

# Advance Care Planning 101

Learn about advance care planning and why it's important to speak with the person you're caring for about their wishes.

Like many caregivers, you've probably heard about advance care planning, but you still have questions. What exactly is it? Who needs it? Why is it important? And how are you supposed to tackle it while handling your other responsibilities? Like so many aspects of caregiving, advance care planning can seem overwhelming. But read on. This quick guide will help equip you to assist your loved one get this important task squared away.

## What is it?

Advance care planning involves making decisions about how someone wants their health needs handled ahead of time — and letting family members and health care providers know those preferences.

**Typically, an advance care plan is formalized in a legal document called an *advance directive*. This only goes into effect when a person is unable to speak for themselves due to a medical emergency, disease or severe injury. An important part of advance directives for those who may be aging is the ability to express values and desires about end-of-life care.**



## Who needs it?

Just about everyone. All of us could one day have a medical crisis or emergency that leaves us unable to communicate our own health care choices, which is why it's smart and practical to have an advance care plan in place. That way, preferences are documented, and families and medical teams are aware of precise wishes.

### Why is it important?

When you encourage the person in your care to create an advance directive, you're taking essential steps to honor their wishes in the event of a medical crisis or end-of-life care. There's more: You're also removing the burden of ever having to make tough decisions on your loved one's behalf. These types of decisions may include whether or not to allow doctors to use life-sustaining emergency treatments like CPR, ventilators or artificial nutrition. It can be comforting to have these decisions in place ahead of time, and can also help avoid needless guilt, uncertainty and arguments.

### How do you get started?

This simple checklist shows you the steps needed to get advance care planning in place for your friend or family member.

- **Have open and honest discussions** with the person in your care. Do so while everyone can still make decisions. **Information** from the Administration on Aging that can help you prepare for this important conversation.
- **Create advance care planning documents.** These can list specific health care, financial and end-of-life wishes. Depending on your state's regulations, you may need to have the form notarized. A family attorney can also guide you through the process and paperwork, but you will of course have to pay a fee. Keep these documents in one place, but make copies to give to doctors.
- **Update the documents** if circumstances change.
- **Ask your friend or family member to give permission in advance** for a doctor or lawyer to talk directly with you as needed.

### What comes next?

Once you have helped the person in your care with advance planning, what you can do — aside from keeping documents updated as needed — is rest easy. After all, you've helped do everything you can to make sure their values and desires will be honored, and that's a huge caregiving accomplishment.

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Sources:

National Institute on Aging

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/>

American Bar Association: State-specific advance directive forms

[https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/law\\_aging/2018-links-to-state-specific-advance-directive-forms.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/law_aging/2018-links-to-state-specific-advance-directive-forms.pdf)

Eldercare Locator: Starting the conversation about health, legal, financial and end-of-life issues

<https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/Resources/Brochures/docs/Conversations.pdf>

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