



# About Advance Directives

## What is an Advance Directive?

An **Advance Directive** is a legal document. It is a way for you to state ahead of time the type of medical treatment and care you would want if you get seriously injured or very sick. It is also a way for you to name someone as your **“health care proxy,”** a person who will speak with doctors about these treatments if you are too sick to speak for yourself. **Advance Directives often include a Living Will and a Health Care Proxy.**

## What is a Living Will?

A **Living Will** goes by many names. Some states refer to it as a **Declaration** or **Health Care Directive**. A Living Will has details about the types of medical care you do and do not want if you were seriously injured, very sick, or near the end of life. You can complete a Living Will yourself and do not need help from a lawyer. Each state has its own rules that you need to follow.

A Living Will is not the same as a “Will and Testament” (or simply a “Will”) that states what you want to happen with your money and property after you die.

## What is a Health Care Proxy?

A **Health Care Proxy** goes by many names. Some states refer to this person as a **Health Care Agent, Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care, or Health Care Surrogate**. All these names have the same meaning.

A Health Care Proxy is a way for you to name someone to speak about your medical treatment and care if you are too sick to speak for yourself. Your Health Care Proxy can talk with the doctor,

nurses, and others on the healthcare team about treatment choices you made a while ago along with any new decisions that must be made now.

**It is up to you to choose someone as your Health Care Proxy.** This may be a family member, close friend, or someone else you want to speak with the healthcare team about your treatment and care choices.



It is important to talk with them ahead of time so that he or she knows your values and wishes. Then, if you are very sick and cannot speak for yourself, your Health Care Proxy can talk with the healthcare team about your treatment choices.

## Do I Need an Advance Directive?

No, it is your choice whether to have an Advance Directive. Most doctors and patients find it helpful to have this legal document. Talk with your healthcare team and loved ones about whether this is something you should do. If you decide to fill out an Advance Directive, make sure that your Health Care Proxy, your family, and your doctor have a copy of it.

There are many ways to learn more about an Advance Directive. A good place to start is by talking with your doctor. ■