

# Living with Dementia: Planning for Your Health Care

If you're worried about your memory or have Alzheimer's disease or dementia, planning for your health care can help you:

- Think about what kind of health care you do and don't want.
- Decide who can help you make health care decisions.
- Tell others what you want and what is important to you.

You can get help to make your health care plans. This guide can help you learn how to plan and where to get more information.

## How can you plan for your future health care?

### 1 Choose someone to help you make health care decisions.

Ask someone you trust to help you with health care decisions. This person can also make health care decisions for you if you can't. Usually, this is a family member or close friend. The person you choose is called your **agent**, health care surrogate, or health care proxy.

Your agent can help you get the type of health care you want by:

- Talking with you about your wishes.
- Talking to your doctors about your health care and treatment options.
- Helping you make decisions about medical tests, surgery, and treatments.
- Helping you decide where you will get care.

If there is no one that you want to name as your agent, it's very important that you write down your wishes. See **Step 4** for ways you can do this.



## 2 Sign a legal document that says who can help make decisions for you.

You don't need to wait for a dementia diagnosis to create this document. This document is called a **health care power of attorney**. You can find the forms here:



- The American Bar Association's [Giving Someone A Power of Attorney for Your Healthcare](#) includes a power of attorney form that works in most states.
- The AARP website helps you [Find Advance Directives Forms by State](#).

If you don't sign a health care power of attorney and aren't able to make your own health care decisions, most states will give your next of kin the right to make those decisions for you. The types of decisions this person can make are different in each state.

## 3 Think about the care you want, and talk to the person who will make decisions if you are not able.

Think about what is important to you regarding your health care and personal care.

Talk with your agent, your family, and your doctor about these things. There are resources that can help with the conversation, such as the Center for Practical Bioethics' [Caring Conversations: Making Your Healthcare Wishes Known](#) or The Conversation Project's [Your Conversation Starter Guide](#).



### Write your wishes down.

- 4 If you don't have someone you trust to be your health care agent, you can write down your wishes in a document called a living will. Another way to write down your wishes is by using a tool like [PREPARE for your Care Advance Health Care Directive](#).



Give your family, friends, and doctor copies of your living will.

### Terms to know

**Advance directive:** A legal document that says how you want health care decisions made for you if you can't speak for yourself. An advance directive can include a health care power of attorney and living will.

**Health care power of attorney:** An advance directive that says who can make health care decisions for you when you're not able to make them for yourself.

**Living will:** An advance directive that says what medical treatments you want and don't want when you're not able to make decisions for yourself.

**Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) Orders:** Medical orders that tell paramedics or health care providers not to perform CPR. Talk to your doctor about writing a DNR order if that is what you want.

## Terms to know *(continued)*

**Physician's Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST):** Medical orders that tell health care workers the treatments you want or don't want. POLST, like DNR, is for people who have a serious illness. It contains more information than a DNR. Ask your doctor to write a POLST for you if that is what you want. Your doctor can update the POLST when your health changes.

**Note:** *Health care powers of attorney and living wills are legal documents. DNR and POLST are medical orders. Both kinds of documents are important to ensure you get the care you want.*

**Organ donation:** Make sure that your agent and others close to you know if you want to be an organ and tissue donor.

## Where can I get more information?

- Advance directives and making medical decisions: The American Bar Association Commission on Law and Aging provides:
  - [Myths and Facts about Health Care Advance Directives](#)
  - [Making Medical Decisions for Someone Else: A How-To Guide](#)
- Organ and tissue donation: [www.OrganDonor.gov](http://www.OrganDonor.gov) provides information and links to state registries
- POLST: [National POLST Paradigm](#) provides information on POLST and other advance care planning resources

## Where can I find a lawyer who can help me?

Elder law attorneys help older adults with powers of attorney, living wills, long-term care planning, and estate planning.

You can find an elder law attorney through:

- The National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys—[Find a Lawyer](#)
- The American Bar Association—[Bar Directories and Lawyer Finders](#)
- [The National Elder Care Locator](#) (800-677-1116)

The National Alzheimer's and Dementia Resource Center (NADRC) developed this resource at the request of the Administration for Community Living (ACL). This resource is intended to support the work of ACL's grantees and others who deliver programs to support people living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias and their caregivers. The NADRC's full array of dementia related materials and resources can be found at <https://nadrc.acl.gov/>.

