

Advance Care Planning

General information guide

What is Advance Care Planning?

Advance Care Planning is a process of planning for future health. You can discuss and write down your values, beliefs and preferences. This can guide decision making in the future if you cannot make or communicate your own decisions due to lack of capacity.

Advance Care Planning is about discussing a person's life goals, values and choices. Key people who will help you with this process are your hospital doctor or healthcare professional. It's a good idea to talk with your family/carer and your healthcare professional. You may talk about your beliefs, values and attitudes towards treatment options. You could also talk about personal and cultural issues that are important to you.

Making decisions for someone else can be difficult and distressing. Advance care planning can help people close to you and those caring for you know what is important to you. It lets you be part of your future health decision making while you are still able.

Talking about and writing down your wishes for future care will help those caring for you. This may help them feel more comfortable about making decisions on your behalf.

If you already have an Advance Care Plan or Enduring Power of Attorney (medical treatment) please let your healthcare professional know.

Why do Advance Care Planning?

There are 3 main benefits:

- reduces stress for your **family**
- clarifies treatments and identifies the legal decision maker for **medical staff**
- gives **you** peace of mind

Imagine you are in a situation, (a car accident or if a chronic illness worsens) and you are unable to make decisions for yourself. Ask yourself the following questions:

- *Who will speak for you if you are not able to speak for yourself?*
- *Who do you want to make medical decisions for you if you were not able to make them yourself?*
- *Will they know what you want?*
- *Could there be any disagreement amongst your family/friends/carers about your wishes?*
- *What medical treatments would you want or not want if you were unlikely to survive?*
- *What's meaningful to you?*
- *What does living well mean to you?*

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Advance Care Planning at St Vincent's

Advance Care Planning can reduce the burden of decision making during crisis situations and can provide a clearer understanding of your wishes. Advance Care Planning is built upon the values and mission of St Vincent's.

Above all, Advance Care Planning allows your voice to be heard when you are unable to speak.

Case Study

Mrs Jones is a frail, elderly lady with heart problems. Mrs Jones and her family talk with her doctor at St Vincent's about what might happen in the future if she is no longer able to make her own decisions.

Mrs Jones said that she wasn't the sort of person who wanted everything done to save her life. She would prefer to not have treatments if they were unlikely to save her life or if they would be too painful.

She knew that at her age cardiopulmonary (heart-lung) resuscitation was unlikely to save her life. She said very clearly that she didn't want this sort of treatment.

When talking about her health with her family, Mrs Jones chose to appoint her daughter, as her Enduring Power of Attorney (medical treatment).

This means her daughter will legally make healthcare decisions for Mrs Jones when she no longer can.

Mrs Jones felt peaceful knowing this. With her family by her side, Mrs Jones and the St Vincent's doctor made a record about her wishes.

All members of her family and her hospital doctor were clear on what Mrs Jones wanted. Mrs Jones felt very peaceful knowing her wishes were now clearly recorded.

My Advance Care Plan

You may wish to complete *My Advance Care Plan – Health Wishes* to write down your healthcare wishes.

The plan will be used to guide your healthcare team if you are unable to make decisions for yourself.

You should talk about and complete the *My Advance Care Plan – Health Wishes* form with your healthcare team, specialists and involve your family/carers.

Your healthcare team can explain the details to you about medical treatments related to your condition. They can talk you through some of the benefits and risks of these treatments.

If you wish to legally refuse treatment, you will need to complete a *Refusal of Treatment Certificate* for your current health condition.

St Vincent's can give you a copy of this form. Your hospital doctor can explain this to you in more detail.

Your Advance Care Plan can contain one or more of the following documents:

- Enduring Power of Attorney (medical treatment)
- My Advance Care Plan – Health Wishes
- Refusal of Treatment Certificate.

It is very important, if you complete any of the above documents, that you give copies of these to:

- St Vincent's Hospital (your treating doctor, specialist or other healthcare professional)
- Your GP
- Your family/carers
- Your Enduring Power of Attorney (medical treatment).

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What is a substitute decision maker?

This term is sometimes used in Advance Care Planning. A substitute decision maker is a person who you choose to make health decisions for you.

The substitute decision maker only makes decisions if you are not able to.

The legal term for this is called *Enduring Power of Attorney (medical treatment)*. A fact sheet and form about *Enduring Power of Attorney (medical treatment)* is included in the information pack.

It is best to appoint an *Enduring Power of Attorney (medical treatment)*. If you do not wish to legally appoint an *Enduring Power of Attorney (medical treatment)* you can name a person to make health decisions for you.

You can write this person's name on the *My Advance Care Plan – Health Wishes* form. This does not have the same legal weight as appointing an *Enduring Power of Attorney (medical treatment)*.

Who should I appoint as my substitute decision maker?

It is important to choose someone who has a clear understanding of your wishes and can be a strong advocate.

They must be over 18 years of age. It is a good idea to choose someone you trust and is available if required.

Next Steps

Please let your healthcare professional know if you already have:

- an *Advance Care Plan*
- an *Enduring Power of Attorney (medical treatment)* or
- a *Refusal of Treatment Certificate*.

If you are thinking about Advance Care Planning, you can take the following steps:

- **Read** this General Information Guide and the other documents in the information pack.
- Read *My Advance Care Plan – Health Wishes form*. This will help you understand what information will be needed to complete the plan.
- Spend some time **thinking** about your values and beliefs in regards to your current and future health. Use the *My Values* website if you think this will help you.
- **Think** about who you would like to make decisions for you if you were not able to speak for yourself.
- Have a **conversation** to make sure people understand the things that are important to you if you become unwell and decisions need to be made for you. Have this conversation with those close to you, your family/carers and your hospital doctor/specialist and GP.
- **Appoint** your *Enduring Power of Attorney (medical treatment)*.
- Make a time with your healthcare team/ specialist/GP to **write down** your wishes on the *St Vincent's My Advance Care Plan – Health Wishes* form. They can talk about the benefits and risks of medical treatments with you.
- **Share** your Advance Care Plan with anyone you want. This can include St Vincent's, your GP, Enduring Power of Attorney (medical treatment) and family/friends/carer.

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Signing your *My Advance Care Plan – Health Wishes*

Your hospital doctor or GP needs to sign your *My Advance Care Plan – Health Wishes* form to acknowledge that you are competent to make these decisions.

You will also need to sign *My Advance Care Plan – Health Wishes* form to demonstrate that you agree with it.

Once signed, it is a good idea to share your plan with anyone you want. This could include:

- St Vincent's
- your GP
- Enduring Power of Attorney (medical treatment)
- family
- friends
- your carer.

It is useful to keep a list of people you have given your *My Advance Care Plan – Health Wishes* to.

If you change your plan in the future you know who to give updated copies to.

Reviewing and updating your *My Advance Care Plan – Health Wishes*

It is a good idea to review your Advance Care Plan every year. You should also review your plan when there is a change in your personal or medical situations.

You should write a new *My Advance Care Plan – Health Wishes* form if things change.

It is a good idea to give copies of the new form to your Enduring Power of Attorney (medical treatment), family, GP and St Vincent's.