

# Advance Care Planning: Advance Directives for Health Care

During an emergency or at the end of life, you may face questions about their medical treatment and not be able to answer them. You may assume your loved ones know what you would want, but that's not always true. In one study, people guessed nearly one out of three end-of-life decisions for their loved one incorrectly.

Research shows that you are more likely to get the care you want if you have conversations about your future medical treatment and put a plan in place. It may also help your loved ones grieve more easily and feel less burden, guilt, and depression.

What is advance care planning?

Advance care planning involves discussing and preparing for future decisions about your medical care if you become seriously ill or unable to communicate your wishes. Having meaningful conversations with your loved ones is the most important part of advance care planning. Many people also choose to put their preferences in writing by completing legal documents called advance directives.

## What are advance directives?

Advance directives are legal documents that provide instructions for medical care and only go into effect if you cannot communicate your own wishes.

The two most common advance directives for health care are the living will and the durable power of attorney for health care.

**Living will:** A living will is a legal document that tells doctors how you want to be treated if you cannot make your own decisions about emergency treatment. In a living will, you can say which common medical treatments or care you would want, which ones you would want to avoid, and under which conditions each of your choices applies. Learn more about preparing a living will.

**Durable power of attorney for health care:** A durable power of attorney for health care is a legal document that names your health care proxy, a person who can make health care decisions for you if you are unable to communicate these yourself. Your proxy, also known as a representative, surrogate, or agent, should be familiar with your values and wishes. A proxy can be chosen in addition to or instead of a living will. Having a health care proxy helps you plan for situations that cannot be foreseen, such as a serious car accident or stroke. Learn more about choosing a health care proxy.

Think of your advance directives as living documents that you review at least once each year and update if a major life event occurs such as retirement, moving out of state, or a significant change in your health.

## Who needs an advance care plan?

Advance care planning is not just for people who are very old or ill. At any age, a medical crisis could leave you unable to communicate your own health care decisions. Planning now for your future health care can help ensure you get the medical care you want and that someone you trust will be there to make decisions for you.

## **How can you get started with advance care planning?**

To get started with advance care planning, consider the following steps:

Reflect on your values and wishes. This can help you think through what matters most at the end of life and guide your decisions about future care and medical treatment.

Talk with your doctor about advance directives. Advance care planning is covered by Medicare as part of your annual wellness visit. If you have private health insurance, check with your insurance provider. Talking to a health care provider can help you learn about your current health and the kinds of decisions that are likely to come up. For example, you might ask about the decisions you may face if your high blood pressure leads to a stroke.

Choose someone you trust to make medical decisions for you. Whether it's a family member, a loved one, or your lawyer, it's important to choose someone you trust as your health care proxy. Once you've decided, discuss your values and preferences with them. If you're not ready to discuss specific treatments or care decisions yet, try talking about your general preferences. You can also try other ways to share your wishes, such as writing a letter or watching a video on the topic together.

Complete your advance directive forms. To make your care and treatment decisions official, you can complete a living will. Similarly, once you decide on your health care proxy, you can make it official by completing a durable power of attorney for health care.

Share your forms with your health care proxy, doctors, and loved ones. After you've completed your advance directives, make copies and store them in a safe place. Give copies to your health care proxy, health care providers, and lawyer. Some states have registries that can store your advance directive for quick access by health care providers and your proxy.

Keep the conversation going. Continue to talk about your wishes and update your forms at least once each year or after major life changes. If you update your forms, file and keep your previous versions. Note the date the older copy was replaced by a new one. If you use a registry, make sure the latest version is on record.

Everyone approaches the process differently. Remember to be flexible and take it one step at a time. Start small. For example, try simply talking with your loved ones about what you appreciate and enjoy most about life. Your values, treatment preferences, and even the people you involve in your plan may change over time. The most important part is to start the conversation.

# Advance Care Planning: Advance Directives for Health Care

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have received information on advance care planning for health care. At this time I:

- Have chosen to complete an Advance Directive for Health Care Form
- Have chosen to not to create an Advance Directive for Health Care
- Already have Advance Directive for Health Care and have provided documents to BCNH
- Would like to review my options or find out more about Advance Directive for Health Care before making a decision.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name of person completing form

\_\_\_\_\_  
Relationship to resident

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
BCNH Staff Signature & Position

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date