

# Your Health Care Proxy

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Congratulations on taking a step towards completing your Massachusetts Health Care Proxy form!

## What is a Health Care Proxy?

A health care proxy (or health care “agent”) is someone who can be your voice if you are ever unable to make your own health care decisions. You should appoint someone who can understand and respect your values and wishes about health care. A proxy form can be filled out at any time and does not require a lawyer or a notary. It must be witnessed by two adults; neither can be the person you are appointing as proxy or alternate proxy.

## Why do I need a Health Care Proxy?

All adults (age >18 years), both healthy and those who are sick, should complete a health care proxy form. Most serious illnesses develop unexpectedly, so a proxy is “insurance”: you hope you never need it, but if you do, it’s important to be prepared. In fact, at least 30 percent of people over age 65 are unable to make their own medical decisions at end of life and they require a health care proxy to make health care decisions on their behalf.

## Important Steps After Completing a Health Care Proxy Form

Talk to your Health Care Proxy about what would matter most to you in the face of serious illness. Studies show that proxies experience less emotional burden making end-of-life decisions for another person when they have been prepared for their role in advance by having conversations over time about your values and goals. Topics to consider exploring include:

- What makes life worth living for you?
- Are there conditions you would consider worse than death?
- Are there specific kinds of medical care you would want or not want if you were nearing end of life?
- How much flexibility do you wish to give your proxy in making decisions for you?

Listed below are some resources to help you have a conversation with your proxy.

- Give a copy of your proxy form to your Health Care Proxy, Alternate Health Care Proxy, your primary care provider and other specialists that you see frequently. Ask that the proxy be placed in your medical record.
- Talk to your health care providers about what is most important to you. If your health care team knows about your wishes, they will be better equipped to help you or your Proxy make decisions about your care in the future.

## Need Help Taking These Important Steps?

The following are a list of websites with tools that can help you get started:

- Prepare for Your Care: [www.prepareforyourcare.org](http://www.prepareforyourcare.org)
- The Conversation Project: [theconversationproject.org](http://theconversationproject.org)
- Massachusetts Medical Society: [www.massmed.org/healthcareproxy](http://www.massmed.org/healthcareproxy)



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## **MASSACHUSETTS HEALTH CARE PROXY**

### **Information, Instructions, and Form**

#### **What does the Health Care Proxy Law allow?**

The **Health Care Proxy** is a simple legal document that allows you to name someone you know and trust to make health care decisions for you if, for any reason and at any time, you become unable to make or communicate those decisions. It is an important document, however, because it concerns not only the choices you make about your health care, but also the relationships you have with your physician, family, and others who may be involved with your care. Read this and follow the instructions to ensure that your wishes are honored.

Under the Health Care Proxy Law (Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 201D), any competent adult 18 years of age or over may use this form to appoint a Health Care Agent. You (known as the "Principal") can appoint any adult EXCEPT the administrator, operator, or employee of a health care facility such as a hospital or nursing home where you are a patient or resident UNLESS that person is also related to you by blood, marriage, or adoption. Whether or not you live in Massachusetts, you can use this form if you receive your health care in Massachusetts.

#### **What can my Agent do?**

Your Agent will make decisions about your health care *only* when you are, for some reason, unable to do that yourself. This means that your Agent can act for you if you are temporarily unconscious, in a coma, or have some other condition in which you cannot make or communicate health care decisions. Your Agent cannot act for you until your doctor determines, in writing, that you lack the ability to make health care decisions. Your doctor will tell you of this if there is any sign that you would understand it.

Acting with your authority, your Agent can make any health care decision that you could, if you were able. If you give your Agent full authority to act for you, he or she can consent to or refuse any medical treatment, including treatment that could keep you alive.

Your Agent will make decisions for you only after talking with your doctor or health care provider, and after fully considering all the options regarding diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment of your illness or condition. Your Agent has the legal right to get any information, including confidential medical information, necessary to make informed decisions for you.

Your Agent will make health care decisions for you according to your wishes or according to his/her assessment of your wishes, including your religious or moral beliefs. You may wish to talk first with your doctor, religious advisor, or other people before giving instructions to your Agent. It is very important that you talk with your Agent so that he or she knows what is important to you. If your Agent does not know what your wishes would be in a particular situation, your Agent will decide based on what he or she thinks would be in your best interests. After your doctor has determined that you lack the ability to make health care decisions, if you still object to any decision made by your Agent, your own decisions will be honored unless a Court determines that you lack capacity to make health care decisions.

Your Agent's decisions will have the same authority as yours would, if you were able, and will be honored over those of any other person, except for any limitation you yourself made, or except for a Court Order specifically overriding the Proxy.

### How do I fill out the form?

- 1 At the top of the form, print your full name and address. Print the name, address, and phone number of the person you choose as your Health Care Agent. (**Optional:** If you think your Agent might not be available at any future time, you may name a second person as an Alternate Agent. Your Alternate Agent will be called if your Agent is unwilling or unable to serve.)
- 2 Setting limits on your Agent's authority might make it difficult for your Agent to act for you in an unexpected situation. If you want your Agent to have full authority to act for you, leave the limitations space blank. However, if you want to limit the kinds of decisions you would want your Agent or Alternate Agent to make for you, include them in the blank.
- 3 **BEFORE** you sign, be sure you have two adults present who will be witnesses and watch you sign the document. The only people who cannot serve as witnesses are your Agent and Alternate Agent. Then sign and date the document yourself. (Or, if you are physically unable, have someone other than either witness sign your name at your direction. The person who signs your name for you should put his/her own name and address in the spaces provided.)
- 4 Have your witnesses fill in the date, sign their names and print their names and addresses.
- 5 **OPTIONAL:** On the back of the form are statements to be signed by your Agent and any Alternate Agent. This is not required by law, but is recommended to ensure that you have talked with the person or persons who may have to make important decisions about your care and that each of them realizes the importance of the task they may have to do.

