

# the conversation project



## Three Ideas for Solo Agers to Keep in Mind

Solo aging means different things to different people. Generally, a solo ager is an older adult who does not have immediate family to turn to for support with concerns like health care. So many resources for advance care planning talk about conversations with spouses and children. We want to talk about other options.

Planning for your future is important for everyone. For solo agers, documenting what matters to you is even more important to make sure your wishes are honored. **Your goals and preferences matter and you are valuable.**

Here, we'll share ideas for thinking about what matters to you. We'll talk about identifying people who will help make sure your health care aligns with your goals and preferences, including if you are dealing with a serious illness, now or in the future. **You don't need to do all the steps below.** Choose the ones that are right for you.

We'll also be sharing some guides and resources. [Click for instructions to view or print the guides below in a larger font.](#)

### 1. Think about what matters to you

We can't plan for everything. But we can talk about what is most important — in our life, and in our health care. The Conversation Project wants to help everyone talk about their wishes for care through the end of life, so those wishes can be understood and respected.

For some prompts to help you begin, take a look at the [Conversation Starter Guide](#). This guide asks questions like: "What does a good day look like for you?" Your answer might be enjoying favorite everyday activities or spending time with certain people. The guide also asks about what works for you in your health care, such as how involved you want to be in medical decisions.

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## As a patient, I'd like to know...



Only the basics  
about my condition  
and my treatment

All the details  
about my condition  
and my treatment

If you have a serious illness, the [What Matters to Me Workbook](#) has specific suggestions for you.



### More Resources: Health Care Planning

- [Advance Care Planning Guidance from the National Institute on Aging](#)
- [How Solo Ager's Can Create a Care Plan](#)

## 2. Record and share what matters to you

It's a good idea to record your conversation with an important legal document to be sure your choices are followed. This is called an advance directive.

In your advance directive, you describe your preferences and wishes for your health care if you cannot speak for yourself.

Every state and most countries have their own advance directive forms. In the United States, your state attorney general website or the website Caring Info can help you [find the right forms in your state](#). Your doctor's office should also be able to provide you with the form. These are all free resources.

Be sure to keep your advance directive up to date. Your preferences may change as your situation or your health changes. If you filled one out years ago, review it and make any changes.

It's important to share your advance directive. Talk to anyone who can help you have a say in your care through the end of life, including your health care team. Provide copies of your advance directive to anyone who may need them. Also share it with your health care proxy, who we will talk about next.



### More Resources: Legal Help

- [ABA Commission on Law and Aging](#)
- [Legal Services Corporation](#)

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## 3. Choose a health care proxy

A health care proxy is the one person who speaks on your behalf if you can't make your own health care decisions. Although your proxy's decisions on your behalf could have some financial impact, the proxy does not make financial decisions for you and are not responsible for paying for your care.

The [Guide to Choosing a Health Care Proxy](#) can help you choose a proxy who will follow your wishes. It also has suggestions for how to have a conversation with that person.

- ▶ Start by asking if the person is comfortable taking on this role.
  - You can say, "I'd like you to be my health care proxy. That means you would be the person who would make medical decisions for me if I can't make them for myself. I would share what matters to me in my care, so you wouldn't have to guess. Is this something you would be comfortable doing?"

Here are some people you can consider asking to be your proxy:

- Friend or extended family member
- Trusted neighbor
- Member of a religious community
- Member of a volunteer group

Some local agencies offer professional proxy services. You can ask your doctor's office, or your local agency on aging, senior center, city/county department of aging, or AARP chapter, for information about what is available. You might say:

*"I'm concerned that I don't have a health care proxy, and I don't have close family or friends to ask. Is there a social worker or case manager I can talk to about how to be sure my wishes are known?"*

You may decide not to name a proxy. In that case, it is still very important to fill out your advance directive so you can have a say in your care if you became unable to make your own decisions. Share your advance directive with your doctor's office. If you get health care



### More Resources: Health Care Proxy and Advance Directive

- [USAging](#) (if you live in the United States, you can also [Find Local Aging Services](#) near you)

in multiple places, make sure each place has your advance directive on file. At home, attach a copy to your refrigerator. If you travel a lot, keep a copy with you in your wallet, purse, or glove compartment.

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After these conversations, you may want to think about additional people to be in your support network in addition to a health care proxy. For example, you might look for someone to water your plants while you are traveling, someone to watch your pet if you ever have to receive treatment in a facility, someone to help in a power outage, someone to provide rides to doctor's appointments, or someone to call on the phone. For example:

*One woman connected with a few neighbors on her street. She knocked on their doors to say hello. They made a plan to stop by or even look in the window to check in with each other at a regular time.*

*Another older adult spoke to two other people who lived in the same building. They agreed to text or call one other each week.*

You might also connect with fellow solo agers through communities on the internet. Be careful to judge the source of any information online and watch out for potential scams.



## More Resources: Support and Planning for Solo Agers

- [Thinking Ahead Roadmap](#) and [Advice from the AARP](#) (for finances)
- [Solo and Smart book](#) and [online video series](#) (for tips about health, finances, community, and more)
- [Online Facebook group](#) (for conversations with more than 9,000 fellow solo agers)

As you continue to think about and share what matters most to you, The Conversation Project has resources available to support you in your journey.

What are your suggestions for solo agers? Share your tips in the comments.

With thanks to [Carol Marak](#) for her contributions.