

Creating Your Advance Directive

🌐 Available in:

Español (<https://www.caringinfo.org/es/planificar/instrucciones-anticipadas/como-crear-sus-instrucciones-anticipadas/>).

The purpose of any advance directive is to enable you to speak for yourself and to let other people know what choices you have made and what is important to you. It is a really good idea to speak to those close to you as you are preparing your advance directive.

Remember that you are only half done until you discuss and share your advance directive with others and store your document (<https://www.caringinfo.org/planning/advance-directives/storing-advance-directive/>), in a safe and accessible place.

What Legal Documents Do You Need to Create?

The most useful directive varies by where you are in life. When you are young and healthy about all you can do is speak in general terms about your priorities. When a person develops a chronic condition or illness, they have a clearer idea of what may happen and can be more specific about what they want. When a person has a life-limiting condition, it becomes very important to be explicit about wishes.

Below are guides to the various stages:

- **You are healthy:** You want to complete an advance directive so, if something suddenly happens and you can't speak for yourself, others will know what you want in general terms. If nothing else, COVID (<https://www.caringinfo.org/planning/covid-19/>) has taught us that unexpected things happen.
- **You have a chronic condition:** You also want to complete an advance directive. Because you know about your disease and its course, you can be more specific in saying what you do and don't want.
- **You have a serious illness:** You also want to complete an advance directive. Because you know about your disease and its course, you can be more specific in saying what you do and don't want. Depending on the predicted course, you may also want to complete a POLST (<https://www.caringinfo.org/planning/advance-directives/polsts-are-portable-medical-orders/>).
- **You know you don't have long:** An advance directive may be useful as it contains more information and nuance than the POLST (<https://www.caringinfo.org/planning/advance-directives/polsts-are-portable-medical-orders/>), but you definitely want a POLST (<https://www.caringinfo.org/planning/advance-directives/polsts-are-portable-medical-orders/>), which is signed by a physician and specifies what treatments you want and don't want at the end of life.

How Do You Know What Kind of Treatments You Want or Don't Want?

If you have a specific disease or condition, learn as much as you can about it. Speak with your doctor and other healthcare providers, consult trustworthy websites such as WebMD and MayoClinic or the website of your own institution. The more you know, the better you will understand what treatments are likely, their benefits and risks, and how they fit into your values and view of life. Most of us don't really know what resuscitation for example looks and feels like. There are resources available to explain these and other terms to you:

- The Coalition for Compassionate Care of California (<https://coalitionccc.org/CCCC/Resources/Decision-Aids-for-Healthcare-Providers/CCCC/Resources/Decision-Aids-for-Healthcare-Providers.aspx>) has developed videos and decision aids in English, Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese describing various treatments (scroll to the thumbnails at the bottom of the page).
- Fair Health Consumer offers decision aids (<https://www.fairhealthconsumer.org/shared-decision-making>), as well as information on costs of care (<http://www.fairhealthconsumer.org>).

Are There Resources for Helping You Create Your Advance Directive and POLST?

There are. The best process for preparing to write an advance directive includes understanding your state of health, talking with people dear to you and thinking about what is important to you. Talk with a friend or family member, your physician or other provider, your clergy person—in short anyone who cares about you and is willing to help. Beyond that there are several websites that offer guided decision making around advance directives. Most are free to users, but you should always review the terms carefully before using.

In alphabetical order they are:

- *ADVault* offers MyDirectives.com (<http://MyDirectives.com>), a site that will guide you through completing your advance directive and appointing a healthcare agent. They offer a facilitated process, online signatures and notarization (if necessary), cloud storage, and availability around the globe.
- *Cake* (<http://www.joincake.com>) offers advance directives and information on other issues such as funeral arrangements and wills
- *Five Wishes* (<http://www.fivewishes.org>) is a program of Aging with Dignity and offers advance care planning resources to individuals and families at a nominal fee. They collaborate with ADVault for storage of your documents.
- Planning My Way (<http://www.planningmyway.org>) is a project of the Cunniff-Dixon Foundation. The website offers free guidance in advance care planning and documentation in both English and Spanish.
- *PREPARE for your Care* (<http://www.prepareforyourcare.org>) offers help in creating your documents as well as advance directives in English, Spanish and other languages. They can be completed online and downloaded for signature.

Learn more about how Advance Directives work together with Powers of Attorney, DNR orders, and POLSTs (<https://www.caringinfo.org/blog/types-of-documents-to-make-healthcare-wishes-known/>).

