When a Prisoner Needs Care: 
Tools For Effective Advocacy 
and Better Outcomes

1. Get Informed
   I. Know the Prisoner’s Situation. Get Documentation.
      - Diagnosis, Recent Evaluations
      - Prescription information
      - Recent Treatment Records, Current Provider
   II. Know the Detention Facility
      - System to Notify Prison/Jail
         CDCR: cphcs.ca.gov/contact.aspx
      - Contact person (e.g., an “ADA Coordinator”)
      - Jail Policies
   III. Other Helpful Things to Know
      - Is there a pending class action lawsuit?
      - Criminal Defense Attorney/Public Defender

2. Work Together
   - Get on the Same Page, Inside & Out – BE ONE VOICE.
     - What does the Prisoner Need/Want?
     - What are the Priorities?
   - Have the Prisoner sign an Authorization for Release of Information to allow the prison/jail staff to share info.
   - Encourage the prisoner to use the Administrative Remedy process. (“File a Grievance”)
     - Prisoners are expected to try to resolve problems informally with jail/prison staff first.
     - “Exhaustion” of administrative remedy process is required for bringing a lawsuit later.
3. Make Yourself Heard

- **WRITE A LETTER.**
  - Direct letter to Medical Care Supervisor. Copy to the Warden or the Director of the facility.
  - Present the facts. Describe problem, propose solutions.
  - Be specific. History of condition, diagnosis, how long, previous requests. Provide documentation.
  - Convey your deep concern and your relationship with the prisoner.
  - Ask for a written response.

- **GET THE OUTSIDE TREATMENT PROVIDER INVOLVED.**

4. Keep Good Records

- **Keep a Notebook.** Write down everything.
- **Keep Track** of the dates of events and the names and phone numbers of people you speak with.
- **Get information from the prisoner.** Ask for a written description of the problem, including dates and the names of those who may have more information (jail/prison staff, other inmates, outside treatment providers).
- **Keep a Copy of Everything.**
  - All Documentation you give to the jail/prison. Track who you gave the documentation to (or how you sent it) with dates.
  - All Responses from jail/prison.
  - All Letters to/from the outside treatment provider.
  - All Grievances and Institution Responses (from Prisoner).

5. Pursue Alternative Strategies

- Work with the Criminal Defense Attorney/Public Defender.
- Consult with or Hire a Civil Attorney.
- Send letter to relevant local officials – Sheriff, Warden, elected officials.
- Contact State Representatives or Congressperson.
- Media.
- Use Established Standards:
  - CDCR Receiver’s Inmate Medical Services Policies & Procedures [cphcs.ca.gov/imspp.aspx]
  - ABA Criminal Justice Standards on Treatment of Prisoners (available online)