

FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)

What is an advance directive?

An advance directive is a legal document outlining your wishes for healthcare, so they will be known in the event you are not able to communicate those choices. The Georgia Advance Directive for Healthcare is one document with two major parts: a healthcare agent form and a living will.

What is a healthcare agent and what is a living will?

A healthcare agent (also known as a surrogate decision maker) is the individual you designate to make decisions on your behalf when you are unable to do so yourself. A living will is a document that specifies your healthcare preferences to be used by your healthcare agent and medical team when you cannot speak for yourself.

Who should complete an advance directive?

Everyone above the age of 18. Health crises can happen to anyone and it is important for your family to know your preferences and who you want to speak on your behalf.

Why should I have an advance directive?

There are many good reasons to complete an advance directive. Documenting who will make your medical decisions if you are not able to and making sure that person understands what you would want will help your doctors provide the right treatment for you. Studies show that it will also help your family cope.

Can I have more than one person be my health care agent?

No. You can only have one person be your primary health care agent. However, you can choose two alternates and ask your primary agent to include them in the decision-making process.

How long does it take to complete an advance directive?

It depends. For some the process takes a few minutes, for others it can take multiple conversations over an extended period of time. We recommend you being the process and have a conversation about your preferences with your healthcare providers and decision makers.

When does an advance directive become active?

Your healthcare agent is only called upon if you are unable to make your own healthcare decisions. Your living will only become active in Ga. when you meet certain medical conditions—your condition is terminal and your death is imminent or you are in state of permanent unconsciousness.

Advance Care Planning

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Why do I have to write this information down? My family will know what to do.

You may believe that they know what to do – but perhaps they don't. For example, you may have said something in the past about life sustaining interventions – but you need to be clear about what that really means to you. Your family may also have questions about the choices that you've made.

Is an advance directive the same thing as a Do-Not-Resuscitate (DNR) Order?

No. A DNR order is different than an advance directive. A DNR is a **medical order** that specifies your wishes that, in the event your heart or breathing stops, no attempt will be made to resuscitate you with chest compression, defibrillator shock, insertion of a breathing tube, or resuscitation drugs. A DNR order must be written by an appropriate medical professional. If you want others to follow your DNR wishes after you leave the hospital, speak to your healthcare provider about an out-of-hospital DNR.

Where can I get more information?

You can speak directly with your physician about completing a directive or The Ethics Program at WellStar has staff available to assist you. Contact the Ethics program via email ethics.program@wellstar.org or call 470-956-5812 to schedule an appointment.

Do I need an attorney to complete an advance directive?

You do not need an attorney to complete an advance directive nor does it need to be notarized. It only requires two witnesses. However, if you have any legal questions, you should contact an attorney to discuss those issues.

To whom should I give copies?

You should give copies of your Advance Directive to your: healthcare providers; person(s) chosen to be your healthcare agent(s) and your family. You should also keep the original copy with your other important documents, where someone could easily find it.

What if I change my mind?

You can change your advance directive at any time by destroying your current copy and filling out a new form. You should notify your healthcare provider and your healthcare agent to make sure they are aware of your changes and provide them with new updated copies.

If I complete advance directives in one state, will it be recognized in other states?

Not necessarily. Most states usually recognize directives completed in other states if they are similar to that state's form(s). If you spend a great deal of time in more than one state, you may want to complete directives in each state.