

## What is Advance Care Planning?

Advance care planning is a **process** of understanding, reflecting on and discussing future medical decisions, including end-of-life preferences. It may include:

- **Understanding** your health care condition and treatment options.
- **Clarifying** your health care wishes and defining what “living well” means to you.
- **Weighing** your options about what types of care and treatment you would want or not want.
- **Choosing** a health care agent who can speak for you if you become injured or ill and unable to communicate, and deciding to complete and advance directive.
- **Communicating** your wishes and sharing any documents with your family, friends, clergy, advisors, physicians and other health care professionals.

## Important Facts

Eighty percent of people say that if seriously ill, they would want to talk to their doctor about end-of-life care, but only 7% report having had end-of-life conversation with their doctor.<sup>1</sup>

- Eighty-two percent of people say it’s important to put their wishes in writing, 23 percent have actually done it.<sup>1</sup>
- Seventy-five percent of physicians whose patient had an advance directive were not aware that it existed.<sup>2</sup>

### References:

<sup>1</sup> Survey of Californians by the California Healthcare Foundation (2012)

<sup>2</sup> Critical Care Journal (2007)

### For information, call

Aspirus Customer Contact Center at 715.847.2380 or 800.847.4707 to request a FREE appointment or reach our Advance Care Planning WARM LINE at 715.843.1340. The WARM LINE is available during normal business hours. Staff will respond to your basic questions about advance care planning.

[aspirus.org](http://aspirus.org)

330 E Lakeside St.  
PO Box 1109, Madison, WI 53701-1109  
Toll free 866.442.3800  
[hcw@wismed.org](mailto:hcw@wismed.org)  
[www.honoringchoiceswisconsin.org](http://www.honoringchoiceswisconsin.org)



The name “Honoring Choices Wisconsin” is used under license from East Metro Medical Society Foundation. RESPECTING CHOICES® is a registered mark under license from Gunderson Lutheran Medical Foundation, Inc.



AD-024 (08/27/19)

**Advance Care Planning**  
It's About the Conversation



# Advance Care Planning: *How to Begin*

## 1 Reflect on Your Values

Who we are, what we believe and what we value are all shaped by experiences we have had. Religion, family traditions, jobs and friends affect us deeply. Reflecting on your experiences will help you clarify your beliefs. Ask yourself the following questions:

### *Looking back*

Has anything happened in my past that shaped my feelings about medical treatment? What was positive about that? What do I wish had happened differently?

### *Here and now*

Do I have any significant health problems now? What kind of things bring me so much joy that if a health problem prevented me from doing them, life would have little meaning?

### *If ill*

Do I understand my illness and the complications that may occur? What fears or worries do I have about my illness or medical care?

## 2 Choose a Health Care Agent

An important part of planning is to appoint someone to make your health care decisions if you are injured or ill and unable to communicate.

Many people select a close family member, but you may choose anyone you think could best represent you. It's important to appoint at least one alternate person in case your first choice becomes unable or unwilling to represent you. You should appoint someone who:

- You can trust.
- Will accept this responsibility.
- Is willing to follow the values and instructions you have discussed, including the spiritual perspectives – even if he or she does not always agree with your choices.
- Can manage conflict and make decisions in some difficult situations.

## 3 Explore Goals for Treatment

Clarifying your goals for care will help guide your health care agent and health professionals. Discuss these questions with your health care agent:

- When would it make sense to continue certain treatments in an effort to prolong life or seek recovery?
- When would it make sense to stop or withhold certain treatments and accept death when it comes?
- Under any circumstances, what kind of comfort care would I want, including medical, spiritual and environmental options?
- What are my personal, cultural or religious beliefs and how do they affect my decisions?

Take time to talk with your health care agent so they understand your thoughts about what “living well” means to you. Share your thoughts about:

- If and when the burdens of life may outweigh the benefits.
- Treatments that may keep you alive.
- What quality of life means to you.
- How you would describe a peaceful death.

## 4 Complete an Advance Directive

Based on your understanding, reflection and discussions, carefully complete your written advance directive.

- Give copies to your health care agent and health care professionals.
- Talk to the rest of your family and close friends. Tell them who your health care agent is and what your wishes are.
- Keep a copy of your advance directive where it can be easily found and accessed, now in a safe deposit box or locked drawer.
- Take a copy with you if you go to a hospital or nursing home and ask for it to be put in your medical record.
- Review the document regularly. Remember, advance care planning is a *process*, not a one-time event. Wishes may change as circumstances change.

Advance care planning is one of the best gifts you can give to the people you love, and it starts with a conversation.