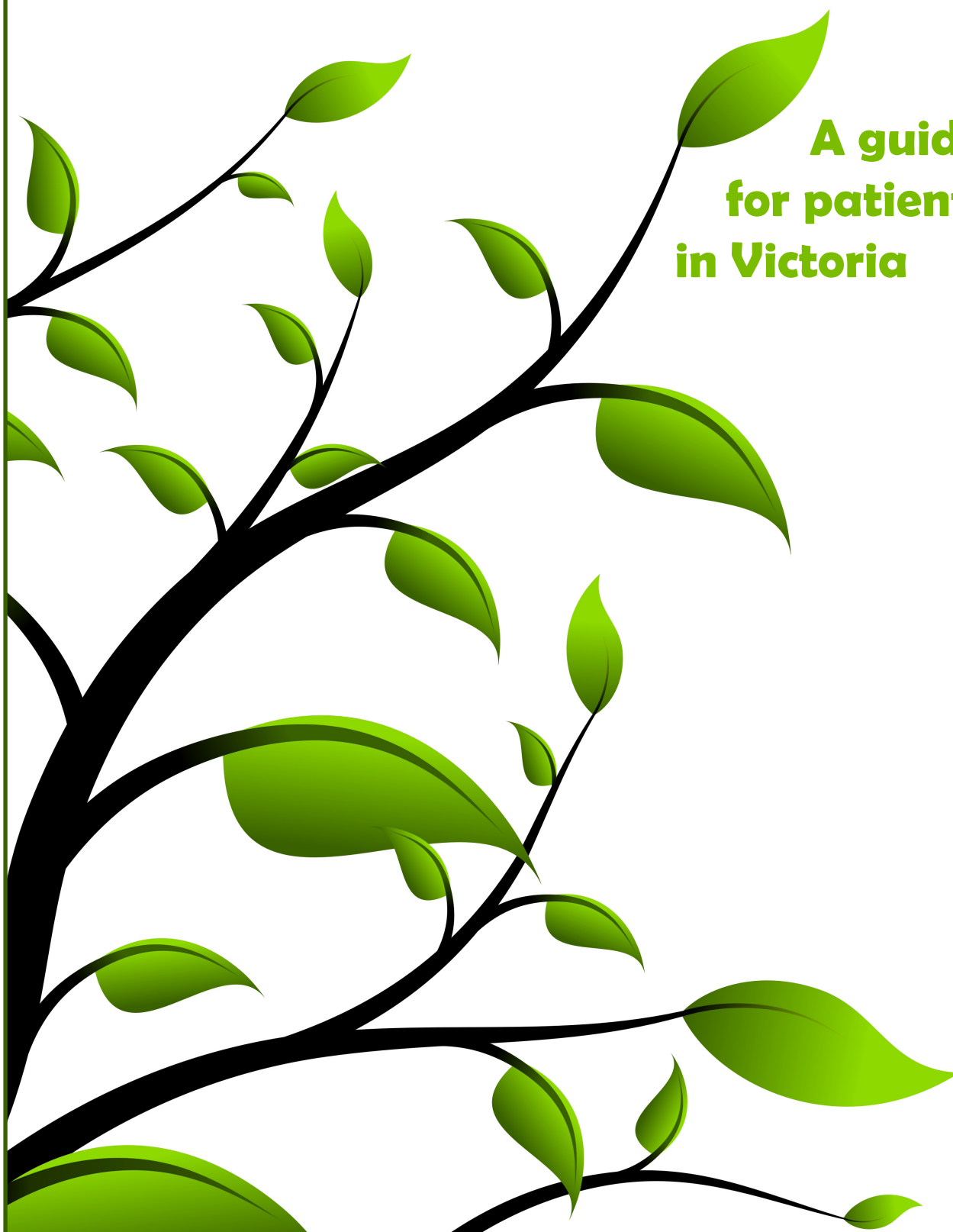




ST JOHN OF GOD
HEALTH CARE

Planning your future health care

**A guide
for patients
in Victoria**





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This guide is written for adult patients of St John of God Health Care, who are considering their future health care needs.

