

Advance Care Planning

What You and Your Loved Ones Should Know

Advance care planning is for all adults and ensures people know what you want when it comes to health care decisions. It outlines your health care values and documents what providers and loved ones need to know if you can't speak for yourself.

What is an advance directive?

An advance directive is a legal document that defines your medical care preferences and end-of-life wishes if you are unable to make your own decisions. It includes:

1. A living will that states your wishes about medical care.
2. The medical power of attorney documenting who you choose to make health care decisions for you if you are unable. This document may also be called a health care proxy, appointment of health care agent or durable power of attorney for health care, and the person you pick may be listed as a health care agent, surrogate, attorney-in-fact or health care proxy.

In Virginia, your advance directive needs two witnesses, but it doesn't have to be notarized. Virginia also honors advance directives from other states. However, if you spend a lot of time in another state, you might want to have an advance directive there as well.

Make sure people know you have an advance directive and where it is.

- Give a copy to your health care agent and your providers and loved ones.
- Bring a copy to the hospital.
- Keep a copy in a safe place that's easy to find; don't keep your only copy in a lock-box or safe.

You can cancel or change your advance directive at any time, especially if your health changes, but tell others if you do and keep updated records of changes.



What is a living will?

A living will is part of an advance directive that guides your loved ones and health care teams through your medical treatment preferences if you can't communicate. It is legal as soon as you and your witnesses sign it, and it goes into effect when you can't make your own decisions.

What is the medical power of attorney?

The medical power of attorney is where you assign a health care agent to make your medical decisions if you are unable to make them, especially during end-of-life care or serious medical situations. It goes into effect when your provider says you can't make your own medical decisions.

Who should I select as my health care agent?

You can choose any adult (18 or older) to be your health care agent. While they don't have to live in Virginia, they must know your preferred care decisions. Your health care agent should be someone you trust, like a close family member or good friend, who understands your wishes. Make sure they feel comfortable making health care decisions for you and talk to them about your wishes regularly. You should also pick a second agent in case your first choice is unwilling or unable to serve for any reason.

Understanding Life-Sustaining Treatments

Life-sustaining treatments are medical procedures used to keep someone alive when their body can't function on its own. You might want them if they can restore normal function or improve your condition, but if you have a serious illness, you may not want to prolong life with these treatments.

Choices often revolve around cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) orders, Durable DNR (DDNR) orders, Do Not Intubate (DNI) orders, and artificial nutrition and hydration.

What is a Physician's Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST) form?

A POLST form is a portable medical order for people who are seriously ill or frail. Based on the patient's wishes, it tells health care providers what to do in a medical emergency about CPR and other specific treatments. The form will be signed by the patient (or their surrogate), the facilitator who helped complete the form and the patient's provider.

What is cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)?

CPR is used when your heart or breathing stops. It may include chest compressions, electrical stimulation or medication to support or restore heart function or inserting a tube into your windpipe to support breathing.

What is the difference between DNR and DDNR orders?*

A **Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order** is a provider's order that prevents CPR if your heart or breathing stops while you are in a specific medical facility. It must be signed by a doctor and can be canceled anytime. It usually ends when you transfer to another health care facility and may not be honored during surgery.

A **Durable Do Not Resuscitate (DDNR) order** is a DNR intended to communicate your wishes about resuscitation to EMS, fire and rescue, and other health care providers. It doesn't expire and is issued by a doctor. **If the DDNR order is signed by the patient, only the patient may revoke it.**

**While DNR and DDNR orders are created to provide future guidance on medical care, they are medical orders and are not considered an advance directive. Additionally, Virginia EMS providers CANNOT honor a living will or a DNR from another state.*

What is a Do Not Intubate (DNI) order?

Intubation is the insertion of a tube in your nose or mouth to help you breathe. If you do not want life mechanically sustained in this way, you must discuss this with your provider. Having a DNR order does not mean you have refused to be intubated.

What is artificial nutrition and hydration?

This treatment gives you food and fluids when you have a serious illness and can't eat or drink.

Do advance directives include wishes about organ donation, cremation or burial?

Yes, your advance directive can include your wishes on other end-of-life choices. If it does not, you can write down your choices separately and keep it with your advance directive.



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