Getting Your Ducks in a Row: A Simple Guide to Making Your Healthcare Wishes Known

None of us knows what the future may hold. Advance care planning gives you an opportunity to think about what matters to you, decide who you trust to speak for you, and put your wishes in writing—before someone else has to make decisions for you.

Start with What Matters to You

Before filling out a form, take some time to think about your values, priorities, and wishes.

Ask yourself:

- What makes life meaningful to me?
- What would I want my loved ones and healthcare team to know about me?
- What kinds of care would I want if I became seriously ill?
- What would quality of life mean to me?
- Are there treatments or situations I would have strong feelings about?
- What questions do I have for my health care provider?

You don't have to have every answer. The goal is to start thinking and talking.

Choose Someone You Trust

A **Health Care Proxy** allows you to name a person you trust to make healthcare decisions for you if you become unable to make them yourself.

Choose someone who:

- Knows you well
- Will listen to and respect your wishes
- Can make difficult decisions
- Is willing to speak up for you
- Understands that their job is to represent your wishes, not their own

Talk with the person you choose. Make sure they are willing to take on this role and understand what matters to you.

Put Your Wishes in Writing

Advance directives are documents that can help communicate your healthcare wishes if you are unable to communicate or make decisions for yourself.

Depending on your needs and circumstances, these may include:

- **Health Care Proxy** - Names the person you choose to make health care decisions for you if you cannot make them yourself.
- **Living Will** - Provides written instructions about your healthcare wishes, particularly regarding end-of-life care.
- **Do Not Resuscitate Order (DNR)** - Documents your wish not to receive CPR if your heart stops beating or you stop breathing.
- **Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (MOLST)** - A medical order used to document and communicate certain treatment preferences, particularly for people with serious illness or changing health needs. Talk with your healthcare provider about whether a MOLST is appropriate for you.

You may not need every document. Your healthcare provider can help you understand which documents are appropriate for your situation.

Share Your Plan

Don't let your completed documents sit in a drawer where no one knows they exist.

Give copies to:

- Your Health Care Proxy
- Your primary care provider and other important healthcare providers
- People close to you who may need to know your wishes
- Your healthcare facility, if applicable

Store your original documents somewhere easy for you and your trusted contacts to find. It can also be helpful to keep a list of who has a copy and where your original documents are located.

Review Your Documents from Time to Time

Your wishes can change—and that's okay.

Review your advance care planning documents:

- After a major change in your health
- After a major life change
- If the person you've chosen as your health care agent is no longer the right person
- If your wishes change
- Periodically, even if nothing has changed

Make sure your health care agent's contact information is current and that your healthcare providers have your most recent documents. A good tip is to set an annual calendar reminder on your phone to check in on your wishes and make sure your documents still reflect what matters to you.

Where Do I Get Started?

There are several resources available to help you learn more, ask questions, and put your wishes into writing.

- **New York State Department of Health** — Find free information and forms for Health Care Proxies, Living Wills, DNR orders, and MOLST. Visit health.ny.gov and search "Advance Directives" or "Health Care Proxy."
- **Your Healthcare Provider** — Talk with your doctor or other healthcare professional about your options, medical questions, and how different treatments may fit with your wishes and goals for care.
- **CareFirstNY Hospice Social Workers** — If you or a loved one is receiving hospice care, our social workers can help you access advance care planning resources, understand the process, facilitate conversations, and work through questions about documenting and communicating your wishes. Call (607) 962-3100 or visit CareFirstNY.org for more information.

Your Voice Matters

Advance care planning isn't about predicting the future. It's about making sure your voice can still be heard if you aren't able to speak for yourself—take the first step and start the conversation today.



Questions about advance care planning?
Contact CareFirstNY:
(607) 962-3100
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CareFirstNY.org