

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

CMH basics and being your own best case manager

Your case manager is not your enemy, and they are not your only path forward either. Once you know who actually does what, you stop waiting on people who were never the ones who could say yes.

BY JIM PALASTY · 12 MIN READ · THE ORG CHART NOBODY HANDS YOU

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ROLES YOU NEED TO TELL APART

Case manager, supports coordinator, PIHP, and direct service provider each do a different job. Confusing them costs you time you don't have.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

You get assigned a name

A case manager, a phone number, and no org chart explaining who they answer to.



STEP 2

Nobody explains the rest

Supports coordinators, providers, and the PIHP all sit somewhere above or beside that one name.



STEP 3

You build your own map

Once you know who actually controls what, you stop asking the wrong person for the right thing.

Who does what

Case manager	Eligibility, plan of service, hour authorizations
Supports coordinator	Day-to-day coordination under self-determination
PIHP	Funding decisions, rate setting, formal appeals
Direct service providers	Actual daily care, subject to constant turnover

THE EMAIL THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

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Whitney stopped calling her case manager and hoping. After every meeting, she sent a two-paragraph email summarizing what was said and what was promised, with a date attached to each promise. Six months later, when a promised respite authorization never arrived, she forwarded the original email with one line: "Following up on this, dated March 12th." It arrived within the week.

THE SYSTEM DOESN'T MOVE ON MEMORY. IT MOVES ON A DATED RECORD SOMEBODY CAN'T ARGUE WITH.

What matters, at a glance

MICHIGAN SPECIFIC

Case manager

Assesses eligibility, writes the plan of service, and authorizes hours. Your first call for anything plan-related.

Supports coordinator

Handles day-to-day coordination under self-determination arrangements, often the person who actually returns your calls.

Direct service providers

The actual staff delivering care, rotating constantly due to the statewide DSP workforce shortage.

The PIHP

Controls the money and the appeals process. Your case manager cannot overrule a PIHP funding decision alone.

A written meeting agenda

Meetings without an agenda drift. A one-page list of what you need decided keeps everyone on the same page.

The follow-up email

Summarizing every meeting in writing within 24 hours is the single habit that builds your paper trail automatically.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

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|---|---|
| ☐ A contact list with names, titles, and who reports to whom | ☐ A one-page meeting agenda template |
| ☐ A follow-up email template you can reuse each time | ☐ A dated escalation log of open items |
| ☐ Your PIHP regional office's direct contact information | |

YOUR MOVE

When you need to be your own best case manager, here is how

- 1 Ask every new contact their exact title and role.
- 2 Bring a written agenda to every scheduled meeting.
- 3 Send a follow-up email within 24 hours, every time.
- 4 Keep a dated escalation log of unresolved promises.
- 5 Escalate to a supervisor after two weeks of silence.
- 6 Contact your PIHP directly when CMH cannot resolve it.

You are not replacing your case manager. You are making sure nothing depends on anyone's memory but your own.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

cmham.org · <https://cmham.org>

michiganallianceforfamilies.org · <https://michiganallianceforfamilies.org>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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