

Advance Care Planning

Advanced Directives (Medical Healthcare Agent and Living Will) POLST Document (Provider Order of Life-Sustaining Treatment)

Advanced Directives and POLSTs are used differently

Even though they both cover end-of-life wishes, a [POLST](#) is different from an advanced directive. A POLST is a healthcare provider's order while an advanced directive is a legal document. That means they'll be used differently by emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and hospital personnel.

How an Advanced Directive works

An advanced directive is a legal document that contains your end-of-life preferences.

The medical directive portion allows you to specify who you want to make health care decisions for you if a time comes when you cannot make these decisions for yourself.

When decisions need to be made about future treatments, the living will portion guides your health care agent to make choices that honor your wishes.

The document may go by different names in different states, such as:

- Medical power of attorney
- Medical directive
- Health care power of attorney
- Designation of health care surrogate
- Durable power of attorney for health care

Because an advanced directive isn't a medical order, it can't tell EMTs and hospitals what to do. Even if resuscitation or other end-of-life choices are specified, they can't be honored. Standard emergency medical protocols must be followed unless a doctor's orders say otherwise.

Advanced directives are more useful in non-emergency situations like when someone is in a hospital or skilled nursing facility.

How a POLST works

A POLST is a one-page form that focuses only on immediate treatments. It's best for health emergencies because it's a medical order signed by a doctor. That means EMTs and hospitals must do what the POLST specifies.

It's usually recommended for terminally ill or very frail seniors who have made their **end-of-life wishes** clear.

The POLST document may go by different names in different states, such as:

- Provider Order of Life-Sustaining Treatment
- Physician Order of Life-Sustaining Treatment
- Medical Order of Life-Sustaining Treatment (MOLST, e.g. New York)

How an Advanced Directive and POLST work together

To make sure your wishes will be honored in any situation, you should have both an advanced directive and a POLST. **Keep them both handy** so you can show them to doctors, hospital staff, and EMTs.

	POLST	Advanced Directive
Age requirement	For any age	For age 18 and older
Who can use it?	Only those who are seriously ill or frail	Anyone regardless of current health
How is it used?	To direct <i>immediate</i> medical treatment	To direct <i>future</i> decisions about medical treatments
Tells EMTs & hospitals what medical treatments can be used in an emergency	YES	NO
Guides patient treatment when staying in a facility or hospital	YES	YES
Appoints someone to make health care decisions on your behalf	NO	YES