

# Advance Care Planning

## Planning for Life's "What If's"

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Imagine one day being in a life-changing care accident that leaves you unable to make your own healthcare decisions. Who will make these decisions for you? Will that individual make informed decisions? Do they, and your healthcare provider, know what is important to you? Have you put your wishes for who you want to make your healthcare decisions and the type of care you would or would not want in writing?

Advance Care Planning is for all adults. It is thinking about the type of healthcare you would want if in the future you had a sudden illness or injury, a progression of a chronic illness or a terminal illness and could not make your healthcare decisions. Advance care planning can help you think about these "what if's", discern what care is best for you and document your wishes in a living will and power of attorney for healthcare.

April 16 to 20, 2018 is National Healthcare Decisions Week. We encourage adults of all ages to complete a living will and power of attorney for healthcare.

### **What is a Living Will?**

- A living will is a legal document that provides instructions about the type of treatment you want when you are no longer able to make decisions or speak for yourself.
- A living will only goes into effect if you have lost the ability to make decisions and are terminally ill.

### **What is a Healthcare Power of Attorney?**

- A healthcare power of attorney is a legal document that enables you to appoint someone to make healthcare decisions for you when you can no longer make those decisions.
- A healthcare power of attorney only goes into effect if you have lost the ability to make decisions and are terminally ill.

***"It's always too early until it's too late!"***

## Steps to Advance Care Planning:

Think about the type of healthcare you would want, if in the future you had a sudden illness or injury, a progression of a chronic illness or a terminal illness and could not make your healthcare decisions.

1. Reflect on “what living well” means to you. Write down your thoughts.
2. Consider any cultural, religious, spiritual or personal beliefs that might influence your decisions.
3. Think about what type of medical care you would want if:
  - You were in an accident or had an illness that resulted in a severe, permanent brain injury from which you are not expected to recover.
  - You were in a coma and not expected to wake up.
  - You had a terminal illness and were nearing the end of life.

Would you want to be on a breathing machine, be given food and fluids artificially, receive blood or blood products, have surgery, receive antibiotics, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), dialysis, or other mechanical devices to keep you alive?

4. Think about who best can serve as your healthcare power of attorney. When selecting this person, consider someone who:
  - Is 18 years of age or older,
  - Knows you well and cares about you,
  - Will respect your values and goals and
  - Is able to make difficult decisions under pressure.
5. Once you have thought about this, complete your living will and a healthcare power of attorney. Be sure to sign these documents in front of two witnesses. Then make sure your wishes are known so that your end of life care reflects your choices! Share your documents and discuss your wishes with your healthcare power of attorney, family, friends and physicians.

Completing your living will and healthcare power of attorney allows you to put in writing your wishes for healthcare that can minimize confusion at a difficult time. The decision is yours.

For more information please contact Amy Richardson, Advance Care Planning Coordinator at (225) 526-4241 or [Amy.Richardson@fmlhs.org](mailto:Amy.Richardson@fmlhs.org).