

# ADVANCE CARE PLANNING



**Advance care planning** is a **process** (not just a specific piece of paper or legal document) that helps us reflect on, understand and discuss values and preferences when it comes to medical and end-of-life decisions. It's a process that **all adults 18 and over should be thinking about** (not just the elderly), since an accident or medical crisis can leave anyone, of any age, unable to make his or her own healthcare decisions. By having preferences clearly spelled out, you reduce the decision-making burden on family members, and you have peace of mind that your wishes will be known.

## The steps for advance care planning typically include:

**Reflecting on your values.** Who you are, what you believe and what you find important can help you decide which healthcare treatment options are right for you. Consider how you feel about treatments that extend your quantity (length) versus quality (experience) of life, which comfort measure you would like to support your physical, spiritual, and mental well-being at death, which treatments may be contrary to your personal, cultural or religious beliefs, etc.

**Choosing a healthcare agent.** A healthcare agent is the person who will make decisions for you in case you are too injured or ill to make them known yourself. Your agent should be trustworthy, willing to accept the responsibility, willing to follow your wishes, and someone who can manage conflict and decision-making. Many times, this person is a spouse or close family member, but it doesn't have to be!

**Completing an advance care directive.** Though advance care planning is a process, by completing an advance directive, you are making sure there is a permanent place for your values, preferences, and goals to live and be known. An advance directive is a legal document that clearly spells out your wishes and your health care agent. *Honoring Choices Wisconsin* is a great organization that helps Wisconsin residents complete their advance directives.

**Having a conversation.** Having a plan is no good unless it is shared! Be sure to make copies of your advance directive, and share its information with your healthcare agent, family, friends, clergy, and healthcare professionals. Visit [www.theconversationproject.org](http://www.theconversationproject.org) for helpful tools on how to have these conversations.

## The importance of reviewing your advance care directive every now and then -

Your healthcare wishes may change over time as the result of certain life events. Revisit and review your advance directive periodically or whenever one of the 5 D's occur:

- Decade
- New diagnosis
- Divorce
- Decline in health
- Death of a loved one

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Honoring Choices Wisconsin:  
[www.honoringchoiceswi.org](http://www.honoringchoiceswi.org)

National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization: [www.nhpco.org](http://www.nhpco.org)

National Institute on Aging:  
[www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/advance-care-planning](http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/advance-care-planning)

The Conversation Project:  
[www.theconversationproject.org](http://www.theconversationproject.org)

