

Notice of Privacy Practices

Palomar Family Counseling Service, Inc. (PFCS)

Effective Date: March 11, 2026

This Notice of Privacy Practices (NPP) explains how we may use and share your Protected Health Information (PHI) - which includes details about your mental health, therapy sessions, medical history, or billing - and your rights regarding this information. We follow federal laws like the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and state laws like the California Confidentiality of Medical Information Act (CMIA), which protect your privacy even more strictly in areas like mental health records.

Our goal is to keep your information safe while providing quality counseling services. We only use or share what's needed, and we'll explain it clearly here. If you have questions, contact our Privacy Officer (details below). This NPP is available on our website (www.palomarfamilycounseling.com) and at intake. We may update it - check the date above for the latest version.

How We May Use and Share Your PHI

PHI is any information that identifies you and relates to your health or care. We use it responsibly for:

Treatment: To provide your counseling, like sharing notes with your therapist or coordinating with a doctor (with your consent where needed). For example, we might discuss your progress in team meetings to improve your care. Psychotherapy notes (private session details kept separate) are extra protected and require your specific written permission to share, except in rare legal cases.

Payment: To bill for services, like submitting claims to Medi-Cal, insurance, or the County of San Diego.

Health Care Operations: To run our agency, such as quality checks, staff training (using anonymized info when possible), or audits.

Other Allowed Uses (No Permission Needed):

- Public health reporting (e.g., abuse or threats of harm).
- Legal requirements (e.g., court orders).
- Health oversight (e.g., audits by government agencies).
- To prevent serious threats to safety (e.g., under California's Tarasoff duty-to-warn law for imminent harm).

We follow stricter rules under CMIA for sensitive info like mental health, substance use, HIV/AIDS, genetic data, or reproductive health - sharing only with your clear authorization unless required by law. We won't sell your PHI or use it for marketing without your okay.

Your Rights Regarding Your PHI

You have control over your information. Here's what you can do:

- **Access Your Records:** Ask to see or get a copy of your PHI (except psychotherapy notes). We'll respond within 30 days; fees may apply for copies.
- **Amend Your Records:** If something's wrong or incomplete, request changes in writing. We'll review and reply within 60 days.
- **Request Restrictions:** Ask us not to share certain info (e.g., with insurance). We may not always agree, but we'll consider it.
- **Confidential Communications:** Ask to receive info in a specific way (e.g., email instead of mail) if it protects your safety.
- **Accounting of Disclosures:** Get a list of who we've shared your PHI with (up to 6 years back), except for treatment/payment/operations. First request per year is free.
- **Paper Copy of This Notice:** Get one anytime, even if you agreed to electronic.

To use these rights, contact our Privacy Officer in writing. We'll help explain the process simply.

Our Legal Duties

- We must protect your PHI's privacy and security.
- We'll notify you promptly if there's a breach (unauthorized access) affecting your info.
- We follow this NPP and will tell you about changes (e.g., posting updates online and at our offices).
- Under CMIA and HIPAA, we prioritize the stricter rule to keep your info safe.

Complaints

If you think we've mishandled your PHI, tell us - we won't retaliate. Contact:

- **PFCS Privacy Officer:** Kelli Lawrence, klawrence@pfcs.agency, 760-741-2660
- Or file with: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights (ocr.hhs.gov) or California Department of Health Care Services.

We'll investigate complaints within 30 days and work to fix any issues.

Contact Us

For questions or to exercise your rights:
Palomar Family Counseling Service, Inc.

1002 E. Grand Avenue, Escondido, CA 92025

Privacy Officer: Kelli Lawrence Email: klawrence@pfcs.agency Phone: 760-741-2660

This NPP applies to all PFCS locations and programs. Thank you for trusting us with your care—we're here to support you while keeping your privacy top priority.