

Advance Care Planning and Advance Directives

Advance Care Planning

Advance care planning (ACP) helps you think about and name what is vital to you. The goal is to make sure you get health care that follows your values, goals, and wishes.

This may include choosing a trusted person(s) to make health care decisions for you if you can no longer make them on your own.

Advance Directives

These are free legal forms that allow adults to state their health care wishes. They can help guide your medical care in case you cannot make your own decisions in the future. There are two kinds of these forms: a Living Will and a Power of Attorney for Health Care (POA-HC).

A Living Will informs your health care providers of your end-of-life wishes and allows them to carry those wishes out. A Living Will only covers health care decisions when a person is in a persistent vegetative state or when a person is terminally ill, and death is imminent. A Living Will does not name a trusted person to make health care decisions for you.

A POA-HC covers all health care decisions, not just those that are covered by a Living Will. A POA-HC names a trusted person(s), also called a health care agent, to make your health care decisions only when a doctor determines that you are unable to make them on your own.

Who should complete an advance directive?

At UW Health, any adult who can make health care decisions for themselves, can and should complete a POA-HC to make sure their wishes are known. If you only wish to complete one type of advance directive document, we strongly recommend you complete a POA-HC.

Can advance directives be changed?

Yes. Your healthcare wishes may change with life events. You should make updates as your life changes. We can help you if you want to make changes.

What if I don't have a POA-HC?

You are always your own decision maker unless a doctor determines you are no longer able to make your own health care decisions. If a doctor determines you cannot make your own health care decisions the health care team will turn to your adult family members or close friends to make health care decisions for you.

However, there are some health care decisions that family members cannot make unless they are your health care agent, named in your POA-HC. Without a POA-HC, it may be necessary for your family or others to ask the court to appoint a guardian for you. Obtaining guardianship is a legal process that takes both time and money.

Completing a POA-HC

Completing a POA-HC is easy and free of charge. Please talk with a member of your health care team for assistance.

Wisconsin patients

- Clinic patients
Ambulatory Social Work
(608) 821-4144
advancecareplanning@uwhealth.org
- Hospitalized patients
Coordinated Care
(608) 263-8667

Illinois patients

- Clinic patients
Spiritual Care
(779) 696-4620
- Hospitalized patients
Case Management
(779) 696-4175

You can also find more information online, including free forms and instructions, at <https://www.uwhealth.org/acp>.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 1/2025. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6162