

Advance Directive Guide for California Families

Understanding your options and how to document your end-of-life wishes under California law

◆ Westlake Village Hospice, INC

◆ Social Work Department

◆ California-Specific · Updated 2025

Why an Advance Directive Matters

An Advance Directive is a legal document that tells your healthcare team and family what medical treatments you want — or don't want — if you become unable to speak for yourself. It is one of the most important gifts you can give your family.

Without an Advance Directive, decisions about your care will fall to family members who may disagree, or default to California law — which may not reflect your wishes. With one, you stay in control.

California's Key Advance Planning Documents

1. Advance Health Care Directive (AHCD)

California's primary advance directive form. It has two parts:

- **Power of Attorney for Health Care** — Names a person (your "Agent") to make medical decisions if you cannot
- **Individual Health Care Instructions** — Describes your wishes for specific treatments (CPR, ventilators, artificial nutrition, etc.)

Requires: Your signature, dated, witnessed by two adults OR notarized. Your Agent cannot be a witness.

2. POLST Form (Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment)

A medical order — not just a preference form — that travels with seriously ill patients across care settings. It gives specific, immediate instructions to emergency responders and clinical staff.

- Must be signed by a physician, APRN, or PA
- Printed on bright pink paper — kept at home where emergency responders will see it

- Available from your hospice social worker or physician
- Covers: CPR preferences, medical interventions, and artificial nutrition

3. DNR Order (Do Not Resuscitate)

A physician order specifically instructing that CPR should not be performed. In California, a DNR must be a signed physician order to be honored by EMS. A family member saying "no CPR" is not legally sufficient without documentation.

4. Living Will

An informal document expressing your general end-of-life wishes. While not as legally binding as an AHCD in California, it is a useful supplement to guide your Agent and family on your values and preferences.

How to Complete Your AHCD — Step by Step

- 1 Download the form** — Free from the California Attorney General's website or request a copy from our social worker.
- 2 Choose your Agent** — This person must be 18+, not your healthcare provider, and willing to advocate for your wishes even under pressure.
- 3 Complete Part 2** — Write your wishes for CPR, ventilator use, artificial nutrition, comfort care, and organ donation.
- 4 Sign and witness** — Two witnesses (not your Agent, not your healthcare provider) sign. Or have it notarized.
- 5 Distribute copies** — Give to your Agent, your physician, your hospice team, and keep the original at home in an accessible location.
- 6 Register (optional)** — California's POLST registry or private advance directive registries can store your document electronically.

Questions to Help Define Your Wishes

- If I had an irreversible brain injury, would I want to be kept alive by machines?
- If my heart stopped, do I want CPR attempted?
- If I could no longer eat, would I want a feeding tube?
- If I were in the final weeks of life, would I want to be at home?
- What matters most to me in my final days — comfort, alertness, or something else?

- What are my wishes for religious or spiritual rituals?

Our social worker can guide you through this process at no charge. These are not easy conversations, but having them — with the right support — is one of the most important things your family can do.

Our Social Workers Are Here to Help

Advance directive assistance is included in your hospice benefit — at no cost to you.

(818) 791-0611

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