencies
- ▷ Supporting people in carrying out their roles as parents

Housing Assistance

- ▷ Finding suitable housing
- ▷ Helping negotiate leases and pay rent
- ▷ Purchasing and repairing household items
- ▷ Developing relationships with landlords
- ▷ Improving housekeeping skills

Financial Management

- ▷ Planning a budget
- ▷ Troubleshooting financial problems e.g., disability payments
- ▷ Assisting with bills
- ▷ Increasing independence in money management

Counseling

- ▷ Oriented toward problem solving
- ▷ Built into all activities
- ▷ Goals addressed by all team members
- ▷ Includes development of illness management skills

Health

- ▷ Education to prevent health problems
- ▷ Medical screening
- ▷ Scheduling routine visits
- ▷ Linking people with medical providers for acute care
- ▷ Sex education and counseling on reproductive health

Medication Support

- ▷ Ordering medications from pharmacies
- ▷ Delivering medications, if needed
- ▷ Educating consumers about medications
- ▷ Reminding individuals to take medications
- ▷ Monitoring side effects
- ▷ Work Opportunities
- ▷ Educating employers about serious mental illness
- ▷ Help preparing for employment
- ▷ Help finding and keeping employment
- ▷ Employment support

Entitlements

- ▷ Assisting with applications
- ▷ Accompanying consumers to entitlement offices
- ▷ Managing food stamps if needed
- ▷ Assisting with redetermination of benefits

Substance Abuse Treatment

- ▷ Substance abuse treatment provided directly by team members

What about medications?

Some people who experience psychiatric symptoms find that medications help reduce or eliminate symptoms and make it a part of their recovery plan. However, not all people choose to take medications. If you decide not to take medication, the assertive community treatment team will respect your choice and still help you to work on reaching your goals.

For people who choose to take medication as part of their strategy for recovery, the assertive community treatment team will work very closely with you to see which medication works the best. Because the team can be available every day if needed, you will be able to let them know quickly if a medication isn't working for you or if you experience side effects. Your doctor will be able to swiftly make any adjustments that might be needed.

Some people take several medications and may have difficulty getting them organized so that they take them the way they were prescribed. If needed, the team can help you set up your medications in an organizer so that you take the right medications at the right time or even drop them off when it's time to take them. Not everyone needs this much help, but it's available to those who need and want it.

How does assertive community treatment relate to families?

An assertive community treatment team will respect your wishes about whether you want to involve your family or other people in your treatment. With your permission, the team can help your family better understand your illness and how to support your recovery. If you've become isolated from your family, the team can help you try to re-establish relationships with them, but the choice is yours.

Is assertive community treatment effective?

There has been a lot of research done comparing assertive community treatment to case management. What studies show is that people who received assertive community treatment were less likely to be hospitalized and were more likely to have stable housing. Studies also show that people who receive assertive community treatment and their family members find it more satisfying than case management programs.

How can I find out more about assertive community treatment?

Where can I get information about other ACT resource kits?

Evidence Based Practices Implementation Website

www.mentalhealthpractices.org

National Assertive Community Treatment Technical Assistance Center

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
2107 Wilson Blvd, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201-3042
(866) 229 -6264
elizabeth@nami.org
www.nami.org/about/PACT.htm

Assertive Community Treatment Association (ACTA)

Assertive Community Treatment Association, Inc.
810 E. Grand River Ave., Suite 102
Brighton Michigan 48116
(810) 227-1859
cherimsixbey@actassociation.com
www.actassociation.com

Helpful Books

“Assertive Community Treatment of Persons with Severe Mental Illness” by L. Stein & A. Santos, Norton Publishers

www.wwnorton.com

“PACT Model of Community-Based Treatment for Persons with Severe and Persistent Mental Illness: A Manual for PACT Start-up” by D. Allness & W. Knoedler, NAMI

www.nami.org
(866) 229-6264

Videos

“Assertive Community Treatment” (A Brief Introduction to ACT), Duke University, Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences

toolkit video

“Never Too Far” (describes an ACT program in a rural community), Duke University, Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences

pasip001@mc.duke.edu
919 684-3332

“Consumers Talk About ACT” (interviews with individuals who receive ACT services), Duke University, Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences

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