



Making decisions for your care and treatment

When you have cancer, there are many decisions to make about your care and treatment. Thinking and talking about your wishes, values, and beliefs in advance can make these decisions easier.

Your health care team can help you make the best decisions by explaining:

- The type of cancer you have
- The care or treatment options available to you
- Your overall health

The best care or treatment decision also considers:

- Your goals
- What you value about your health
- Your fears and concerns
- Your overall health

Before any care or treatment begins, you must give **informed consent**. Informed consent is a decision made by you (or your **Substitute Decision Maker [SDM]**) about treatment after your health care team has provided you with the following information:

- Your type of cancer and how it might affect your body
- Your care and treatment options including the expected benefits, risks, side effects, and where you will receive care or treatment
- What may happen if you decide not to have treatment
- What may happen if your cancer changes or your treatment doesn't work as expected

Making decisions about your care and treatment can be difficult and it is normal to feel anxious or scared. It often helps to have someone with you, such as your SDM, a family member, caregiver, or friend, to support you during discussions with your health care team. If this person cannot be physically present for your appointments, make sure to ask about any telephone call or videoconference options.

If you are capable of making decisions about your care and treatment, your health care team will talk to you directly. Being capable means that you have the mental capacity and ability to:

- Understand information about the proposed care or treatment options; and
- Appreciate the likely results of saying yes or no to the proposed options



Hierarchy (a ranked list) of Substitute Decision Makers.



Legally Appointed SDMs:

- Court Appointed Guardian
- Attorney for Personal Care
- Representative Appointed by Consent and Capacity Board

Automatic Family Member SDMs:

- Spouse or Partner
- Parents or Children
- Parent with Right of Access Only
- Siblings
- Any other relative

Court Appointed SDM:

- Public Guardian & Trustee

If you are not capable due to illness, injury, disability or any other reason, your health care team will talk to your SDM to make these decisions on your behalf. Your SDM must try to make the same care and treatment decisions you would have made. These decisions should be guided by your wishes, values, and beliefs. **Your SDM does not make decisions for you when you are still capable.**

Everyone in Ontario has an automatic SDM. Your SDM is based on a ranked list in Ontario's Health Care Consent Act (1996). The family member that is highest on this list is your automatic SDM. If you are unable to make health care decisions, your team must talk to your automatic SDM.

If there isn't such a person, or if this person is not able, willing, or available to make decisions on your behalf, your health care team must ask the next person on the list. This continues until an SDM is identified from this list. If there is more than one person at any level of this list (for example: if you have more than one child or sibling), they need to make decisions together.

If you want to choose someone else to be your SDM, you can name a person or more than one person to act as your SDM by legally appointing them as your "**Attorney for Personal Care**". You need to do this by completing a document called a "**Power of Attorney for Personal Care (POAPC)***."

It is important you tell your health care team if you have completed a POAPC. Your health care team will contact your Attorney for Personal Care for care and treatment decisions on your behalf if you are not capable.

* The term attorney here means someone who is representing you, and making decisions on your behalf, it does not mean that they are a lawyer. A POA for Personal Care is not the same as a POA for Property. A POA for Property makes financial decisions for you if you are unable to make them for yourself. Your POA for Personal Care may or may not be the same person as your POA for Property.

Your SDM must be:

- 16 years of age or older
- Available in person or by phone or a video call
- Willing to talk with you to understand your wishes, values, beliefs, and care needs
- Willing to carry out your wishes, values, and beliefs even if they are different from their own
- Able to ask questions and talk to your health care team
- Able to make difficult health care decisions on your behalf that may include:
 - Agreeing to tests, treatments, or procedures
 - Starting or stopping treatment
 - Withdrawing life support
 - Being admitted to or discharged from hospital
 - Receiving care at home or in the community in settings such as a long-term care home or hospice

The Ontario Power of Attorney Kit can be accessed by visiting the Attorney General of Ontario's website (attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/) and searching for "Power of Attorney Kit". A print copy can be mailed to you free of charge by calling 1-866-252-0104. You do not need a lawyer to write your POAPC, but they can help you understand the process and review the document to ensure everything is complete and you have not missed anything.

It is important to talk to your SDM about your wishes, values, and beliefs. This will help prepare them to make health care decisions on your behalf if needed in the future. This is called Advance Care Planning (ACP). Consider sharing your wishes, values, and beliefs with your SDM in a video/audiotape or by writing them down. This allows them to review it in the future if needed.

For more information about ACP and SDMs in Ontario go to speakupontario.ca.

Talk to a member of your health care team if you need support or more information to help you understand your care and treatment.