

# ALL ABOUT SERVICE IN CHRONIC PAIN ANONYMOUS

## Introduction

Chronic Pain Anonymous (CPA) is a worldwide fellowship of people from all walks of life who live with chronic pain and chronic illness. Members come together to support each other and learn how to find serenity and a meaningful life while living with the disabling effects of their physical health conditions.

Participating in keeping CPA strong and thriving helps us make connections with other members and feel that we belong. We find a sense of renewed purpose. Contributing to support the fellowship benefits our personal program of recovery.

This brochure explains what service in CPA is and how we can fulfill this responsibility while living with our health challenges. Although we may not be able to function as we have in the past, we trust our Higher Power to guide us in our service. We can always find ways to contribute to CPA and new opportunities to use our education, talents, and skills. We find value and self-esteem when we discover how we can offer our abilities to each other and the fellowship.

**What is service in CPA?** Service is anything that assists and supports a fellow CPA member, a CPA group, or the fellowship as a whole. It's a way to look outside of ourselves and our own struggles to help someone else as we carry CPA's message of strength and hope.

Service provides a means to deepen relationships within the CPA fellowship while growing mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Service, a central principle of CPA recovery, is about giving and receiving, trusting, and having faith in our Higher Power. Many members find that service work helps to shift their focus

toward others and away from pain and illness, helping them discover renewed purpose and meaning in their lives.

Our service can include many different roles and actions. For example, reaching out and asking for help as well as being available to others in the fellowship by phone, email, video, or text, are all forms of service. In our groups, we can chair or volunteer to read literature in a meeting or share our experiences with others. We can go beyond group service and volunteer for a committee or task force or participate in a service body that supports the fellowship.

**How do I approach service?** Service can be challenging when living with chronic pain and chronic illness. It is difficult to predict how one's body will function on any day. There are high-functioning days, neutral days, and can't-get-out-of-bed days. We learn to break tasks into small parts, so the work is more manageable. We can work ahead of when things are due, so they are ready when needed. We can share the work with others. One of our program tools says, *"One day at a time I will pace myself and trust my body to guide me. I will not push when my body tells me it's time to stop. I will do half of what I think I can accomplish."* It is important to work our program of recovery as we perform service.

**Who can perform service?** Anyone in the CPA fellowship can participate. The size of the act isn't important—it can be as simple as supporting and showing compassion toward a person with chronic pain and chronic illness. Service can improve relationships with ourselves, fellow members, family, and friends and within our communities. We allow our Higher Power to guide us when making decisions about doing service, praying for the wisdom to do the next indicated action.

At the group level, there are essential service positions that help the group run smoothly. Some of these can be Chairperson, Treasurer, and Secretary; there is also the Group Representative (GR) and Intergroup Representative, who represent the group on CPA service bodies. There may be some requirements, which are determined by each group, for filling positions. Service body positions will each have a job description with the suggested requirements. These may include length of time in the CPA fellowship, previous CPA service experience, and specific skills or knowledge.

**How do I begin?** It is recommended that members begin performing service in groups they regularly attend before working on service bodies or committees. A service opportunity might arise during a meeting when announcements are being made, or someone could ask if we are interested in doing service. In addition, we can consult with other members or ask about service opportunities at the business meeting for our group. Eventually, we may wish to inquire about other possibilities beyond our group.

**How do I approach commitment in service?** When considering service, we may immediately want to say yes. Or we may think, "How could I possibly take on a service commitment? I can barely keep up with my personal responsibilities." To decide, many of us take our time and apply our program tools. We can seek our Higher Power's wisdom and clarity through prayer and meditation. We may also consult with our sponsor or a trusted fellow member before making our decision about a service commitment.

Our fellowship members understand the demands of daily life, especially under the circumstances of our health conditions. Here are some questions we can ask to help make a decision:

*What am I responsible for?* Identify what is involved to fulfill the role. It could be a responsibility to another person, such as sponsorship, or to the group, such as being a GR.

