

Washington County Mental Health Court

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Mental Health Court?

Mental Health Court (MHC) is a collaborative multidisciplinary court that promotes a person's engagement in a treatment focused mental health plan to successfully complete probation.

The Mental Health Court Team is comprised of representatives from the District Attorney's Office, the Public Defender's Office, Washington County Probation and Parole, Washington County Mental Health, the Washington County Sheriff's Office, and the Oregon Health Sciences University Forensic Psychiatric Program.

Conditions of probation are specific to each person's unique mental health treatment plan, social environment and economic circumstance. Each person's mental health counselor or therapist, social worker, and case manager are consulted in developing conditions of probation that support the mental health treatment plan. The comments of the victim and the defendant's family are also considered in structuring the conditions of probation.

Which persons are eligible for Mental Health Court?

A person is evaluated for MHC by the MHC Team. Final consideration is at the discretion of the MHC Judge. Eligibility is based on the following:

- A person must be on probation or have a pending criminal charge.
- The person must have a serious and persistent mental illness that is treated through medication and therapy.
- There must be a relationship between the person's mental illness and his or her interactions with the criminal justice system. The type and seriousness of the crime and their history of offenses is considered and evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- The person must want to participate in MHC and agree to follow his or her mental health treatment plan and the conditions of MHC.

- The person must be able to participate in MHC. A person whose limitations impair his or her willingness or ability to comply with a mental health treatment plan, remain drug and alcohol free or comply with court directives may not be suitable for MHC.

Will a drug and/or alcohol addiction exclude a person from Mental Health Court?

A primary diagnosis of drug or alcohol addiction may disqualify a person from consideration for MHC. A person with a primary diagnosis of drug or alcohol addiction, or a person that has developed a mental illness through addiction is encouraged to participate in drug court which focuses on addiction. People with co-occurring addiction and mental health disorders, i.e., people who use drugs/alcohol to self-medicate, but have a primary diagnosis of mental illness are eligible to be considered for participation in MHC.

What is the process to be considered for Mental Health Court?

Participation in MHC begins by a referral to the MHC Probation Officer. A referral can be made by a judge, a person's attorney, a deputy district attorney, a probation officer, a police officer, a mental health therapist, or case manager. A family member, victim or community member that wants a person considered for MHC can contact the MHC Public Defender or MHC Deputy District Attorney. The person must agree to participate in MHC and meet the MHC eligibility criteria (a negotiated plea that requires a person to participate in MHC will not guarantee the person is accepted into MHC).

In a pending case, the person meets with the MHC Probation Officer and is given an opportunity to observe MHC. The person must sign a release allowing the MHC Probation Officer to review his or her mental health treatment records and treatment history with his or her therapist and case manager. Participation in MHC is staffed with the MHC Team: Deputy District Attorney, MHC Probation Officer, Public Defender, Washington County Jail Community Restoration Staff, a Washington County Mental Health representative, Washington County Mental Health Response Team (Deputy and Therapist), and an Oregon Health Science University Psychiatric Fellow.

Upon acceptance into MHC, the person will meet with the Public Defender assigned to MHC to review the MHC guidelines and procedures. In a pending case, the case will be scheduled for entry of plea and sentencing in MHC.

What are the expectations of participants in MHC?

- Commitment to take medications as directed by the treating psychiatrist.
- Commitment to participate in counseling or therapy as directed by the therapist or treatment plan/case manager.
- Commitment to follow the directions of the MHC Probation Officer.
- Commitment to abstain from possession or use of non-prescribed controlled substances, alcohol or marijuana, and the willingness to submit to random body substance tests.
- Commitment to obey the law.
- Commitment to treat others with respect and dignity.
- Commitment to transparency and honesty in interactions with treating mental health professionals, the MHC Team and the Court.
- Commitment to pay victim restitution, participate in community service or avoid contact with certain individuals or locations.

What can a person expect from Mental Health Court?

Every person in MHC can expect to attend regular hearings to review compliance with his or her mental health treatment plan and probation. Every person has an individualized mental health treatment plan and unique social and economic circumstances. Consequently, the conditions of each person's MHC probation conditions are determined by the MHC Team. Every person will retain all rights of due process including the right to appear and be heard.

MHC is at least one year in duration in three phases:

Phase One requires a minimum of one meeting with the MHC Probation Officer every other week and attendance at MHC every other week. Phase One lasts four months, but may be extended for a longer duration to achieve compliance with the mental health treatment plan or conditions of MHC.

Phase Two/Three requires one or more monthly meetings with the MHC Probation Officer and monthly attendance at MHC. The duration of Phase Two or Three is influenced in the person's success in complying with MHC conditions. Graduation is accomplished when a person has completed his or her conditions of MHC and is evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Sanctions for failure to follow MHC conditions may result in extending the duration of a phase, modification of the conditions of probation, jail, an extended duration of probation, or a revocation of probation. Participation in MHC cannot exceed the maximum sentence allowed by law.

What are the goals of Mental Health Court?

The goals of MHC for the individual are:

- To develop and sustain consistent engagement with a mental health treatment plan;
- To reduce or eliminate conduct that results in criminal justice system involvement;
- Integration into constructive community activities; and
- Successful completion of probation.

The goals of MHC for the community are:

- To reduce recidivism;
- Increase community safety;
- Provide treatment for people suffering from a mental illness which reduces the cost of incarceration, supervision, police involvement or hospitalization.

When and where is Mental Health Court held?

Washington County Mental Health Court is held every other Monday at 2:00 PM in courtroom 303C in the Washington County Courthouse in Hillsboro, Oregon.

Contact information for the Mental Health Court Probation Officer

The MHC Probation Officer can be contacted through Washington County Community Corrections at (503) 846-8202.

Contact information for the Mental Health Court Public Defender

The MHC Public Defender can be contacted through the Washington County Metropolitan Public Defender's Office at (503) 726-7900.

Contact information for the Mental Health Court Deputy District Attorney

The MHC Deputy District Attorney can be contacted through the Washington County District Attorney's Office at (503) 846-8671.