Advance Care Planning: A personal guide

Plan for tomorrow’s healthcare today
This guide has been designed by Advance Care Planning Australia to help you to think about your future healthcare choices and to support you in the process of developing an Advance Care Directive.

Making decisions about future healthcare is also known as advance care planning. Advance care planning can help inform those closest to you how to make healthcare decisions on your behalf should you be unable to make those decisions for yourself. This process may involve thinking and talking about complex and sensitive issues. Use this guide to write down thoughts or questions that you may have about advance care planning.

We encourage you to use this guide with its companion booklet Getting started. You can refer to this guide during discussions with your doctor, family, and other healthcare providers, and use it to inform your own Advance Care Directive.

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Your past experiences of health ...

Your past experiences and current beliefs can shape your views about medical treatment. You may have had an experience with a family member or friend who was faced with a decision about medical care near the end of life. This may have been a difficult experience for you and led you to have certain views regarding what kinds of medical treatments you may or may not want in the future.

Think about it ...

Have you or anyone else you know had a positive or a difficult experience with healthcare?

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__________________________________________________________________________

Are there things that you wish could have been done differently?

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__________________________________________________________________________

Are there any medical treatments that you have experienced or seen others experience that influence your views?

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__________________________________________________________________________

Do you have any questions about these that you wish to ask your doctor?

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__________________________________________________________________________

Your current health ...

You may be healthy now, or you may be experiencing health problems. It is worth thinking about your health while keeping in mind the things that you value, goals you may want to achieve and the place of spirituality in your life.

Think about it ...

Thinking about your health now, list any significant health problems that concern you.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

How may the qualities of your life that you value, and your beliefs about religion or spirituality, affect your choice of medical treatments?

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__________________________________________________________________________
Your future health ...

You may have thoughts on the kinds of health problems that could affect you in the future. The medical treatments that you choose may also be based upon your values and goals.

Think about it ...

What short or long-term goals do you have?

If you are receiving medical treatment, how might the treatment help or prevent you from accomplishing these goals?

Who should make decisions?

It is a good idea to think about who you would want to make decisions about your health if you are unable to make those decisions for yourself. Many people select a close family member, but you can pick any adult who you think could best represent you. You may wish to legally nominate a substitute decision-maker (the form for this differs in each state/territory).

The person that you choose needs to be:

- aged 18 or over
- trusted to follow the values and instructions you have discussed
- willing to accept this responsibility
- available to take on the role if required
- able to make decisions in stressful situations.

Think about it ...

How would you want decisions regarding your medical treatment to be made if you could not make them for yourself?

Who would you want to have making these decisions?

Would you also like your family and/or other members from your community (e.g. religious advisor) involved?
How to make decisions

It helps to plan for situations where you may:
- become unexpectedly incapable of making your own decisions, and
- it is clear you will have little or no recovery, and
- the injury or loss of function is significant.

Such situations might arise because of an injury to the brain from an accident, a stroke, or a slowly progressive condition like Alzheimer’s disease.

To plan for this type of situation, some people might say: 'If I’m going to be a vegetable, let me go', or 'Don’t keep me alive on machines', or 'I want everything'.

While these remarks are a beginning, they need to be more specific to guide decision-making. Clearer statements such as ‘I do want/do not want treatments that can keep me alive’ can assist in planning. Your doctor can help you understand this. It is important to then discuss these choices with those closest to you.

Think about it ...

Write down the aspects of your life that you value. This may include your independence, activities you enjoy, communicating with your loved ones, etc.

If you could no longer participate in the above parts of your life, are there any situations where you would regard life prolonging treatments to be overly burdensome and prefer them to be stopped or withheld?
To do …

- Discuss your thoughts with those close to you – your family, substitute decision-maker, your GP and other involved healthcare providers.
- Ask your doctor any questions that you may have regarding your health and medical treatments.
- Seek advice from the advance care planning advisory service or access information on the website resource hub.
- Legally nominate your substitute decision-maker for medical treatment on a Medical Enduring Power of Attorney/Guardian form (or equivalent) and advise this person/these people. Your doctor can witness this form.
- Complete an **Advance Care Directive** (instructional and/or values), and provide to your doctor/s, other healthcare providers, your substitute decision-maker, family and those involved in your care.
- Discuss any changes as soon as you think of them and also make these changes to your forms.

**Contact us**

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Advance care planning advice
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