

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES

What You Should Know



What if you were too ill to understand *your* treatment options or to tell your doctor what treatment you want? Decide what is best for **YOU.**

Advance Directive

An advance directive is a legal form that helps your doctors and family members understand your wishes about medical and mental health care. It can help them decide about treatments if you are too ill to decide for yourself. For example, if you are unconscious or too weak to talk. There are two types of advance directives: durable power of attorney for health care and living will.

Durable Power of Attorney

A durable health care power of attorney (HPOA) allows you to name the person you trust to make health care decisions if you can't make them for yourself—this person is also frequently referred to as a *health care agent* or a *health care surrogate*.

You can choose any adult to become your health care agent; this person does not have to be related to you, or even live close by. It's best to choose someone you trust, someone who knows your values, because he or she will then have the legal right to make health care decisions for you if you are unable to.

If you don't choose a health care agent, your doctor will choose someone to make decisions for you in the following order: legal guardian (if you have one), spouse, adult child, parent, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, or a close friend. Your health care team, or a court, will make decisions for you in accordance with VA policy if none of the above is available. In this case, there is a risk that the person appointed may not be the person you would have chosen. For instance, this individual may be someone you don't feel close to, or someone with values very different than your own.

Living Will

A living will is a legal form that states what kinds of treatment you *would* or *would not* want if you become ill and can't decide for yourself. This form helps your health care agent make decisions just as you would for yourself if you could. Completing a living will can greatly relieve your loved ones from worrying that they have made the right decision for you. If you don't have a living will, decisions will be made for you based on what is known about you in general and about your values.

Should I Have An Advance Directive? Am I Required To Have One?

Yes, it's a good idea to have one. An advance directive helps protect your right to make your own choices. It helps make sure people respect your values and wishes if you can't speak for yourself. Your *advance directive is used only when you aren't able to make decisions yourself*.

No, you are not required to complete an advance directive.

How Do I Complete An Advance Directive?

Fill out VA Form 10-0137, "VA Advance Directive: Durable Power of Attorney and Living Will." Or use any valid state advance directive form. Talk to your VA Social Worker at VA Butler Healthcare who can provide more education to you, help you clarify your wishes, and assist you with completing a health care HPOA. Your VA health care team can make your advance directive part of your medical record.

May I Change My Advance Directive?

Yes, you may change or cancel your advance directive at any time. In fact, you should review your advance directive periodically, especially if there is a change in your health, to make sure it's up to date. If you change it, be sure to tell your health care team and have them put it in your health record. Share your new directive with your family members and other loved ones.

For more information about Advance Directives, contact your VA Butler Healthcare Social Worker, or visit www.butler.va.gov/patients/advance.asp