

What is advance care planning?

Advance care planning involves planning for your future health care. It enables you to make some decisions now about the health care you would or would not like to receive if you were unable to communicate your preferences or make treatment decisions. This might happen after an accident, due to illness or near the end of your life.

Everyone should consider advance care planning, regardless of their age or health. If you become seriously ill or injured, and you haven't documented your preferences or identified a substitute decision-maker, doctors will consider treatments based on their assessment of your best interests. This may include treatments and treatment outcomes that you would not want.

In these situations, doctors may ask someone you are close to, like a family member, for their opinions about your medical treatments and care. This can be very hard for them if they don't know your preferences.

Advance care planning gives you the chance to:

- talk to your family, friends and doctors about how you would like to be cared for in the future
- write down your own preferences for care and medical treatments in an advance care directive (see 'the law and advance care planning' overleaf)
- choose who you would like to make medical treatment and care decisions for you.

Benefits for you and the people close to you

Advance care planning:

- helps to ensure your preferences and values about health care are known and respected if you are too unwell to speak for yourself
- assists those who are close to you. Families of those who have done advance care planning have less anxiety and stress when asked to make important health care decisions for other people¹.

Writing your preferences down in an advance care directive allows you to say what you would want. This can give peace of mind to you and comfort to others as preferences are clear, understood and more readily respected.

What do you need to do?

Be open

- Think 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. (See 'The law and advance care planning' overleaf.)

Ideally, they need to be:

- available (live close by in the same region)
- over the age of 18 years
- prepared to speak on your behalf and make the decisions you would make when required by 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/create-your-plan and find the forms for your state or territory. Your doctor or other health professional can support you to write down your choices. You can also contact the National Advance Care Planning Support Service for free advice and printed forms.

More information: advancecareplanning.org.au

1. Detering KM, Hancock AD, Reade MC and Silvester W, The impact of advance care planning on end of life care in elderly patients: randomised controlled trial, BMJ. 2010; 340: c1345.

Be heard

- A written advance care directive will make things easier for your substitute decision-maker(s), if the need arises. It will give everyone peace of mind, knowing your preferences will be heard and respected.
- Make copies and store them with:
 - > your substitute decision-maker(s) and family members
 - > your GP/local doctor and specialist(s)
 - > other care providers such as your aged care home or hospital.

We also recommend uploading a copy of all advance care planning documents to My Health Record.

- Review your advance care directive regularly – for instance every year, or if there is a change in your health, personal or living circumstances. If you make changes, share copies with the people mentioned above and upload the new document to My Health Record.

The law and advance care planning

Different states and territories in Australia have different laws on advance care planning. For example, in some states and territories, there are important rules regarding who can witness documents for you.

Some states also have documents that allow people to write down their values and preferences only. These forms are not legally binding but may guide doctors and decision-makers when making decisions. These forms may be called a Statement of Choices or My Values and Preferences.

When planning for your own future health care, it will be helpful to understand the advance care planning process and the law in your own state/territory.

See advancecareplanning.org.au/create-your-plan for information.

Depending on your state/territory:

- a legal Substitute Decision-Maker may also be called an Attorney, Enduring Guardian, Enduring Power of Attorney, 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.

Conversation starters

Speak to your family and others close to you about your views and preferences for your health care.

To get started, choose a quiet setting where you won't be interrupted.

Let the conversation happen naturally. There may be laughter and tears, grief and acceptance. You don't need to talk about everything all at once. Remember that advance care planning is an ongoing conversation.

The more your loved ones understand your preferences, the easier it will be for them to help guide your medical treatment. Tell them what treatment outcomes you would consider acceptable and which ones you would find unacceptable.

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

- What I value and enjoy most in my life are ...
- I was thinking about what happened to ... and I realised that I ...
- I would want ... to make medical decisions on my behalf if I was unable to do so
- If ... happened to me, I would want ... because ...

Explore your reasons for these answers and your feelings to help your family understand your preferences.

Where can I get more information?

Advance Care Planning Australia™

 advancecareplanning.org.au

 National Advance Care Planning Support Service™
1300 208 582

For free support call 9am–5pm (AEST/AEDT)
Monday to Friday

 learning.advancecareplanning.org.au