

## Have you completed a Health Care Proxy?

National Healthcare Decisions Day (NHDD), celebrated this year as a week-long event from April 16 to 22, aims to help people across the United States understand the value of advance health care planning.

NHDD is an initiative meant to encourage people 18 years and older to express their wishes regarding health care – not just those who are older, or who are facing a serious illness – and for providers and facilities to respect those wishes, whatever they may be. One way to do this is by completing a Health Care Proxy, a legal document that allows you to appoint someone as your health care agent. This person would be responsible for making health care decisions on your behalf if you lose the ability to make decisions yourself (e.g., if you're severely injured or ill).

You can also use the Health Care Proxy to cite what types of treatments you would or would not want (e.g., *"If I am in a coma with no hope of recovery, I do not want to receive artificial nutrition provided by feeding tubes"*). Without this document, family members may disagree about the type of care you should receive. A proxy can prevent confusion and help your family and friends make the right health care decisions for you during an already stressful time.

When choosing your health care agent, be sure to select someone you trust, such as a family member or close friend. Talk with them to make sure they are willing to take on this responsibility. If they agree, share with them your thoughts, beliefs, and preferences about how you would want to be treated for the remainder of your life.

Although a Health Care Proxy is a legal document, you don't need a lawyer to complete it; however, your signature must be witnessed by two adults other than your agent. Once completed, a copy should be given to your health care agent and primary care doctor. You may also consider providing a copy to a second close family member – or even carry a copy with you.

Health Care Proxy forms are available at most doctor offices and at hospitals. You can also download a copy of the form by visiting the "Frequently Used Forms" section at [independenthealth.com](http://independenthealth.com).