



## **Introduction to Assertive Community Treatment A Clinician’s Guide to Introduce ACT to potential ACT participants**

### **Assertive Community Treatment**

- ACT is short for Assertive Community Treatment

### **Who is ACT for?**

- ACT is for individuals who have been diagnosed with a mental health condition, such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, and who have not been helped by “traditional” community mental health services.
- ACT helps people who have been in and out of the hospitals or jail, or who have had periods of homelessness.
- Some people working with ACT teams identify as having a serious mental illness. Some do not. Either way, ACT can help you successfully live and work in the community.

*(Clinician - Briefly inquire about previous experience with Community Mental Health Services, what was helpful/not helpful.)*

### **How is ACT different from other services?**

#### Team Approach

- An assertive community treatment team is a group of 5-12 mental health professionals who work closely together.
- Teams consist of prescribers (psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners), nurses and mental health professionals such as peer support specialists, therapists, case managers employment specialists, substance abuse specialists and housing specialists.

*(Clinician – Explain different roles if there are questions.)*

### Continuous Care

- 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 may choose to 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.
- With assertive community treatment, you won't have to keep "breaking in" new providers.
- 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.

*(Clinician – Ask if there are any questions, give examples to clarify. For example someone may ask if they have to work with everyone on the ACT team. You might answer that, “You can decide which staff you prefer to work with after meeting team members, but occasionally you may have to decide if you will work with someone on the ACT team in urgent situations who you feel is not your top choice when your preferred persons are not available.”*

### Personalized Care

- An assertive community treatment team only works with a relatively small number of people (anywhere from 10 to 100 depending on the size of the team and where they are located in Oregon). That way they can provide very personalized care.
- The team only works with a small group of people so they can provide as much support as you need or want.
- Your needs may change from time to time. If support is needed every day, you can get support every day. If you want just weekly support, you can get that too.

*(Clinician – This is a crucial area to address. There is often a misconception that all people receiving ACT services have to have contact with ACT staff at least 4 times per week. While ACT model fidelity has a standard which is measured by determining the average number of contacts per month for a representative sample of ACT participants, it is expected that some participants will have 4 or more contacts and some will have less. In practice, the frequency of contact for each ACT participant should be individualized based on need and participant preference.)*

### 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.

*(Clinician – Explore briefly what experiences individuals have had accessing services and support when it was needed. Clarify that the ACT team approach allows someone from the ACT team to respond quickly, however it may not always be your preferred ACT team member.)*

### Support Where it is Needed Most

- Most services are provided in community settings, because that's where a lot of people need help and support.
- 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 of your choice.
- 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.

*(Clinician – Discuss if individual has ever had this kind of experience and what might be the most comfortable and secure places to meet.)*

### No Time Limit on Services

- 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.

*(Clinician – Ask about how long someone may want support, what they would like to accomplish, what kinds of services and supports might help. Continue to provide examples of how ACT may help.)*

### 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 to 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.

*(Clinician – As appropriate, reassure people about ACT respect for informed choice about taking medications.)*

#### 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.

*(Clinician – Ask about interest in family involvement.)*

#### Is Assertive Community Treatment Effective?

- There has been a lot of research done comparing assertive community treatment to the usual case management services. 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.

## What Can ACT Do For You?

*Check areas where you would like assistance from the ACT Team.*

### Daily Activities

- Grocery shopping
- Cooking
- Purchasing and caring for clothing (laundry)
- Using transportation
- Improving hygiene

### Social Interactions

- Making new friends
- Finding places to meet people
- Dealing with conflict

### Family Life

- Family relationships
- Psycho-education 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
- Working through financial problems (e.g. disability payments, bank overdraft)
- Learning to pay bills
- Increasing independence with money management

### Counseling

- Problem solving
- Working through past trauma
- Developing coping skills

### Health

- Education to prevent health problems
- Medical screening
- Help with managing current health issues
- Scheduling routine appointments
- Finding providers for acute care
- Sex education and education on reproductive health

### Medication Support

- Ordering medications from pharmacies
- Having medications delivered (if needed)
- Learning about medications
- Medication reminders
- Organizing medications
- Safely storing medications

### Employment/Education

- Preparing for employment
- Finding and keeping employment
- Support talking with employers
- Getting my GED
- Going back to school
- Help with applying for college

### Benefits

- Applying for Social Security, SNAP, medical insurance, other \_\_\_\_\_  
(circle those needed)
- Managing SNAP benefits
- Reapplying or getting recertified for benefits

### Substance Abuse Treatment

- Finding ways to reduce my alcohol or drug use
- Stop using alcohol or drugs
- Other ways to manage my symptoms that don't include alcohol or drugs
- Reduce or quit smoking cigarettes