



Advance Health Care Directives

What is an Advance Health Care Directive?

- It is a legal document that allows you to appoint an agent to make health care decisions for you if you are unable to speak for yourself;
- It also allows you to specify the medical treatment you want (and do not want) to guide your agent and health care providers in the future.
- You may designate post-mortem decisions, such as donation of body parts or whether you would like to be buried or not.

Why is an Advance Health Care Directive important?

- It gives you the ability to take control of your health care and determine who will speak for you
- It gives loved ones the ability to care for you if you become incapacitated
- It may diminish the need for a conservatorship, an expensive and cumbersome legal process in which a court appoints a legal representative to handle your financial and personal affairs

How does an Advance Health Care Directive work?

- It only becomes effective if you are unable to speak for yourself (unless you decide to make it effective immediately)
- You do not have to complete both parts of the directive. If you do not have someone to appoint as an agent, you can still make your health care decisions. Similarly, if you do not want to specify any health care directives, you can still appoint a trusted person to be your agent.
- You can designate an alternate agent in case your first agent is unavailable or unwilling to act.
- You can revoke and create a new AHCD at any time so long as you are mentally competent.
- AHCDs do not expire, but you should review them periodically and create a new one if your health care choices change or you decide that you want to change your agent.

Questions to ask yourself when appointing an agent....

- Is this someone who knows you well and understands you?
- Will this individual be willing to speak on your behalf?
- Would this person be able to act on your wishes and not his/her own?
- Will this individual be available long into the future?
- Will this person be a strong advocate for you?

Planning now can make your life—and the lives of those who love you—better.

- Incapacity can happen gradually, as when we near the end of life, or suddenly as when we suffer from a stroke or other health crisis. If not planned for, incapacity can create a myriad of problems. Taking action while you can make sound decisions will help you and your loved ones manage your care in the future.