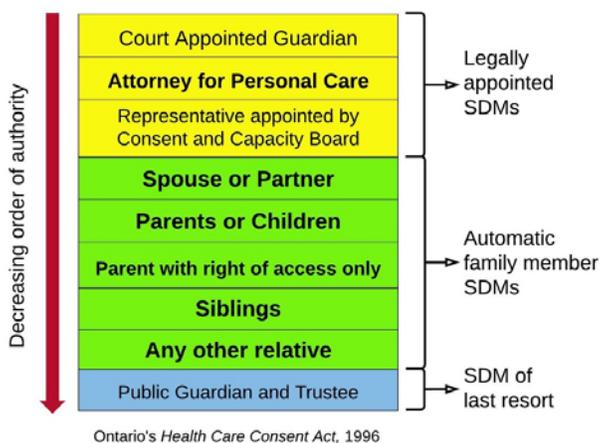


Engaging in Advance Care Planning for COVID-19

The 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has left many feeling afraid and uncertain about what will happen next and this is understandable. During so much uncertainty, something you can control while you are still mentally capable, is who would make health care decisions for you if you can't speak for yourself. The best time to plan for future healthcare choices is before a medical crisis occurs. It is more important than ever that your [Substitute Decision Maker\(s\) \(SDM\(s\)\)](#), family and healthcare team understand what matters most to you in the event that you become seriously ill.

Why is this important now?

In Ontario, Advance Care Planning involves two steps. In the **first step** you identify who will be your Substitute Decision Maker(s) or SDM(s). There are two ways to identify who would be your SDM in Ontario:



1. The Health Care Consent Act provides a [hierarchy](#) (ranked listing) of your possible automatic SDMs (see illustration) The individual(s) highest on this list who meets the requirements to be a SDM in Ontario is your automatic SDM. **You don't have to do anything to have this automatic SDM** make decisions for you when you are mentally incapable of doing so because this SDM has the right to act for you by this law.

Or if you prefer to have someone else other than your automatic SDM then:

2. You can choose and name a person, or more than one person, to act as **your SDM** by preparing a document called a [Power of Attorney for Personal Care \(POAPC\)](#). This legal document can be done with the assistance of a lawyer or you may do it yourself accessing the document on the [Ontario attorney general website](#).

In the **second step** you have important conversations with your SDM(s) and others to share information about what's important to you, your wishes, values and beliefs, and anything else that you think will help your SDM(s) understand how you would like to be cared for. Having a conversation before a medical crisis occurs allows time for reflection about how a serious illness may impact your health and your life.

It helps you:

- Think about your values and goals
- Reflect on healthcare choices you may have to make if you become severely ill
- Consider the person(s) who can make decisions for you if you cannot make them yourself, and
- Talk with this person(s) and other family or friends about your goals, values, and preferences for medical or personal care if you were to become ill

Who should you include in this discussion?

These discussions must be with your SDM(s) and other loved ones who can support your SDM(s) at a time of

crisis. It's important that your SDM knows what's important to you – what quality of life means to you – this prepares them to step into your shoes if needed and make future health care decisions that you would make for yourself. It's not about specific health care decisions or treatments, it's about sharing an understanding of what values and wishes can inform future health care decisions.

It is important that your SDM(s) is someone who is willing to:

- Accept this role
- Talk with you about your goals, values, and preferences
- Follow your decisions (even if they do not agree with them), and
- Make decisions in difficult moments (such as stressful times, differing opinions, crisis situations)

Is your SDM prepared for their role?

There's no way to tell if a sudden illness, such as COVID-19, could leave you unable to make your own decisions. Your future SDM(S), supported by your family may need to make decisions about health and personal care. By sharing what is important to you ahead of time, your SDM, family, and healthcare team will know what matters most to you and will use this information to guide health care decisions for you.

Some ideas to prompt conversations are:

"My doctor called to talk about the risk of becoming very sick if I were to become infected with coronavirus and encouraged me to think about what's important to me; about my future care and asked me to have a conversation with you. Can we talk?"

"I've been thinking about my risk of becoming very sick if I were to become infected with coronavirus and hoped we could talk about what's important to me. Can we talk?"

*"If I were to become very sick, I would like you to know about: _____
my biggest worries/fears are, how my beliefs or faith can be met if I'm seriously ill, what is comfort to me etc."*

"I heard that X got sick and ended up in the intensive care unit. His daughter had to make decisions about his health care. It made me realized that I need to talk to you about this..."

Let's keep the conversation going

These can be difficult things to talk about especially in these uncertain times. Think of these conversations as a gift of knowledge to those close to you who may need to act as your SDM. Knowing what matters most to you will support them to be in the best position to speak on your behalf. Having these discussions means your SDM may not be left to struggle with the possible guilt and anxiety of having to guess about what decisions you would have wanted them to make.

Don't be surprised if your health care provider reaches out to you to discuss your health and the risks with COVID-19. You may also wish to reach out to your health care provider to learn more and start a discussion.

For more information about Advance Care Planning in ON you can visit: [Speak Up ON: Resources for Individuals and Families](#) or access the [Advance Care Planning Workbook: Ontario Edition](#)

To access up to date information about the 2019 Coronavirus (COVID-19) you can visit: [Public Health Ontario COVID-19](#)