

# Understanding Advance Directives

*Living Will, Healthcare Surrogate Designation, Anatomical Gifts*

**If you became too ill to express your wishes about your medical care, would your physicians and loved ones know what decisions to make on your behalf?**

Illnesses such as Alzheimer's disease or a coma can prevent patients from communicating whether they want to receive or refuse life-sustaining measures. These decisions can be made in advance based on your beliefs, values and wishes.



## What is a Health Care Advance Directive?

You have the right to choose or refuse medical treatment. The law recognizes your right to make an Advance Directive that instructs physicians to provide, withhold or withdraw medical treatment, including life-prolonging procedures such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), the use of a breathing machine (ventilator or respirator) and insertion of an intravenous (IV) line to provide nutrition, fluids and medicine in certain circumstances.

A Health Care Advance Directive serves one of three purposes. It can designate another person to make health care decisions on your behalf. This person can be any competent adult of your choice, including an unmarried partner. It can instruct physicians to provide, withhold or withdraw medical treatment. Or it can indicate a desire to make an anatomical donation after death.

By creating a Health Care Advance Directive, you can make those decisions in advance and maintain control over your medical treatment in the future, while also easing the burden on your loved ones.

1. A **Living Will** is a written document that guides physicians in the types of care you want and do not want. This document must be witnessed by two people, only one of whom can be a spouse or blood relative.
2. By designating a **Health Care Surrogate**, you choose a person to speak for you and make decisions about your treatment based on your desires, values and beliefs — not theirs. A written designation requires two witnesses, only one of whom can be a spouse or blood relative.  
A Durable Power of Attorney can enable a grantee to perform financial and legal activities and, if **expressly provided**, to make health care decisions if the grantor becomes incapacitated, either physically or mentally.
3. A person may make an **anatomical gift** in a number of ways including by signing an organ and tissue donor card, registering online with the donor registry, and/or

signifying an intent to donate on their driver license or identification card. An anatomical gift or “gift” means a donation of all or part of a human body to take effect after the donor’s death and to be used for transplantation, therapy, research or education.



## How do I prepare a Health Care Advance Directive?

First, you likely will wish to discuss with your family, physicians and spiritual advisor or clergy some of the different medical scenarios that can occur and how you would like your care handled.

Next, you can obtain Healthcare Advance Directive forms from a Baptist Primary Care office, a Baptist employee at any registration desk within a Baptist Health facility, the Internet, an attorney or another source. If you are an inpatient at a Baptist Health Hospital you can ask for assistance from your Nurse Case Manager or Social Worker. After you have completed a form, share copies of it with your physicians and any loved ones who likely would be contacted in a medical emergency and would be involved in making decisions about your care.

You can change or cancel a Healthcare Advance Directive at any time, and it is a good idea to review the document regularly to make sure it still reflects your beliefs, wishes and values. To make a change, just complete a new form and share it with your physicians and loved ones.

**Healthcare Advance Directive forms are available from FloridaHealthFinder.gov (<https://www.floridahealthfinder.gov/reports-guides/advance-directives.aspx>) .**

## Where can I find more information about Health Care Advance Directives?

The AGS Foundation for Health in Aging (<https://www.healthinaging.org/age-friendly-healthcare-you/care-what-matters-most>)

Honoring Choices Florida (<https://www.honoringchoicesfl.com/>)

The Conversation Project (<https://theconversationproject.org/>)

Florida Statute Title XLIV, Chapter 765, Health Care Advance Directives (<http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/>)

