

## SENIOR INFORMATION & ASSISTANCE

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### What is an Advance Directive or Living Will?

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Every adult has the legal right to decide what medical treatment to accept. Because of an illness or injury, however, you may not be able to decide about end-of-life treatments. At those times, your doctor and your family may not know what decision you would have made. Many people are now trying to plan for this situation by making their decisions ahead of time - hence the legal term "advance directive". A living will is a legal document that indicates to your doctor and family the medical treatments you want.

Types of life-sustaining treatments that might be addressed include: nasogastric tube feeding, use of respirator, dialysis, antibiotics, and resuscitation. A living will should be used in conjunction with the advice of attending physicians about the course of medical treatment.

The living will can be very specific. Make sure your living will is complete and give copies to your doctor and other medical care providers for your medical record. You can cancel a living will at any time by informing your doctor of your decision. A doctor who refuses to follow your wishes should transfer you to another physician.

A living will cannot cover every possible medical situation. A living will is honored only when two doctors agree that the patient is near the end of life and that medical treatment can only prolong life artificially.

You may also want to execute a Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare. If you think of a living will as a piece of paper, you can think of the Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare as a voice. It names the person you wish to advocate on your behalf and to let health care professionals know what your wishes are when you are not able to do so.

**Washington State Living Will Registry** is available online at <http://www.doh.wa.gov/livingwill/> and is free to Washington residents. The registry provides a convenient way to complete, register and file these documents, and to retrieve filed documents at any time. It may include:

- ❖ Health Care Directive
- ❖ Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care
- ❖ MH Advance Directive
- ❖ Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment

Senior Information & Assistance (I&A) has sample living will forms and more information about legal issues for seniors:

**Whatcom I&A: (360) 738-2500**

**Skagit I&A: (360) 428-1301**

More information is also available from Washington Law Help at [www.walawhelp.org](http://www.walawhelp.org).