

# **Advance Healthcare Directives**

## **What is an Advance Healthcare Directive?**

An Advance Healthcare Directive, also sometimes called a living will, is a document that lets you express your choices to accept or refuse medical care if you become unable to express those choices yourself. An Advance Healthcare Directive tells your doctor what kind of treatment you want and what kind you do not want when it comes to the use of extraordinary procedures and treatment. For example, you can express if you want IV fluids or life support in the event you need them. You can also express who you want to make decisions for you in the event you cannot make them yourself. This person is listed in the form as your agent. You can also express your organ donation preferences as well as any other information you want your doctor or family to know concerning your treatment.

## **Who needs an Advance Healthcare Directive?**

Even the youngest and healthiest of adults need an Advance Healthcare Directive because you never know when an accident or illness could occur. Preparing an Advance Healthcare Directive is important because it gives you the power to decide what you want in the event of an emergency instead of leaving the decisions up to someone else who you may not know or may not want making those decisions for you.

## **Who can prepare an Advance Healthcare Directive?**

Anyone who is competent can prepare an Advance Healthcare Directive. A competent person is one who understands and appreciates the natures and consequences of a decision to accept or refuse treatment.

## **What is required to make an Advance Healthcare Directive?**

To make an Advance Healthcare Directive, you must fill out a special form from the State. You do not need a lawyer to fill out the form. You only need to fill it out and give it to your doctors, local hospital, and your agent and successive agent listed in the form. You should also keep a copy in your files somewhere that can be easily found. It must be signed in front of a notary or 2 witnesses. At least 1 witness has to be someone who is not related to you and you should have witnesses who will not inherit any of your property. To get a copy of the form in English [click here](#). To get a copy of the form in Spanish, [click here](#).

## **What is an agent?**

The person listed as your agent in the advance directive form is a person you choose to make the healthcare decisions for you if you cannot make them yourself. The agent has to follow your instructions in the form about the care you do and do not want. If a decision must be made about your healthcare that you did not already explain your preference for in the Advance Healthcare Directive, then the agent has the power to make those decisions on your behalf. The alternate agent will have the same power if for any reason the first agent is not available or refuses to make the decision for you.

## **What if I want to be cremated?**

It is a good idea to include cremation wishes in an Advance Healthcare Directive rather than other documents since an Advance Healthcare Directive is more easily accessible and usually becomes part of a patient's medical file.

## **What do I do with my Advance Healthcare Directive after it is prepared?**

You should deliver a copy of the completed form with the signatures or notary stamp to your doctor, local hospital, the agent, and the alternate agent listed in your form. You should also keep a copy in your records in a place where it can be easily found.

# What if I change my mind?

You can change your Advance Healthcare Directive at any time by completing a new form and distributing it to anyone who had a copy of the first Advanced Healthcare Directive in addition to any new people who will need it like a new doctor or new agent.

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