### Who should have the original and copies?

After you have filled in the form, remove this information page and make at least four photocopies of the form. Keep the original yourself where it can be found easily (*not* in your safe deposit box). Give copies to your doctor and/or health plan to put into your medical record. Give copies to your Agent and any Alternate Agent. You can give additional copies to family members, your clergy and/or lawyer, and other people who may be involved in your health care decisionmaking.

### How can I revoke or cancel the document?

Your Health Care Proxy is revoked when any of the following four things happens:

1. You sign another Health Care Proxy later on.
2. You legally separate from or divorce your spouse who is named in the Proxy as your Agent.
3. You notify your Agent, your doctor, or other health care provider, orally or in writing, that you want to revoke your Health Care Proxy.
4. You do anything else that clearly shows you want to revoke the Proxy, for example, tearing up or destroying the Proxy, crossing it out, telling other people, etc.

YOUR BIRTH DATE (m/d/y)

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

# MASSACHUSETTS HEALTH CARE PROXY

**1** I, \_\_\_\_\_, residing at  
(Principal: PRINT your name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Street) (City/town) (State/ZIP)

appoint as my **Health Care Agent:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of person you choose as Agent)

of \_\_\_\_\_  
(Street) (City/town) (State/ZIP)

Agent's tel (h) \_\_\_\_\_ (w) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**OPTIONAL:** If my agent is unwilling or unable to serve, then I appoint as my **Alternate Agent:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of person you choose as Alternate Agent)

of \_\_\_\_\_  
(Street) (City/town) (State/ZIP) (Phone)

**2** My Agent shall have the authority to make all health care decisions for me, including decisions about life-sustaining treatment, subject to any limitations I state below, if I am unable to make health care decisions myself. My Agent's authority becomes effective if my attending physician determines in writing that I lack the capacity to make or to communicate health care decisions. My Agent is then to have the same authority to make health care decisions as I would if I had the capacity to make them **EXCEPT** (here list the limitations, *if any*, you wish to place on your Agent's authority):

I direct my Agent to make health care decisions based on my Agent's assessment of my personal wishes. If my personal wishes are unknown, my Agent is to make health care decisions based on my Agent's assessment of my best interests. Photocopies of this Health Care Proxy shall have the same force and effect as the original and may be given to other health care providers.

**3** **Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ (mo/day/yr)

**Complete only if Principal is physically unable to sign:** I have signed the Principal's name above at his/her direction in the presence of the Principal and two witnesses.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name) (Street)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(City/town) (State/ZIP)

**4** **WITNESS STATEMENT:** We, the undersigned, each witnessed the signing of this Health Care Proxy by the Principal or at the direction of the Principal and state that the Principal appears to be at least 18 years of age, of sound mind and under no constraint or undue influence. Neither of us is named as the Health Care Agent or Alternate Agent in this document.

In our presence, on this day \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ ( mo / day / yr).

Witness #1 \_\_\_\_\_ (Signature)      Witness #2 \_\_\_\_\_ (Signature)

Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_ Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Statements of Health Care Agent and Alternate Agent (OPTIONAL)**

**Health Care Agent:** I have been named by the Principal as the Principal’s **Health Care Agent** by this Health Care Proxy. I have read this document carefully, and have personally discussed with the Principal his/her health care wishes at a time of possible incapacity. I know the Principal and accept this appointment freely. I am not an operator, administrator or employee of a hospital, clinic, nursing home, rest home, Soldiers Home or other health facility where the Principal is presently a patient or resident or has applied for admission. But if I am a person so described, I am also related to the Principal by blood, marriage, or adoption. If called upon and to the best of my ability, I will try to carry out the Principal’s wishes.

(Signature of **Health Care Agent**)\_\_\_\_\_

**Alternate Agent:** I have been named by the Principal as the Principal’s **Alternate Agent** by this Health Care Proxy. I have read this document carefully, and have personally discussed with the Principal his/her health care wishes at a time of possible incapacity. I know the Principal and accept this appointment freely. I am not an operator, administrator or employee of a hospital, clinic, nursing home, rest home, Soldiers Home or other health facility where the Principal is presently a patient or resident or has applied for admission. But if I am a person so described, I am also related to the Principal by blood, marriage, or adoption. If called upon and to the best of my ability, I will try to carry out the Principal’s wishes.

(Signature of **Alternate Agent**)\_\_\_\_\_

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**Health Care Proxy developed by Massachusetts Health Decisions in association with the following member organizations of the Massachusetts Health Care Proxy Task Force:**

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| Boston University Schools of Medicine and Public Health:<br>Law, Medicine, and Ethics Program | Massachusetts Hospital Association                                  |
| Deaconess ElderCare Program   | Massachusetts Medical Society                                       |
| Hospice Federation of Massachusetts   | Massachusetts Nurses Association                                    |
| Massachusetts Bar Association   | Medical Center of Central Massachusetts                             |
| Massachusetts Department of Public Health   | Suffolk University Law School:<br>Elder Law Clinic                  |
| Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs   | University of Massachusetts at Boston:<br>The Gerontology Institute |
| Massachusetts Federation of Nursing Homes   | Visiting Nurse Associations of Massachusetts                        |
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For prices and information on quantity orders, or for non-English language licensing, please contact non-profit

**Massachusetts Health Decisions**

Email: proxy@masshealthdecisions.org