

HEALTH CARE DIRECTIVES

Advance Care Planning is the process of coming to understand, discuss and plan for a time when you may not be able to make your own medical decisions.

Advance care planning for future healthcare choices is important to do while you are healthy and able to make your own decisions. Thinking and talking about difficult medical choices may be uncomfortable for you. Even if you feel close to loved ones, they may not know what you want for future medical care.

Give yourself and others peace of mind. Plan ahead while you are able. Talk with your family, doctor and other healthcare team members to understand the choices you have for medical treatment. Let them know what your healthcare wishes are.

Use this brochure to help start your advance care planning and create a Healthcare Directive.

Before creating a Healthcare Directive

Think about what matters most to you. Begin by asking:

- What are my values and beliefs about life and death, and the quality of life?
- Whom do I trust to make decisions for me if I can no longer make my own healthcare decisions?

For assistance in obtaining and completing a Healthcare Directive, contact Riverwood Social Services at (218) 927-5524.

What is a Healthcare Directive?

A Healthcare Directive is a written plan you make for your future medical treatments. A Healthcare Directive also is the document in which you can identify someone to communicate your wishes if you are unable to do so—this person is your healthcare agent.

A directive can help you:

- Make your voice heard so your wishes are followed.
- Prevent confusion and disagreement among family members and your doctor and healthcare team who want to follow your wishes.

Medical Treatment

A Healthcare Directive describes the medical treatments and life-sustaining measures you would or would not should and end-of-life situation occur. You may specify if, how and when you would want to:

- Continue treatment to try to stay alive.
- Stop or withhold certain treatment to die naturally.
- Receive comfort care (medical or spiritual) to experience a certain quality of life.

What happens if I do not have a Healthcare Directive?

If you do not have a written Healthcare Directive, you will still receive medical treatment.

Your healthcare team will listen to what people close to you say about your treatment wishes. Completing a directive helps to make sure your family and healthcare team follow your wishes.

How do I make a Healthcare Directive?

You do not need a lawyer to complete a Healthcare Directive or to have to use a specific form to write down your future healthcare wishes. However, the document you create as your Healthcare Directive must meet certain requirements to be legal.

Legal Requirements

You must be 18 years or older to create a Healthcare Directive. It must:

- Be in writing and dated
- State your name
- Be signed by you or someone you authorize to sign for you. You must do this at a time when you can understand and communicate your healthcare wishes.
- Have a notary public or 2 witnesses verify your signature.

Common forms for completing a Minnesota Healthcare Directive are available from Riverwood Social Services; call (218) 927-5524.

What should I put in a Healthcare Directive?

You may be as specific or general as you wish. Specific statements can:

- Clarify your goals for medical care for certain situations, such as permanent brain injury.
- Help guide your healthcare agent or doctor and other members of your care team in making decisions about your healthcare treatment.

Consider these examples of items to include in your directive:

- The names of your healthcare agent or agents, and alternative agents, in case your 1st choice is not available.
- Your goals, values and preferences about healthcare.
- Types of medical treatment you would or would not want, including emergency procedures such as CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitations) and life-sustaining treatments such as artificial nutrition and hydration (tube feeding) and use of a ventilator.
- Where you want to receive care.
- What to do if you are injured or get ill away from home.
- Instructions about mental health treatments that use electroshock therapy or neuroleptic medications.
- Donation of organs, tissues and eyes.
- Funeral arrangements.

What should not go in a Healthcare Directive?

You cannot ask for healthcare treatment that is beyond reasonable medical practice. You also cannot ask for assisted suicide.

What is a Healthcare Agent?

A healthcare agent is a person who will make medical decisions for you if you are unable to make or communicate medical decisions yourself.

Completing a Healthcare Directive form and choosing a healthcare agent (also known as power of attorney for healthcare or substitute decision-maker) are key to preparing for an unpredictable future. Other people will know what you want if you cannot tell them because of illness or injury.

Your agent makes sure your healthcare team follows what you specify in your Healthcare Directive. He or she may need to:

- Make decisions about your medical care, including medications, tests, surgery or end-of-life care.
- Choose doctors or other healthcare team members, or a care facility.
- Review and release medical records.
- Stop treatment, if in your stated wishes.

Choosing a healthcare agent

Your healthcare agent should be someone whom you know well and trust to follow your wishes, such as a family member or friend. Your healthcare agent cannot be your doctor or another member of your healthcare team, unless your doctor or healthcare team member is a family member or you give reasons for choosing this person in your Healthcare Directive.

Before naming a healthcare agent, talk with this person to be sure he/she:

- Is willing to serve as your healthcare agent.
- Can make the decisions you want, even if he or she disagrees with them.
- Is not easily intimidated by other family members, friends or medical professionals.
- Can make major medical decisions related to life and death under stress.

To help make sure your healthcare agent understands your wishes, be sure to review your Healthcare Directive with him/her. You may want your agent to help you write your directive.

Be as specific about your wishes as possible. Sometimes people make general statements such as "Make sure I am comfortable," or "No heroics." Your healthcare agent may not understand what you mean.

What should I do with my Healthcare Directive after I complete it?

Do I need to talk to my doctor?

Talking with your doctor about your healthcare wishes is important but not a legal requirement. Your doctor can check that your Healthcare Directive is clear and complete. Your doctor can also confirm if your healthcare team will follow your wishes.

What if my healthcare team will not follow my Healthcare Directive?

As long as your healthcare wishes follow reasonable medical practice, healthcare teams generally will follow your directive or instructions from your healthcare agent. Healthcare teams cannot follow requests for treatment that do not help you or may harm you.

If your healthcare team is unable to follow your stated wishes or your healthcare agent's directions about your healthcare treatments, the healthcare team must:

- Inform your healthcare agent.

- Document the discussion in your medical record.
- Allow your healthcare agent to transfer your care to another healthcare team or facility who will follow your wishes.

Where should I keep my Healthcare Directive?

- Give copies of your signed Healthcare Directive to your healthcare agent, your doctor and healthcare team, family members and anyone else you want to know about your future healthcare wishes.
- Keep the original Healthcare Directive easily available at your home.

Can I change or cancel my Healthcare Directive?

You can change or cancel your Healthcare Directive at any time. In fact, regularly reviewing and updating your Healthcare Directive as your needs change is a good idea.

To change your Healthcare Directive

For a few minor changes, use your existing directive and:

- Cross out any directions you no longer want followed and initial and date each deletion.
- Write in changes and initial and date each addition.
- Give copies of your updated Healthcare Directive to all individuals who have a copy of your existing Healthcare Directive and tell them to destroy the earlier copy.

If you have more than a few changes or major changes:

- Cancel your current Healthcare Directive.
- Create a new Healthcare Directive. Be sure it meets the legal requirements and includes having a notary public or 2 witnesses verify your signature.
- Give copies of your new Healthcare Directive to all individuals who have a copy of your existing directive and tell them to destroy the earlier copy.

To cancel your Healthcare Directive

- Write a statement saying you want to cancel your existing Healthcare Directive.
- Destroy your Healthcare Directive.
- Give the statement to all individuals who have a copy of your Healthcare Directive.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Minnesota Department of Health Office of Health Facility Complaints

651-201-4200 or 800-369-7994

For filing complaints if you believe a doctor or other member of your healthcare team has not followed Healthcare Directive requirements.

Minnesota Health Information Clearinghouse

651-201-5178 or 800-657-3793

For filing complaints if you believe a health plan has not followed Healthcare Directive requirements.