

What is advance care planning?

If you were very unwell, and not able to communicate your preferences for care to others, who would you want to speak for you? And more importantly, what healthcare decisions would you want them to make?

Advanced illness or serious injury can sometimes mean that people cannot make their own decisions about health and personal care. This can happen to people of all ages, and especially towards end of life.

Writing an Advance Care Directive (values and/or instructional) lets you say what you would want, if you are ever unable to communicate for yourself.

Benefits for you and the people who care for you

Advance care planning:

- helps to ensure that a person's preferences, beliefs and values about health care are known and respected if they are too unwell to speak for themselves
- benefits those who are close to them. Research has shown that families of people who have done advance care planning have less anxiety and stress when asked to make important healthcare decisions for other people.

Making healthcare decisions for others can be difficult. An Advance Care Directive can give peace of mind and comfort as preferences are clear, understood and respected.



When should you make an Advance Care Directive?

You should start planning when you're healthy – before there's actually an urgent need for a plan. But having an Advance Care Directive in place becomes particularly significant towards the end of a person's life. About 85% of people die after chronic illness, not as the result of a sudden event – so it's important that your Advance Care Directive is ready in case it's required someday.

What do you need to do?

Be open

- Think and talk about your values, beliefs and preferences for current and future health care.
- Decide who you would like to speak for you if you become very sick and are not able to speak for yourself. Ask them if they are prepared to be your substitute decision-maker.

Ideally, they need to be:

- available (ideally live in the same city or region)
- over the age of 18
- prepared to advocate clearly and make decisions on your behalf when talking to your doctors, other health professionals and family members.

Depending on your state/territory, you may be able to appoint more than one substitute decision-maker.

Be ready

- Talk about your values, beliefs and preferences with your substitute decision-maker and other people involved in your care, such as family, friends, carers and doctors.
- Write your plan and/or appoint your substitute decision-maker. See advancecareplanning.org.au for the relevant form or advance care planning legal factsheet. Your GP or other health professionals can help support you to document your choices.

There are different legal requirements in different Australian states and territories, so it is a good idea to ask for help. In some states and territories there are important rules regarding who can witness documents for you. See your relevant advance care planning legal factsheet.

Be heard

- A written Advance Care Directive will make things easier for your substitute decision-maker(s), if the need ever arises. It will give everyone peace of mind, knowing your preferences are heard and respected.

Make copies and store them with:

- your substitute decision-maker(s)
- your GP/local doctor
- your specialist(s)
- your residential aged care home
- your hospital
- myagedcare.gov.au.

You don't have to give a copy to each of the above, but make sure your substitute decision-maker and main doctor each has a copy.

- Load your Advance Care Directive into your 'My Health Record' at myhealthrecord.gov.au
- Review your Advance Care Directive regularly – for instance each year. You should review it if there is a change in your health, personal or living situation.
- Give your substitute decision-maker and doctors an updated copy of your Advance Care Directive if you make changes and keep it safe.

Conversation starters

To get started, choose a quiet setting where you have a lot of time, so you know that you won't be interrupted. Be patient and take your time: you and your loved ones might need a few moments to think.

Sometimes you might get a bit sidetracked and that's okay. Let the conversation happen naturally. You don't need to talk about everything all at once. Remember that advance care planning is an ongoing conversation.

Starting the conversation can be the hardest part, so here are a few ways to begin:

- I was thinking about what happened to ... and it made me realise that ...
- I would want ... to make medical decisions on my behalf if I was unable to.
- Being able to ... is the most important thing to me.
- If ... happened to me, I would want ...

Where can I get more information?

Advance Care Planning Australia

- advancecareplanning.org.au
- National Advisory Service: 1300 208 582
- learning.advancecareplanning.org.au

The law and advance care planning

Different states and territories in Australia have different laws on advance care planning. When planning for your own future care, it will be helpful to understand the law in your own state/territory. See advancecareplanning.org.au for information.

Depending on the state/territory:

- A substitute decision-maker may be legally appointed as an Attorney, Enduring Guardian, Decision-Maker or Medical Treatment Decision-Maker.
- An Advance Care Directive may also be called an Advance Health Directive, Health Direction or Advance Personal Plan.