

A person may, due to illness or an accident, lose the ability to make decisions for themselves, understand the consequences of the decisions made and / or communicate these decisions to others.

Mental incapacity is defined in the *Guardianship and Administration Act 1993* as 'the inability of a person to look after his or her own health, safety or welfare or to manage his or her own affairs'.

### What happens when someone loses mental capacity?

A family member is usually able to step in and make those decisions on an informal basis. Many people, however, wish to plan ahead. To ensure that their wishes are followed as closely as possible in the future, should they lose capacity and there are no informal arrangements, they legally appoint a person to make decisions on their behalf. There are two main types of documents that cover these matters:

- **Advance Care Directive (ACD)** – for health care, lifestyle and accommodation decisions
- **Enduring Power of Attorney (EPA)** – for financial decisions

### Validity and operation

For an Advance Care Directive and an Enduring Power of Attorney to be legally valid, the person making them must be mentally competent (i.e. have mental capacity) to understand what the documents are and what they do. A person cannot be coerced to complete or sign such a document.

Written confirmation of the person's mental incapacity (not being able to make the decisions themselves) can be provided by a medical practitioner and may be required for an Enduring Power of Attorney or Advance Care Directive to be used by the appointee/s. However, you can declare your Enduring Power of Attorney to become effective upon signing it

and to remain effective after you lose your mental capacity.

### Advance Care Directive (ACD)

This document allows a person to appoint a friend, family member or another trusted person to make important personal decisions such as where they live, holidays, relationships and medical or dental treatment, should mental competence be lost in the future. This person will be known as the *Substitute Decision-Maker*.

A *Substitute Decision-Maker* is expected to make decisions respecting the wishes of the person (where this is known), rather than what the Substitute Decision Maker wants.

When preparing your ACD you can specify the conditions of appointment and your values and wishes that the Substitute Decision-Maker will need to consider when acting on your behalf. You can specify types of treatment or interventions that you would not accept and your preferred end-of-life arrangements.

### Enduring Power of Attorney (EPA)

This document allows a person to appoint a friend, family member or another trusted person to make financial decisions, including property transactions on their behalf.

*Note: Enduring Power of Attorney is different from a General Power of Attorney. Use a General Power of Attorney to give someone else the power to make financial decisions on your behalf for a specific period /event. For example, you might choose to appoint an attorney if you are going away for a while and need someone else to sell your house or pay your bills. The General Power of Attorney will end when you lose capacity to make your own decisions.*

### How do I put these documents in place?

You need to complete the relevant forms. The **Advance Care Directive DIY Kit** is available

at [www.advancecaredirectives.sa.gov.au](http://www.advancecaredirectives.sa.gov.au). You can complete the form on line or you can download and print it. The kit includes a form, instructions on how to complete it and a sample ACD. Alternatively, you can obtain a free professionally printed hard copy of the Advance Care Directive Kit:

- from Service SA (postage fees apply)
- in person from Service SA
- in person from selected local public libraries.

The **Enduring Power of Attorney DIY Kit** contains a step-by-step guide, three Enduring Power of Attorney forms and a Revocation form. It is also available for purchase on line from **Services SA**.

The EPA form and the EPA revocation form (but not the full kit) are also available for free download from the Lands Services SA website <https://landservices.com.au/businesses-and-property-industry-professionals/land-transactions/forms-and-guidance-notes> (links located under 'Registration forms').

Alternatively, you may engage a solicitor to assist you with preparing these documents.

## Advance care planning on My Health Record

My Health Record is an online summary of your health information. The system is managed by the Australian Government. It includes an Advance Care Planning section, which allows you make your ACD information available to health care providers at the time and place it is needed.

For more information visit [myhealthrecord.gov.au](http://myhealthrecord.gov.au), contact My Health Record help line **1800 723 471** or speak with your GP.

## What if there is no Advance Care Directive or Enduring Power of Attorney?

If there is no Advance Care Directive (or a previous document covering the same issues) or

an Enduring Power of Attorney and a person loses the ability to make decisions, the **South Australian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (SACAT)** may appoint a guardian and/or an administrator to make personal and financial decisions for that individual. This can be a relative, friend or the Public Advocate/Public Trustee.

