Categories: End of life planning,

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United States of America

Estate planning
You may want to talk with a lawyer about setting up arrangements to protect your financial legacy and provide support if you lack capacity. Consider:

- A will. Prepare a document naming your beneficiaries.
- A living trust names and instructs a person to hold and distribute property and funds on your behalf when you can no longer manage your affairs.
- A revocable living trust (RLT) is a tool you can use to manage and distribute your property after you pass away. Even if you create an RLT, you should still have a simple will.
- Durable financial power of attorney lets you choose an ‘agent’ to make important financial decisions for you if you can’t make them yourself.

Advance care planning (ACP)
Advance Care Planning sets out your personal values, life goals, and preferences regarding future medical care. ACP consists of durable medical power of attorney, an Advance Directive (living will) and Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST).

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- 32% of Americans have a will.
- 60% of people without a will reported not taking any action to create one and also haven’t made a living trust or any other estate planning document.
- 41% of people between the ages of 18 and 34, and 34% of people between 35 and 54 have never discussed estate planning with anyone.
- 52% of people don’t know where their parents store estate planning documents.
- 18% of people don’t know what an Advance Healthcare Directive is.

Source: LEGALZOOM Estate Planning statistics 2025

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With a durable medical power of attorney (POA) you choose a healthcare proxy or agent to make medical decisions for you if you can’t make them yourself. These decisions could be about your treatment options, surgery, medication, and end-of-life care. A healthcare proxy can be chosen in

addition to or instead of a living will.

An Advance Directive (living will) lets you outline your healthcare preferences in the event you can't communicate them yourself. You can say what treatment you do or do not want to receive. A combined living will and POA are sometimes called an Advance Healthcare Directive (AHCD).

A legally valid Advance Directive must be signed and dated by a person with capacity and either notarized or witnessed by two people who aren't the healthcare proxy.

A Do Not Resuscitate Order (DNR) tells medics you don't want to be resuscitated in an emergency. A Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST) outlines your wishes regarding the life-sustaining treatment you want or don't want.

Forms vary in different states.

Useful Websites

A Good Goodbye Light-touch end-of-life and funeral planning conversations.

Afterall (previously Cake) A service that catalogues users' end-of-life wishes, instructions and documents.

Death Collective of Eastern Iowa Local initiative signposting death-positive services and resources.

End Well "is a nonprofit on a mission to transform how we think about, talk about and plan for the end of life".

FreeWill Notes on end of life planning.

Investopedia Estate Planning: 16 things to do before you die.

Legal Voice Steps to take for life and death planning.

National Institute on Aging A checklist for getting your affairs in order.

Prepareforyourcare.org Resources on advance directives.

The Order of the Good Death Issues around death with dignity, child and pet deaths.

UCLA Advice on Advance Care Planning.

United States Government Dealing with the death of a loved one.

Wellthy (previously Lantern) A commercial service that helps you plan ahead.

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Translation disclaimer: Content originally written in English.