



What Does it Mean to be a Health Care Agent?

If you are reading this, chances are that someone has asked you to be, or think about being, their health care agent. Below are commonly asked questions and information to help give you a better understanding of what it means to be someone's health care agent.

What does it mean to be a Health Care Agent (sometimes called a Health Care Proxy)?

If you accept the role of being someone's health care agent, you would be expected to act as their advocate and legally would be able to make most health care decisions for them if they are unable to speak for themselves. You would need to gather information from the health care team so you could make choices on behalf of that person. It is important to know that as a health care agent you would not be held financially responsible for any medical costs related to treatment or care.

When would I have to start making decisions?

You would need to start making decisions when two doctors determine that the person that you represent as their health care agent is no longer able to make medical decisions for themselves. A health care provider would reach out directly to you if there is an advance care plan or power of attorney appointing you as an agent. Together with the health care provider, you would discuss the person's wishes and make decisions about medical care and treatment.

How do I prepare to make decisions for someone else?

The most important thing to do is to have multiple conversations with the person about their wishes and preferences for future medical care. These conversations should happen often since beliefs, medical treatments, and health status can change. Additionally, their wishes and preferences should be written down in a document as part of an advance care plan. In this plan they can write about things such as any spiritual or religious beliefs that may impact their decisions or if they want to stay home with their loved ones and receive care. They also need to include their thoughts about things like feeding tubes, ventilators, and cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR). You will need quick and easy access to this advance care plan in case of an emergency such as the [Voice Your Choice online platform](#).

It is difficult to think about and plan for all the possible things that can happen and the decisions that might need to be made as a health care agent. However, having conversations and written guidance can help support your decision-making later.

Need more information? See "[Who Will Speak for You](#)" offered by the Conversation Project. Want to choose and document your own health care agent? Go to www.VoiceYourChoice.org to complete your own online advance care plan or sign up for a webinar.