## How about previous documents?

The Advanced Care Directive Act 2013 came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2014. The new Act created a single Advance Care Directive to replace the previous Enduring Power of Guardianship (EPG), Medical Power of Attorney (MPA) and Anticipatory Direction (AD).

Existing documents completed before the new Act **will continue to be valid** if they still reflect the person's wishes. For further information, contact the Legal Services Commission of SA.

## The role of SACAT

The South Australian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (SACAT) can appoint a guardian to make decisions for a person with mental incapacity including those related to medical treatment, accommodation, health and lifestyle. SACAT is also able to appoint an administrator if required; this refers to managing the incapacitated person's money, legal and business affairs.

An application to SACAT should only be made as a last resort when all other options have been considered. If there is no Enduring Power of Attorney or Advance Care Directive but the person is coping in the community, being adequately cared for by family or friends and there is no conflict between the parties, there is no need to apply for guardianship or administration.

The application should contain relevant and accurate information that supports and shows the need for intervention and also shows how other less restrictive options have been tried and why legal protective orders are required.

Tel. 1800 723 767; [www.sacat.sa.gov.au](http://www.sacat.sa.gov.au)

## Useful contacts and resources

**Legal Services Commission** offers free legal advice to the general public. It publishes resources (available on line) containing useful information on Powers of Attorney and Enduring Power of Attorney.

**Legal Help Line 1300 366 424;**

[www.lsc.sa.gov.au](http://www.lsc.sa.gov.au)

To find a **Justice of the Peace** to witness your Advance Care Directive in South Australia, visit [www.sa.gov.au/topics/rights-and-law/rights-and-responsibilities/justices-of-the-peace/find-a-jp](http://www.sa.gov.au/topics/rights-and-law/rights-and-responsibilities/justices-of-the-peace/find-a-jp)

The **Office of the Public Advocate** is authorised to resolve disputes about an advance care directive (health, accommodation or personal decisions) or a health consent issue without the need to go through a formal South Australian Civil and Administrative Tribunal process. It does this through a mediation service. It also provides information about the *Guardianship and Administration Act 1993*, the *Mental Health Act 2009*, the operation of these Acts and related issues. **Tel. 8342 8200;** [www.opa.sa.gov.au](http://www.opa.sa.gov.au)

**South Australian Government – Advance Care Directives** website features information, online and downloadable form, and useful contacts. [www.advancecaredirectives.sa.gov.au](http://www.advancecaredirectives.sa.gov.au).

**Advance Care Planning Australia** is a national initiative funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care and administered by Brisbane South Palliative Care Collaborative, Metro South Health. It is aimed at assisting people with planning for their future health care. Its website features a range of information resources. Its National Advance Care Planning Support Service can be contacted 1300 208 582 or by email at

[acpa@advancecareplanning.org.au](mailto:acpa@advancecareplanning.org.au).

<https://www.advancecareplanning.org.au/>

**Catalyst Foundation** (including Seniors Information Service) can assist you with accessing the relevant forms and additional information.

Tel. **8168 8776** or email

[information@catalystfoundation.com.au](mailto:information@catalystfoundation.com.au).

## End of life planning

The Legal Services Commission publishes an *End of Life Planning Checklist and Worksheet* which can be downloaded from its website or ordered.

The **South Australian Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2021** commenced 31 January 2023.

The process enables eligible people to voluntarily access a medication that will cause their death, in accordance with the steps and process set out in the Act.

*Note: A desire to access voluntary assisted dying expressed in the Advance Care Directive will not be considered a request for voluntary assisted dying, as the person needs to have decision-making capacity throughout the entire process, to make sure their decision remains voluntary and consistent.*

Further information can be found at [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/vad](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/vad). The South Australian Voluntary Assisted Dying Care Navigator Service can be contacted by phone on **0403 087 390** or email

[Health.VADCareNavigators@sa.gov.au](mailto:Health.VADCareNavigators@sa.gov.au)

*The information contained here is general in nature and is not intended as legal advice*

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