

Take charge!

YOUR ADVANCE CARE PLANNING TOOLKIT

Planning ahead can bring you peace of mind – and is a gift to your loved ones.



Take these four steps to help get the care you want – based on what matters most to you.

- Think about what matters most to you.**
- Talk about your wishes with your family and friends.**
- Choose your health care agent.**
- Write it down – and share your plan.**

What is advance care planning?

Advance care planning is a process that helps you decide and document what kind of care you would want – and what kind you would not want – if you have a health crisis and are not able to communicate or make decisions. This is important for everyone who is 18 or older.

This process includes thinking about what is important to you, talking about it with those close to you (including your doctor), selecting someone to act as your representative, and completing an Advance Health Care Directive to document your decisions.

Why is it important?

If you experience a serious illness or medical emergency, you might not have the time, presence of mind, or ability to fully think through the many decisions you will need to make.

Thinking about these decisions long before you may need care gives you the time to consider your values and wishes, have meaningful conversations with those who need to know them, and take steps to make sure your desires are known and followed. Advance care planning can bring you peace of mind – and is a gift to your family and loved ones, who will know how to act in your best interest.

How do I get started?

This toolkit will walk you through the steps of advance care planning – step by step.

Get started on the very next page.



STEP 1

Think about what matters most to you, and what kind of care you would want if you were unable to speak for yourself.

Start by thinking about your personal values and what matters most to you for your future care. Clarifying this will give guidance to those who can support your wishes.

Give yourself plenty of time to think about these questions. Talking with a close friend, a spiritual leader, or your doctor might help you consider your choices. Writing in a journal or a letter may help you organize your thoughts.

Think about what gives your life meaning:

- > What does “quality of life” mean to you?
- > What’s most important: quality of life, or how long you live?
- > What do you want to do or say before you die? How might this affect what you would want if you were seriously injured or ill, and lost the ability to talk, walk, eat, or remember things?

Think about what you have learned from your experiences:

- > If you have any serious medical conditions now, do you expect them to get worse? How might this affect your quality of life?
- > Think about people you know who have died. Did you learn anything from their deaths about what you want – or don’t want – for your own care at the end of life?

Think about your options:

- > In an emergency, medical treatment such as CPR, intubation, and/or a feeding tube may be given. Do you understand what these terms mean for your care? Have you thought about when you might want these treatments – and in what situations you might not want them?
- > Can you imagine a situation in which you would want to stop medical treatment designed simply to keep you alive, and instead choose only care that keeps you as comfortable as possible?
- > Where would you like to spend your last year? Your last day? Would you like to be in your home, in a nursing home, in the hospital – or somewhere else?
- > Have you discussed your final wishes with your loved ones? Do they know if you want to donate your organs? Do they know whether you prefer to be buried or cremated?

**Now that you’ve thought about what matters most to you,
it’s time to talk to others who need to know.**



STEP 2

Talk about your wishes with your family, friends, and doctor.

Now you are ready to share your thoughts and wishes with those who need to know:

- > Family and friends – those closest to you
- > Your doctor
- > Anyone who is likely to be involved in your future health care decisions

It's easy to avoid these conversations. They can be hard to start. We may be afraid of how family or loved ones might think or react. But having these conversations will bring relief to you AND those who care for you.

Here are a couple of ways to get started:

"Do you remember what happened to Uncle Tony and his family when he was sick? I don't want you to have to go through that with me. That's why I want to talk about these issues now."

"I went to a workshop where they suggested that everyone should talk about their wishes and document them. Can we do that so you know what I'd want you to do?"

Here are two resources that can help you with this step:

- > **The Conversation Starter Kit.** This friendly guide offers some simple questions to consider, and provides examples of how you might begin discussing these issues. <http://theconversationproject.org>
- > **The Stanford Letter Project.** This offers tools to help you write a simple letter about what matters most to you so you can share this information with your doctor and your loved ones. <http://med.stanford.edu/letter.html>

It is important to remember that these are things you will probably discuss more than once. The more you talk about what matters most to you – your wishes for your own care – the easier it gets. So keep talking.

Next, you'll identify someone who can help see that your wishes are followed.



STEP 3

Choose your health care agent – someone you'd want to make decisions about your care if you are unable.

Your agent is the person who will help ensure that your wishes for medical care will be respected if you become unable to speak for yourself. Your health care agent will have legal authority to make health decisions for you.

If you have not selected a health care agent and you become unable to communicate your wishes, your friends and family may disagree about the medical care you should receive – and decisions about your care may be made by doctors, hospital administrators, or judges.

Choosing a health care agent is an important decision.

Your agent should be someone you trust. Most people choose a spouse, partner, relative, or close friend as their agent. Even if your family is involved in helping you make medical treatment decisions, it is still important to choose one person to be your health care agent.

Think about who knows you well and what is important to you. Consider who can honor your wishes, even if their own wishes might be different.

Consider people who will be able to act on your behalf in stressful situations.