*What is the time commitment involved?* Identify how much time the service position requires, such as an hour a week or 10 hours a month.

*How long will I be asked to serve?* Some positions, such as speaking at a Speaker's meeting, are a one-time event. Some, such as a GR, are over a period of time. All positions have a term of service that allows for rotation of service.

*Are there any deadlines?* Although in CPA we often don't have deadlines, be sure to clarify if there are any such expectations.

*Is there a service partner and backup plan?* When we are living with chronic pain and chronic illness, it is difficult to predict how we will feel on any particular day. Therefore, some positions are shared. This makes it possible to divide the

workload or allow someone else to step in as needed. Otherwise, we can ask someone to be our backup.

**What if I can't fulfill my service commitment?** This can happen to any of our members. It requires honesty and clear communication. As soon as we realize we won't be able to fulfill our responsibility, we notify our backup, if we have one, and notify the person we are accountable to for our task. We treat each other with respect and kindness and understand our lives are unpredictable and that we can't always follow through as planned.

**What is a service sponsor?** Sometimes people have a service sponsor along with their Twelve Step sponsor. This person should have a service commitment themselves and can provide guidance and support regarding service responsibilities. A service sponsor can also guide members through the Twelve Traditions and CPA Service Manual.

### **Members share their experiences of service work and their program of recovery**

*When I was offered an opportunity to do service work on an ongoing basis for the CPA fellowship, I was excited, and eagerly accepted the position. However, it became clear to me that the position entailed work that triggered my chronic back pain. I felt guilty for not being able to hold up my end of the agreement, and I begrudgingly notified the members who had offered me the position. I was very pleasantly surprised by the response I received. I was reassured that I had no reason to feel guilty. They reminded me it is important that each of us find service positions that fit with our recovery, and even congratulated me for taking good care of myself!*



*When I first came to CPA, I lurked in meetings, just listening, for a long time. It was often hard for me to stay for the hour-long meeting due to my health. Then I discovered meetings that were shorter, and I found it was easy to participate and even began chairing. This is where I found other people who were living with similar limitations and therefore the structure of the meeting supported my life extremely well. In CPA, I've been surprised again and again*

*how people have shaped the program in a way to foster self-care and respect. I am definitely not a lurker anymore. My service positions have since expanded to even include being an Intergroup Representative. I've found a deep sense of purpose and increased spiritual connection in my service work. Starting service in small ways has made my recovery flourish, and I feel like I very much belong in CPA.*



*When I came to CPA, I believed my life was over. There was so much I suddenly couldn't do. I had lost all outlets for my creativity and professional skills. My whole identity was stripped. It was just me, the bed, and CPA meetings. I will be forever grateful for my sponsor seeing in me that which I could not see in myself. With her patient encouragement, support, and guidance, I have a renewed purpose and focus in my life which are, indeed, manageable. CPA service has allowed my personal recovery and self-acceptance, self-care, and self-love to blossom as I learn, grow, and work with others in the CPA ways.*

## **Conclusion**

Our spiritual principles are put into action through service. Supporting our fellowship by offering our time, talents, and energy is how CPA continues to exist and thrive. We know we are not alone as we work respectfully and cooperatively with others, placing principles before personalities. We pray and meditate, connecting with our Higher Power, for guidance on how we can best serve our groups and CPA as a whole.

Service is essential to keeping CPA solid and strong, and we strengthen our recovery through service. It helps build and restore confidence, especially if our ability to function has changed due to our condition. We learn how to participate while living within the limitations of our health challenges. And we can start simply, such as listening to someone or reaching out to a newcomer.

Service gives our life meaning and focus. Once we discover where and how we can be of service in CPA, we can apply what we have learned in other aspects of our lives.

What service action did you do today? What can you do tomorrow?

For additional resources, please visit the CPA website at [chronicpainanonymous.org](http://chronicpainanonymous.org). You can also start learning more about service by getting familiar with the CPA Service Handbook and Service Flow structure, both found on the website.