

ADVANCE CARE PLANNING – *QUICK GUIDE*

What is Advance Care Planning?

Advance care planning allows you to make decisions about your medical treatment, should you become unable to make your own wishes known. These personal choices are based on your personal values, preferences and discussions with loved ones. Advance care planning includes:

- Collecting information on the types of life-sustaining treatments available
- Deciding which treatments you would (or would not) want if you are faced with a life-limiting illness and are unable to speak for yourself
- Selecting a health care agent to act on your behalf
- Completing an Advance Health Care Directive, which puts into writing the decisions made about your own health care preferences

What is an Advance Health Care Directive (AHCD)?

An Advance Directive is a legal form that lets you choose the kind of health care you want. This way, those who care for you will not have to guess what you want if you are unable to tell them yourself.

What is a Health Care Agent?

A health care agent is a person who can make medical decisions for you if you are too ill to make them yourself. This role is also known as *healthcare proxy* or *medical power of attorney*.

The most common medical decisions made involve your personal choices regarding:

- Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)
- Degree of medical intervention
- Artificially administered nutrition

What is a POLST form?

POLST stands for Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment and is a voluntary form which must be signed by you (or your agent) and your physician, indicating the types of life-sustaining treatment you do (or do not) want if you are seriously ill. POLST clarifies your preferences for CPR, antibiotics, feeding tubes, etc. POLST does not replace your Advance Directive, but when you are seriously ill, it helps to translate your wishes into medical orders which must be followed in all healthcare settings.



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What are the primary differences between an Advance Directive and a POLST form?

ADVANCE DIRECTIVE

- For anyone 18 and older
- Provides instructions for **future** treatment
- Appoints a Health Care Representative
- Does not guide Emergency Medical Personnel
- Guides inpatient treatment decisions when made available

POLST

- For persons with serious illness — at any age
- Provides medical orders for **current** treatment
- Guides actions by Emergency Medical Personnel when made available
- Guides inpatient treatment decisions when made available

How do I prepare an Advance Directive?

You may complete an Advanced Directive without a lawyer. Read the form carefully, following state specific legal requirements. You will need a witness signature or to have the form notarized.

Keep your completed Advance Directive in a **highly visible, easily accessible** place; give photocopies to your loved ones, your doctor & your health care agent. The form stays in effect unless you cancel it or decide to complete a new one with changes. Photocopied forms are just as valid as the original.

Can I make up my own form or use one from another state?

Yes. Any type of form is legal as long as it has at least three things:

- Your signature and date
- The signature of two qualified witnesses with their witness statements
- If you reside in a skilled nursing facility, the signature of the patient advocate or ombudsman. (See websites below for more detail on CA witness requirements.)

Where can I gather more details about Advanced Care Planning?

- Comfort Homesake (Local): comforthomesake.com
- Coalition for Compassionate Care of California: coalitionccc.org
- *Five Wishes* is a well-rounded, user-friendly form: agingwithdignity.org
- Caring Connections has state-specific forms: caringinfo.org
- NHPCO supports compassionate care & quality at end-of-life: nhpco.org