It aims to explain the choices available to you and how you may record your treatment preferences.

Introduction

Catholic Health Care is founded on the belief that life is a gift from God. Caring for people who are sick, aged or living with a disability is based on a respect for the inherent dignity of each human being.

At St John of God Health Care, we seek to relieve suffering, disability and sickness by attending to the physical, emotional, spiritual and social needs of patients. When death is inevitable there is much that can be done in supporting a person in their transition from this life, while also caring for those who grieve for them.

Striving for health care excellence requires close collaboration between our patients, doctors, nurses, allied health and pastoral service professionals.

In order to respect your personal preferences as well as the Catholic Health Care ethos, St John of God Health Care offers only medical treatments which align with:

- your personal treatment decisions;
- Catholic Health Australia (CHA) Code of Ethical Standards for Catholic Health and Aged Care Services in Australia (available for you to review on request or at www.cha.org.au); and
- relevant legislation.

Respecting your preferences

The Victorian Government recognises your right to make – and have respected - certain decisions about your future medical treatment, but limits this to treatment for conditions currently known to you. The *Medical Treatment Act 1988* (Victoria) is a legal framework if you are considering your future health care needs and treatment preferences.

This legal framework is supported by Catholic Health Care because it promotes autonomy and dignity. It is not about euthanasia. It is about acknowledging you have the right to make medical treatment decisions as well as appoint a substitute decision maker(s) if you





lose legal capacity. The Australian Bishops' & CHA "A guide for people considering their future health care" (available for you to review on request, or at www.bioethicsperth.org.au) details the Catholic Health Care ethical stance on advance care planning.

A time may come when you are unable to make decisions about your own health care, so it is a good idea to ensure that someone you trust is in a position to make decisions for you in accordance with your preferences. It is sensible to let trusted people know your values, beliefs and preferences regarding your health care to help guide them if they are called upon to make medical treatment decisions on your behalf.

There are a number of ways in which you can plan your future health care in the event that you are unable to make or communicate treatment decisions. Two of these are:

1. By making a Refusal of Treatment Certificate in accordance with Victorian legislation but only in respect of current conditions or illnesses. This is a legal document.
2. By appointing an Enduring Power of Attorney (Medical Treatment) in accordance with Victorian legislation. This is a legal document.

It is not compulsory for you to have a Refusal of Treatment Certificate or to appoint an Enduring Power of Attorney. Many patients do not feel the need to do so. However, if you have recorded your preferences or intend to record your preferences, please discuss this with your doctor and be sure to review your plan regularly.

Treatment options and Refusal of Treatment Certificates

You may wish to make a Refusal of Treatment Certificate (RTC) in relation to a current condition, and decline some life-sustaining measures or medical treatment should you unexpectedly lose legal capacity in the future. A life sustaining measure is a medical, surgical or nursing procedure directed at supplanting or maintaining vital bodily function that is temporarily or permanently incapable of independent operation. Medical treatment may include an operation or other medical procedure or the administration of a drug but does not include palliative care. Palliative care involves reasonable treatment for the relief of pain, suffering or discomfort and the reasonable provision of food and water, not including artificial feeding through a tube inserted into the stomach.

It is important to be aware that an RTC will not apply if it is cancelled by you or your medical condition has changed to such an extent that your RTC is no longer current. It is therefore important to update your RTC if your condition changes and you wish to decline medical treatment for that new condition.

You may also wish to record specific circumstances when you would want to accept or decline treatment; for example specifying that an intervention be withheld if medical staff consider that a reasonable outcome is unlikely. A 'reasonable outcome' could be defined as an outcome where there is no mental or physical incapacity. However, you can outline what you regard as an acceptable or reasonable outcome.

In your future health care planning, you may want to consider the following types of life sustaining measures or medical treatment:

- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) – to restore breathing and blood circulation during heart failure, for example from a severe heart attack. CPR procedures include mouth-to-mouth resuscitation chest compression.





