

## Key Points about Advance Planning

### Need for Advance Planning:

1. Too often, Americans live as if death were optional. It isn't.
2. At some point we all cope with the reality of serious and eventually fatal illness in our families.
3. Health care advance planning, if done right, accomplishes four things:
  - It helps ensure that the person you want to speak for you has the legal authority to do so;
  - It helps ensure your wishes about your health care are known and respected;
  - It avoids unnecessary, intrusive, and costly medical treatment at the point you no longer want it;
  - It reduces the suffering experienced by your loved ones, because they will have your guidance. Making serious medical decision on a loved one's behalf without their guidance is an agonizing experience.
4. Too few Americans do advance planning. It is important for all adults, not just for old people. Indeed, young adults in many ways have more at stake, because if struck by a serious accident or illness, the consequences of any medical decision can have consequences that will last decades.

### How to do Advance Planning:

It requires two things: *talking* and *writing*.

1. The *writing* part is the easier part because there are advance directive forms widely available that you can use. But signing a document without personalizing it and without talking to those people who will likely be involved in decisions will not accomplish much. The document is only worth the discussion it is based on.
  - The form you need first of all is a Health Care Power of Attorney to appoint the person you want to speak for you when you can't. You can also include in the document your wishes about when you want or don't want medical treatments. Or, you can put your wishes in a separate document, commonly called a Living Will.
2. The *talking* you need to do is with the person you appoint to speak for you, with your loved ones, and with your doctor. Those discussions provide the crucial background that people need to understand your wishes. These aren't easy discussions, but there are aids to help you, such as the [ABA's Toolkit for Health Care Advance Planning](#). It will walk you through the things you need to think about, discuss, and decide.