

ADVANCE CARE DIRECTIVES: November 2015

An Advance Care Directive (ACD) is a written document which provides a legal means for a competent adult to instruct a substitute decision maker and/or to record preferences for future health and personal care.

In residential aged care facilities (RACFs) these documents assist nurses, other health care providers and families to make decisions consistent with the resident's wishes.

The *National Framework for Advance Care Directives (2011)*¹ is a document intended to guide and inform legislators and healthcare planners. While it is a useful guide and can assist RACF managers and senior staff to assist residents complete an ACD, the facility still needs to ask the necessary questions in order to gain the clarity so staff are clear on what the resident's wishes are. Generally for residents admitted to a RACF it may be too late for an ACD to be undertaken due to cognitive decline.

To enhance the provision of palliative care and advance care planning services to the aged nationally, the Australian Government has funded the Specialist Palliative Care and Advance Care Planning Advisory Services (Decision Assist) Project.

The project is managed by a consortium of national health and aged care organisations, including Respecting Patient Choices (lead agency) and Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA). A strong focus is on enhancing the skills of aged care staff and GPs through specialised education and resources and the implementation of strategies to increase linkages between aged care services and palliative care services.

The Federal Government is currently trialling an "opt out" Personally Controlled Electronic Health Record (PCeHR) to be called My Health Care, and this is also being trialled in RACFs. It is important that readily accessible ACDs, that may have been added by the patient's GP, be readily available at any time.

ACSAs POSITION

- **Continued support for Decision Assist to enhance the skills of aged care staff and GPs through specialised education and resources.**
- **The development of realistic and relevant indicators for residential aged care facilities that ask the necessary and specific questions relating to end of life care.**
- **The inclusion of accessible Advance Care Directives (ACDs) on the PCeHR (My Health Care).**

¹ <http://health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/acp>
For review November 2016