



## CHOOSING AND FINDING A HEALTH-CARE AGENT

The health-care agent is someone you legally designate (via a document called a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care) to make your health-care decisions if you should lose the capacity to make them for yourself. If you regain the capacity to make your own health-care decisions, your health-care agent loses the authority to make medical decisions for you. A health-care agent is empowered only to make decisions related to your health care and has no authority over financial or other matters.

It is very important to pick someone you trust and who knows your wishes. It is also important to choose an individual you feel can be assertive in the event that medical providers, caregivers, or family members challenge your wishes.

Whenever possible, name both a primary health-care agent and an alternate. If your primary health-care agent is unavailable, the alternate may then assume the responsibility.

If possible, name someone who lives close to you. If it takes your health-care agent a day or more to reach your bedside in an emergency medical situation, several key decisions may already have been made on your behalf by people who do not know your wishes.

### All words for the same thing

Health-care Agent  
Health-care Representative  
Attorney-In-Fact  
Health-care Proxy  
Surrogate Decision Maker

## FINDING A HEALTH-CARE AGENT:

- The representative does not have to be a family member, spouse, or partner. In some cases it is better to ask a person you trust will honor your wishes rather than a family member. Choosing someone who is not a family member, spouse, or partner may also relieve your loved one of a responsibility he or she may be emotionally unable to assume.
- Ask a neighbor, a member of your church or synagogue, or an acquaintance. When discussing your request, remind your potential health-care agent that there is no liability associated with this role. End of Life Washington can help you with language for this important conversation. We can also talk with anyone who might be considering serving as your health-care agent to explain the role and responsibilities.
- Contact your local Senior Services/Elder Care Agency. They may have a program in your area that provides volunteers to be health-care agents.
- Some communities have professional geriatric care managers or other professionals who may serve as health-care agents for a fee. Check the Aging Life Care Association at <http://memberfinder.caremanager.org>, the Washington Courts list of Certified Professional Guardians at [http://www.courts.wa.gov/programs\\_orgs/guardian/](http://www.courts.wa.gov/programs_orgs/guardian/), and the National Association of Elder Law Attorneys at <http://alturl.com/ixo85>. End of Life Washington may also be able to help you locate these professionals.

For more information about choosing or finding a health-care agent or assistance finding a health-care agent, please contact our office.