



## ADVANCE DIRECTIVES: YOUR VOICE IN HEALTHCARE DECISIONS

### TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR HEALTHCARE FUTURE

Life is unpredictable, and sometimes circumstances can leave us unable to communicate our healthcare preferences when we need to most. An advance directive is a powerful tool that ensures your voice is heard and your values are respected, even when you can't speak for yourself.

Think of an advance directive as your healthcare blueprint—a clear set of instructions that guides your medical team and loved ones when difficult decisions need to be made. It's not about dwelling on worst-case scenarios; it's about taking an active role in your healthcare journey and providing clarity during challenging times.

### UNDERSTANDING ADVANCE DIRECTIVES

An advance directive is a legal document that outlines your healthcare preferences and designates someone to make medical decisions on your behalf if you become unable to do so. These documents only come into effect when you're incapacitated and cannot communicate your wishes directly to your healthcare team.

Creating an advance directive involves thoughtful consideration of various medical scenarios and treatments, including:

- Life-support measures and artificial life-sustaining equipment
- Pain management and comfort care preferences
- Organ and tissue donation decisions
- Specific medical interventions you would accept or decline
- Your personal values and beliefs that should guide care decisions

### THE VALUE OF PLANNING AHEAD

Many people postpone creating advance directives, thinking they're too young or healthy to need them. However, medical emergencies and accidents can happen to anyone at any age. Having these documents prepared offers several important benefits:

**For You:** Peace of mind knowing your wishes will be honored and your values respected in your medical care.

**For Your Family:** Clear guidance that removes guesswork and reduces the emotional burden of making difficult decisions during stressful times.

**For Your Healthcare Team:** Specific instructions that help them provide care aligned with your preferences and values.

## **TYPES OF ADVANCE DIRECTIVE DOCUMENTS**

### **HEALTHCARE POWER OF ATTORNEY (HEALTHCARE PROXY)**

This document designates a trusted person—called your healthcare agent or proxy—to make medical decisions for you when you cannot. Your chosen representative should understand your values and be willing to advocate for your wishes, even if they personally disagree with your choices.

### **LIVING WILL (INSTRUCTIONAL DIRECTIVE)**

A living will provides specific guidance about medical treatments you would or would not want in various situations, particularly end-of-life scenarios. This document can address preferences regarding resuscitation, mechanical ventilation, artificial nutrition and hydration, and other life-sustaining treatments.

### **POLST (PHYSICIAN ORDERS FOR LIFE-SUSTAINING TREATMENT)**

For individuals with serious illness or frailty, a POLST form translates your treatment preferences into actionable medical orders. This document travels with you across different healthcare settings and provides immediate guidance to emergency responders and medical staff.

## **CREATING YOUR ADVANCE DIRECTIVE**

### **STEP 1: REFLECT ON YOUR VALUES**

Consider what quality of life means to you and what factors would be most important in your medical care. Think about your personal, religious, or cultural beliefs that might influence your healthcare decisions.

### **STEP 2: RESEARCH YOUR OPTIONS**

Learn about different medical treatments and interventions so you can make informed decisions about what you would or wouldn't want in various situations.

### **STEP 3: CHOOSE YOUR HEALTHCARE AGENT**

Select someone who knows you well, understands your values, and is willing to advocate for your wishes. Have detailed conversations with this person about your preferences and ensure they're comfortable with this responsibility.

### **STEP 4: COMPLETE THE LEGAL DOCUMENTS**

Use forms that meet your state's legal requirements. While you don't necessarily need an attorney, you may want legal guidance for complex situations or if you have specific concerns.

### **STEP 5: SHARE AND STORE YOUR DOCUMENTS**

Provide copies to your healthcare agent, primary care physician, close family members, and keep copies in easily accessible locations. Consider carrying a wallet card that indicates you have advance directives and where they can be found.

## KEEPING YOUR DIRECTIVES CURRENT

Your advance directive isn't a "set it and forget it" document. Review and update it periodically, especially after major life events such as:

- Marriage, divorce, or death of a spouse
- Birth or adoption of children
- Significant changes in your health status
- Changes in your relationship with your designated healthcare agent
- Moving to a different state

## MAKING IT OFFICIAL

Each state has specific requirements for advance directives, including witness and notarization requirements. Contact your state's Department of Health or consult with a qualified attorney to ensure your documents meet all legal requirements in your jurisdiction.

## GETTING SUPPORT

Creating advance directives can feel overwhelming, but you don't have to do it alone. Many resources are available to help:

- Your primary care physician can discuss medical scenarios and treatment options
- Hospital social workers and patient advocates can provide guidance
- Elder law attorneys specialize in advance directive documents
- Community organizations often offer advance directive workshops
- Online resources provide state-specific forms and instructions

## YOUR HEALTHCARE, YOUR CHOICE

Advance directives empower you to maintain control over your healthcare decisions, even when you can't actively participate in them. By taking the time to create these important documents, you're giving yourself and your loved ones a tremendous gift: the certainty that your healthcare will reflect your personal values and wishes.

Remember, having advance directives doesn't limit your care—it guides your care according to your preferences. You can always change your mind about your healthcare decisions as long as you're able to communicate them directly.

Take the first step today by starting conversations with your loved ones about your healthcare values and preferences. Your future self—and your family—will thank you for this thoughtful preparation.

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For questions about advance directives or to discuss your healthcare options, contact Mass Advantage Member Services at (844) 918-0114 (HMO), (844) 915-0234 (PPO) (TTY: 711). We're here to support you in making informed healthcare decisions that align with your personal values and preferences.