

# FACTS ABOUT AHCDs

# HEALTH CARE AGENT

## **What is an Advance Health Care Directive (AHCD)?**

An AHCD may be written or verbal. It is the best way to make sure that your health care wishes are known and followed in the event that you are not able to make those decisions. It allows you to name a person (usually called your "agent") to make health care decisions if you are unable to communicate (e.g. you are unconscious due to an accident). It is a legal document that states how you wish to be treated if you become mentally or physically impaired. It allows you to tell your health care provider NOW how much treatment you want, or do not want, if you are terminally ill (or going to die soon).

Additional information on Advance Health Directives can be found on [www.cmanet.org](http://www.cmanet.org) or [www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)

## **Do I have to complete an AHCD?**

No. An AHCD simply ensures that your health care wishes are known and followed. It helps to avoid problems for your loved ones when they are aware of what you want. You may tell your doctor and family what your wishes are, but putting it in writing will provide those making the decisions with greater assurance.

## **For how long is an AHCD valid?**

An AHCD lasts a lifetime if they are dated after January 1, 1992. You may revoke or change it at any time. You may also set a specific date on which you want it to expire.

## **Who can complete an AHCD?**

Anyone who is at least eighteen (18) years of age (or is an emancipated minor) and who has the ability to make decisions can complete an AHCD. A lawyer is not needed in completing an AHCD. It is not a complicated process.

## **Can I change my mind after I write an AHCD?**

Yes. You can cancel or change any AHCD at any time. You need to notify the people involved and you can complete a new AHCD. You may also place a time limit on the AHCD.

## **Who can I choose to make these health care decisions for me?**

You can name almost any adult as long as the person is willing to take the responsibility. You can name a spouse, relative or friend. You CANNOT name your doctor or anyone who works at the health care facility that is caring for you unless that person is a relative or a co-worker.

## **Can I appoint more than one person ("agent") to make these decisions for me?**

Yes. However, it is best to name one person as your health care "agent" and designate at least one alternate agent who may also act for you if your primary agent is unavailable or unwilling to act.

## **How much authority does this agent have?**

The agent has legal authority to make all health care decisions when you are not able to do this for yourself. Your agent will be able to accept or refuse medical treatment, have access to your medical records and make decisions about donating your organs, authorizing an autopsy, and disposing of your body should you die. If you do not want your agent to have certain of these powers, or to make certain decisions, you can write a statement on the AHCD document limiting your agent's authority.

Agents are not allowed to make decisions regarding electroconvulsive therapy, psychosurgery, sterilization, abortion, or placement in a mental health treatment facility.

## **Is my agent responsible for my medical bills?**

No. Being an agent (or alternate) only involves health care decision-making. Whoever is financially responsible for your medical bills maintains that responsibility. However, your agent may be responsible for costs related to the disposition of your body after you die.