Living Wills
Advance Directives
Medical Power of Attorney
The Five Wishes

Living wills and other advance directives describe your preferences regarding treatment if you’re faced with a serious accident or illness. These legal documents speak for you when you’re not able to speak for yourself – for instance, if you’re in a coma.

Living wills and other advance directives aren’t just for older adults. Unexpected end-of-life situation can happen at any age, so it’s important for all adults to have advance directives.

**Advance directives: More than just living wills**

Advance directives are written instructions regarding your medical care preferences. Your family and doctors will consult your advance directives if you’re unable to make your own health care decisions. Having written instructions can help reduce confusion or disagreement. **Advance directives include:**

1. **Living will**: This written, legal document spells out the types of medical treatments and life-sustaining measures you want and don’t want, such as mechanical breathing (respiration and ventilation), tube feeding or resuscitation, organ donation. In some states, living wills may be called health care declarations or health care directives.

2. **Medical or health care power of attorney (POA)**: The medical POA is a legal document that designates an individual – referred to as your health care agent or proxy – to make medical decisions for you in the event that you are unable to do so. However, it is different from a power of attorney authorizing someone to make financial transactions for you.

3. **Do not resuscitate (DNR) order**: This is a request to not have cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) if your heart stops or if you stop breathing. Advance directives do not have to include a DNR order, and you don’t have to have an advance directive to have a DNR order. Your doctor can put a DNR order in your medical chart.

   **None of these documents will do you any good if no one knows about them.** You have to talk with your doctor and the person you designate as your health care proxy. Discuss with your doctor what kinds of end of life medical treatments you want. He or she can help you by answering any questions you have about certain treatments. Once you’ve decided what it is you do or don’t want, make your wishes known to your doctor and your family.

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CONTINUED ON OTHER SIDE
Health care directives can be detailed and long, but they rarely require an attorney to draft. Instead, you can make one yourself using books, software, online programs, or forms from a hospital or other care-giving organization. Make sure the resources you use are specific to your state, explain your options, and are clear to you. If the health care directive form that you are using confuses you, find another form or consult a knowledgeable lawyer or medical professional for advice.


The Registry electronically stores your advance directive in its computer database and identifies it by a unique Registration#. You are given labels for your driver’s license and insurance card, stating that you are registered, and a wallet card listing your Registration#. Health care providers can contact the computer on the telephone or via a secure Internet web site and request a copy of your advance directive.

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**The Five Wishes**  [https://fivewishesonline.agingwithdignity.org/](https://fivewishesonline.agingwithdignity.org/)

*Five Wishes* is a national advance directive created by the non-profit organization Aging with Dignity. It has been described as the "living will with a heart and soul."

Wishes 1 and 2 are both legal documents. Once signed, they meet the legal requirements for an advance directive in 42 states, including Nebraska. Wishes 3, 4 and 5 are unique to Five Wishes, in that they address matters of comfort care, spirituality, forgiveness, and final wishes.

**Wish 1: The Person I Want to Make Care Decisions for Me When I Can’t**

This section is an assignment of a health care agent (also called proxy, surrogate, representative or health care power of attorney). This person makes medical decisions on your behalf if you are unable to speak for yourself.

**Wish 2: The Kind of Medical Treatment I Want or Don’t Want**

This section is a living will—a definition of what life support treatment means to you, and when you would and would not want it.

**Wish 3: How Comfortable I Want to Be**

This section addresses matters of comfort care—what type of pain management you would like, personal grooming and bathing instructions, and whether you would like to know about options for hospice care, among others.

**Wish 4: How I Want People to Treat Me**

This section speaks to personal matters, such as whether you would like to be at home, whether you would like someone to pray at your bedside, among others.

**Wish 5: What I Want My Loved Ones to Know**

This section deals with matters of forgiveness, how you wish to be remembered and final wishes regarding funeral or memorial plans.