Think about people who can ask questions of medical professionals and others to get the information they need to make good decisions.

California law states that your agent cannot be your current health care provider or a staff member in your care facility.

Once you have decided who you would like to serve as your agent, ask them if they are willing to take on this responsibility. It's a good idea to also select a backup, or secondary, agent in case your first choice is not available when you need them.

Talk to your agent about your values and your preferences for medical treatment. Even if you are close, don't assume that he or she knows what you would want. While it's impossible to discuss every possible situation, if your health care agent knows what is important to you, he or she will be equipped to make the kinds of decisions that you would make for yourself. Share your answers to the questions in Step 1.

Your last step is to put all of this in writing.



STEP 4

Write it down – document your decisions, and share your form(s) with your agent, doctor, and loved ones.

Now that you've made some decisions about what you want for your future health care, it's important to document this in a legally recognized form. By sharing this documentation, you will give your loved ones, health care agent, and doctor the tools they need to honor your choices.

In California, an **Advance Health Care Directive** is the form used to legally appoint your chosen health care agent, and to document the types of medical treatment you would or would not like to receive in certain situations.

In addition, ask your doctor to help you complete a **POLST form**. In California, the POLST (Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment) provides specific direction to doctors and emergency personnel about the use of CPR and other medical interventions.

You can download an Advance Health Care Directive at [MissionHospice.org/TakeCharge](https://www.MissionHospice.org/TakeCharge).

Give copies of your completed and signed Advance Health Care Directive to:

- Your doctor – make sure they are put in your medical records
- Your health care agent
- Your family, friends, and loved ones

Keep a list of everyone who got a copy of your Advance Health Care Directive, so you will know who to notify when you update your form.

Treat this document like other important paperwork:

- > Keep your original Advance Health Care Directive in a safe place where you can get it quickly if you need it.
- > Put a copy in a place that is easy to get to, like the glove box of your car.
- > If you travel, bring your Advance Health Care Directive with you, or consider making a wallet card stating that you have an Advance Health Care Directive, and including the name and contact information of your health care agent.

Congratulations!

Completing and sharing your Advance Health Care Directive while you are healthy is the single most important step you can take to ensure that your care at the end of life is consistent with what matters most to you.

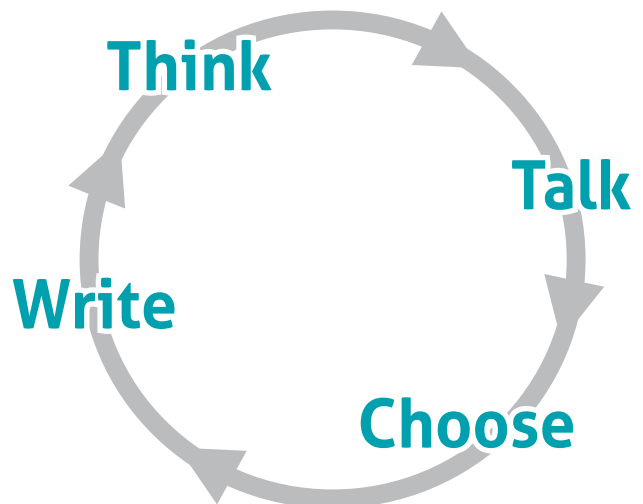
Now what?

Your Advance Health Care Directive reflects your perspectives, values, and decisions *right now*. These may change over time.

Be sure to review your documents at least once a year, any time your health condition changes, and after any major life events, such as marriage, birth of a child, significant illness, divorce, or death of a family member.

When you review your Advance Health Care Directive, ask yourself whether your health care agent is still available, and still the best choice.

When you do update your documents, be sure that you share your revisions with your doctor, your health care agent, and your loved ones. That's the best way to make sure that they understand what matters most to you.



Repeat these steps regularly – especially after major life events – to be sure that your Advance Health Care Directive reflects your current wishes.



www.MissionHospice.org/TakeCharge

This Advance Care Planning Toolkit and the campaign to engage our community were created by Mission Hospice & Home Care and a coalition of local organizations, including:

Channing House | Coastside Adult Day Health Center
Family Caregiver Alliance | Peninsula Volunteers, Inc.
Palo Alto Medical Foundation
San Mateo County Health System Aging and Adult Services
Senior Coastsiders | Seniors At Home
Village of the Coastsides | Villages of San Mateo County

Our coalition is dedicated to creating a more compassionate community for people facing serious illness, death, and bereavement. We encourage everyone to have conversations with their families and their doctors and take charge of their advance health care planning.

We are here to help you.

For more information, visit www.MissionHospice.org/TakeCharge or call Mary Matthiesen, Community Engagement and Education Director, at 650.532.2335.

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Mission Hospice & Home Care is an independent nonprofit founded in 1979 to provide patients and their families in the San Mateo County area with quality, compassionate end-of-life care and education. We offer physical, emotional, and spiritual support throughout the journey from a life-threatening diagnosis through death and the process of bereavement.

www.MissionHospice.org | 650.554.1000