



“Advance directive” is the general term for any document in which a person provides instructions about their health care wishes or appoints someone to make medical treatment decisions for them in the event they are ever unable to make their own decisions. The following is a comparison of the most common advance directive types. These descriptions represent typical directives, but legal requirements vary from state to state and there are many different versions of Living Will, Medical Power of Attorney, and POLST documents.

Advance Directive Type	Medical Decisions Are Made	The Terminology Is	Signatures Required	HALO Recommended Directives of this Type
POLST – Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (Name varies from state to state.)	Days, weeks, or even years in advance of need. Note: POLST orders can be followed even when a patient is fully capable of making medical decisions/could recover with treatment.	Slanted toward death. “Facilitators” fill out POLST forms with patients. The questions asked often manipulate patients’ responses so that they unwittingly refuse life-saving or life-sustaining treatment by opting for “comfort care” (a euphemism for giving pain medications to cover up thirst and hunger, etc.)	1 patient or the patient’s healthcare proxy 1 designated healthcare professional (usually a doctor or nurse practitioner). Most POLST forms require no witnesses.	None.
Living Will	Days, weeks, or even years in advance of need.	Deceptive. The terms used often have legal and medical meanings that are quite different from what a person thinks they mean.	1 principal (person filling out the Living Will) 2 witnesses (or a notary)	Not recommended, with one exception. American Life League’s “Loving Will” is a life-affirming option for those who do not know anyone they would trust to be their medical decision-maker. (The “Loving Will” has a companion Durable Power of Attorney.)
Medical Power of Attorney (a.k.a., Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care)	In the moment by the patient’s appointed decision-maker and tailored to the patient’s current medical needs.	Can be either life-affirming or deceptive and dangerous, depending on who interprets the terms/ how the directive is worded.	1 principle 2 witnesses (or a notary)	HALO’s LAMP Document, the PMDD, the Loving Will with Durable Power of Attorney, and (in Canada) the Life-Protecting Power of Attorney for Personal Care (See halovoice.org for more information.)