

## *Circle Of Life: Cancer Education and Wellness*

### *for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities*

#### **Appendix B: How to Write an Advance Health Care Directive**

A person should learn about advance health care directives in their own state before they begin. A person may wish to look into one or more of the resources listed in this appendix.

- Discuss decisions and wishes with a spouse or partner, family members, close friends, a health care provider, and/or attorney. Telling those close to you about your end-of-life decisions will help ensure that your wishes are carried out.
- Decide what you want, such as a living will, durable power of attorney for health care, and/or other advance health care instructions. Understand the meaning of each and the differences between them.
- Decide who you want as your health care proxy or agent (decision maker). This is one of the most important decisions you will ever make. Choose this person carefully. Pick someone you believe will be able to carry out your wishes even if they include DNR or denying other life-sustaining treatments. Talk with the person to be sure they're OK with doing this for you and that they understand your wishes. And remember it's good to have a second person to act as a backup in case your first choice cannot do it.
- Decide what you want your advance directive to say. If you choose a living will, be specific about such things as CPR, artificial respiration (breathing), medicines to make your heart work, kidney dialysis, artificial feeding (tube or intravenous), and certain surgical procedures.
- If you need help writing an advance directive, contact one of the resources listed below or an attorney. You do not have to use an attorney to write an advance directive. An attorney may know the most about the laws in your state, but only you can make the decisions about your future care.

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- Have one or more witnesses sign your advance directive (or whatever is required in your state).
- If you have appointed an agent (durable power of attorney for health care), give a copy of your advance directive to them and ask them to keep it in a safe place where it can be found quickly if needed. Be sure that family members who are likely to be nearby have copies, and that they know who your agent is.
- Keep copies of your advance directive in a handy, easy-to-find place so that someone else can find it if you are in the hospital and need it. Make sure that those close to you know where your advance directive is kept.
- Do not lock an advance directive in a safe-deposit box, home safe, or filing cabinet that only one person can open.
- Be sure the advance directive is clearly marked.
- Every once in a while, talk to your health care agent about your advance directive in order to remind them of this important responsibility. If your wishes change, be sure to talk this over with your agent, your loved ones, and your health care providers.