



Let's Talk: Advance Care Planning

What is advance care planning?

Advance Care Planning is making sure the people who matter know what matters most to you. It includes thinking about, talking about, and writing down your wishes for future health care. It also includes important legal documents.

Why is advance care planning important?

It is your right to make decisions about your health care. If you are very sick, injured, or nearing the end of your life and you cannot communicate, someone will make decisions for you. Thinking about, talking about, and writing down your wishes for future health care makes sure your wishes are known and can be honored. If you don't plan, the decisions that are made may not be what you would have wanted and this can also be very difficult for your loved ones.

Who should plan for future care?

Everyone. If you are age 18 or older and live in Wisconsin, there is no person who can automatically make health care decisions for you if you cannot (such as your spouse or next of kin). Others who should plan include people who have high risk jobs or who engage in high risk activities, people who are caregivers or health care professionals, people who live with chronic and/or serious illness, and people who are nearing the end of their life.

When should I plan?

Start planning now. Continue your conversations and update your legal documents as your life and health change. Starting when you are young and healthy will help you to be more prepared if you have a health crisis. You can also help your loved ones talk about and write down wishes for care.

How do I plan?

1. **Think** about what matters to you.
2. **Choose** your Health Care Agent(s).
3. **Complete** an Advance Directive and share it with loved ones, your health care professionals, and others you trust.
4. **Repeat** this process as your life and health change.

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Let's Talk: Health Care Agent

What is a health care agent?

Your health care agent (sometimes called your power of attorney for health care) makes health care decisions for you if you cannot. Health care agents may be needed for many reasons like if you are very sick, injured, or nearing the end of your life. You must choose your health care agent *before* you need them.

What decisions does a health care agent make?

Health care agents cannot make decisions for you unless you are not able. At that point, your health care agent may make decisions about:

- Your medical care, such as tests, medicine, surgery, and other treatments
- The location where you will receive medical care
- Who your doctor(s) will be
- Who has access to your medical records

Who should be my health care agent?

If you are an adult living in Wisconsin, you must choose your health care agent. Per state law, there is no person who can automatically make health care decisions for you (such as your spouse or next of kin) if you cannot. Your health care agent does not need to be related to you. Choose someone who:

- You trust to make decisions that are best for you
- Will follow your wishes even if they do not always agree with them
- You talk to regularly about what is most important to you
- Is willing to be your health care agent
- Can make decisions in high stress situations

The person you choose may decide they are unable or unwilling to be your health care agent at any time. If you are able, ask 1-2 other people that you trust to be your alternate health care agents.

How do I make it legal?

Complete a Power of Attorney for Health Care document to legally name your health care agent. You can get a document from your doctor's office or the Fox Valley Advance Care Planning Partnership. Help is available, if you need it. Once it is done, share your document with your loved ones and other people you trust. Send or bring a copy to your doctor's office to keep in your medical record.

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