- Mechanical ventilation - attachment to a ventilator (respirator) machine to assist breathing.
- Renal dialysis – mechanically filtering the blood of body waste products during kidney failure.
- Tube feeding – insertion through the stomach of a soft plastic tube to facilitate liquid nutrition.
- Inotropic drug support – receiving drugs via a needle directly into the blood stream to improve heart function during heart failure.
- Intravenous antibiotics – receiving drugs via a needle directly into the blood stream when an infection occurs.
- Blood or blood component transfusion – receiving blood or blood components via a needle directly into the blood stream during blood loss or when blood needs to be replaced to improve oxygen levels or ensure clotting.
- Any surgical procedure.

Depending on the medical condition or anticipated medical condition, you may consider that some or all of these life-sustaining measures or treatments would be too 'burdensome'. You are therefore encouraged to record the circumstances in which you would not want or would want certain life sustaining measures or treatment measures to be carried out.

It is important that you:

1. Talk to your doctor about different treatment options and your treatment preferences in various potential circumstances.
2. Advise St John of God Health Care at the time of hospital admission if you have appointed an Enduring Guardian.

Enduring Power of Attorney (Medical Treatment)

An Enduring Power of Attorney (Medical Treatment) is a person you can appoint to make medical treatment decisions on your behalf. However, they can only do so if you are unable to make or communicate your own decisions.

If you wish to appoint an Enduring Power of Attorney it is important to choose someone who:

- you trust and who knows you well;
- is willing to respect your values, beliefs and preferences; and
- is able to facilitate and/or make decisions in circumstances that may be difficult or stressful.

Often a family member is a good choice, but not always. Make sure that whoever you choose will closely follow your preferences and be a good advocate for you.

It is important that you discuss your values, beliefs and preferences with your Enduring Power of Attorney to ensure they fully understand and respect your preferences.

More information about appointing an Enduring Power of Attorney is available from the Victorian Office of the Public Advocate website at www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au or by calling 1300 309 337 (freecall).





Summary and contact details

Planning your future health care requires good communication between you and your family, your friends, your doctor and others caring for you.

Planning should be based on careful consideration of the benefits and burdens of different treatment options, including what can reasonably be expected of your substitute decision maker(s), as well as your doctor and others caring for you.

You should:

- Take into account the ethical and legal responsibilities of your substitute decision maker(s) and doctor/health care professional, and aim to provide them with clear guidance so they can provide you with the best and most appropriate health care.
- Review your plan regularly and make any modifications according to changing circumstances.

We hope this guide has assisted you in clarifying your options when planning your future health care.

If you require further information please contact:

- Victorian Department of Health - 1300 650 172 (freecall) or (03) 9096 0000 or visit www.health.vic.gov.au
- Victorian Office of the Public Advocate - 1300 309 337 (freecall) or visit www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au

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Action points

1. If making a Refusal of Treatment Certificate (RTC) go to www.health.vic.gov.au for further information and to download an official RTC or phone 1300 650 172 (free within Victoria) or (03) 9096 0000.
2. If appointing an Enduring Power of Attorney (Medical Treatment) identify an appropriate person/s to appoint and download an official Enduring Power of Attorney Form from www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au or phone 1300 309 337 (freecall).
3. With documents, ensure you:
 - Sign, date, copy, distribute and store documents carefully.
 - Make those closest to you, your doctors and carers aware of the existence and whereabouts of these documents.
 - Review and update documents regularly.
 - Seek medical and/or legal advice if you are unsure or have any queries.
 - Advise hospital staff on admission if you have a RTC or Enduring Power of Attorney (Medical Treatment).

With acknowledgement to:

- Victorian Version © January 2007 Austin Health
- Australian Bishops' and Catholic Health Australia - *A Guide for Health Care Professionals Implementing a Future Health Care Plan*
- *Code of Ethical Standards for Catholic Health and Aged Care Services in Australia*, June 2001
- Meggison, WS, *Advance Care Planning: Acts Amendment (Consent to Medical Treatment) Act 2008 (WA)*, Australian Health Law Bulletin, December 2008, 41-45
- Australian Bishops' and Catholic Health Australia - *A Guide for People Considering their Future Health Care*
- St John of God Health Care *Not for Resuscitation Policy*.

