



**\*\*\*Important to know\*\*\***

In the state of Vermont if you are 18 years of age or older there is no default person to make decisions for you (such as a spouse or next of kin) in the event that you would be unable to do so. For this reason it is important to assign a health care agent to speak on your behalf regardless of whether you are currently healthy or suffer from a terminal illness. Having a conversation about your wishes and goals with this person is imperative.

**Something to Consider:**

One of the most common reasons for an ethics consult in this state is to resolve the issue of a person being unable to make decisions for themselves, not having a health care agent, and with family members who cannot agree on what care they should receive. This results in a complicated ethical dilemma.

References and places to look for more information:

[VTEthicsNetwork.org](http://VTEthicsNetwork.org)—has resources available for filling out legal documentation and better understanding healthcare ethics in the state of Vermont.

[TheConversationProject.org](http://TheConversationProject.org)—Comprehensive guides and resources for helping people talk about their wishes for end-of-life care.

**Having a conversation about health care goals and wishes in Vermont.**

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Having a conversation about your healthcare goals and wishes with a family member or friend is one of the most important things you can do for yourself.

You may also have a family member for whom you think this conversation would be important for you to better understand what their wishes and goals are.

This conversation can be a difficult one to have. This guide is designed to help you through this conversation by giving strategies for initiating it and important topics that you'll want to cover.

### **Things to think about:**

- ◆ Who do you want to have this conversation with?
- ◆ Is it about your health or theirs?
- ◆ When is a good time to bring this up?
- ◆ Where would you feel most comfortable having this conversation?

### **Ideas for starting the conversation:**

- ◆ Acknowledge the awkwardness of the subject, but emphasize the importance.
- ◆ Frame it as “just in case”
- ◆ Bring it up and set up a time in the future to have the conversation.

### **Questions to think about during your discussion:**

- ◆ What is important to me/them at the end of life?
- ◆ How much would you/them want to know about your/their condition and treatment?
- ◆ How much say would you/they want in working with the doctors to decide on treatment?
- ◆ If you/they had a terminal illness, would you/they want to know how quickly it was progressing?
- ◆ How long would you/they want to receive potentially uncomfortable medical treatments?
- ◆ What kind of quality of life do you/they want to have?

- ◆ Where do you/they want to be during your/their last days?
- ◆ How involved do you/they want family and friends to be?

In the end the health care agent should be able to answer the following question in the event that you could not speak for yourself:

**“If you were able to speak and to make a decision right now what would you say.”**

It's also a good idea to share this conversation and your thoughts about this subject with your doctor so that they can help you prepare the necessary documents such as a health care agent form, advance directive, or COLST form.