

Advance Directives

Advance directives are documents giving direction to health care providers, including Christian Science nursing facilities, about treatment choices in certain circumstances. There are two types of advance directives: A durable power of attorney for health care allows you to name a healthcare surrogate/patient advocate to act for you and carry out your wishes should you be unable at a time of need to do so. A living will allows you to state your wishes in writing, but does not name a healthcare surrogate/patient advocate.

Why have an advance directive? Many people, not just Christian Scientists, have strong feelings about the kind of medical care they would like to receive or refuse in certain circumstances. An advance directive allows you to clearly state your feelings in writing so there will not be any confusion or misunderstanding. Thinking through this now also removes the burden from families and friends should there be a future need.

What is a durable power of attorney for health care? It is a legal document that allows you to name anyone at least eighteen years old to be your advocate and make health care decisions for you when and if there is a future need. You can pick a family member, friend or any other person you trust, but be sure the person you choose is willing to serve. A durable power can be used to accept or refuse any treatment. If you want your healthcare surrogate/patient advocate to be able to refuse any treatment, you must say so specifically in the durable power document. A durable power goes into effect only when you are not able to make decisions for yourself. In some states this document is called a health care proxy.

A living will states your wishes with regard to consenting to or refusing medical treatments that are designed to artificially prolong life.

These are legal documents and can best be prepared by an attorney. Basic advance directive forms can also be found on the Internet and should be customized to fit your wishes. In all cases, be sure to read every word to make certain you agree with it. Remember that these forms are written from the standpoint of medical care. You may wish to add directions about refusing medical procedures; you will also need to add language should you desire care in a Christian Science nursing facility, or care by a Christian Science nurse in your home.

Health Care Advance Directives

(also called Health Care Proxy or Power of Attorney for Health Care)

The BA receives many inquiries regarding health care advance directives (also called health care proxy or power of attorney for health care depending on the state where you reside). We are always willing to provide a sample health care advanced directive for your reference and/or use. That, together with this information, has proved helpful to many wishing to develop a health care advanced directive.

We're happy to share our sample form with anyone interested in language which might be used by Christian Scientists in health care advance directives regardless of where they live.

If you live in Massachusetts: As mentioned above, the BA maintains a Massachusetts health care proxy form for individuals who wish to use it. You may choose to use an attorney as you consider its language and provisions. This health care proxy is current with Massachusetts state law. It includes language and options often specified by Christian Scientists.

Outside of Massachusetts: If you reside outside of Massachusetts there are several options. If an attorney is helping you, they may find our sample document a helpful resource because of the specific language it contains.

Another resource may be your own state government's website. For instance, Maine has complete information on state law regarding advance directives and downloadable copies at www.state.me.us. Regardless of where you live, you can do a web search for "health care advance directives" and you'll find a number of sites.

Note: Keep in mind that your advance directive should include language which addresses the laws of the state where you live.

Next steps: Once you have executed (reviewed and signed) your health care advance directive you should make at least four photocopies. Keep the original for yourself where it can be found easily (not a safe-deposit box). Give copies to care providers, your agent (also called your advocate), and alternate agent. You can also give additional copies to family members, Christian Science practitioners, lawyers, and others who may be involved in your health care decision-making.

If you have questions, call 617.734.5600 or email inquiry@chbenevolent.org

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