



## Advance Care Planning and Faith Community Nurses

*82% of Australians think it is important to talk to their family about how they would want to be cared for at the end of their life. Only 28% have done so. (Dying to Talk)*

The inaugural Australian National Advanced Care Planning Week was held in April 2018. It aims to encourage discussions regarding “future healthcare preferences with loved ones” acknowledging that this can be a tough conversation.<sup>1</sup>

The ACP website has conversation starters and tools to get people thinking about their preferences and who they would want to make decisions on their behalf if they were unable to do so, or unable to communicate their wishes.<sup>2</sup> They sum up with the theme: “be open, be ready, be heard”.<sup>3</sup>

An Advance Care Plan (ACP) records beliefs, values and preferences, and appoints a substitute decision-maker to take effect when the person is unable to speak up for themselves. This could be due to illnesses affecting cognitive function or the person becoming unconscious. The ACP helps to guide the decisions the health professionals have to make by ensuring the person’s substitute decision-maker is consulted and can convey the person’s values and preferences for their end of life care.

The ACP website describes the benefits of undertaking the formal ACP process for “the person, their family, carers, health professionals and associated organisations.”<sup>4</sup> It says “families of people who have an advance care plan experience less anxiety, depression, stress and are more satisfied with care” while “for healthcare professionals and organisations, it reduces futile transfers to acute care and unwanted interventions”.<sup>5</sup>

Advance care planning is a team effort and nurses are part of the team.

### Fact sheet for health professionals

Advance Care Planning Australia has launched a fact sheet for health professionals on ‘advance care and legal requirements’ for each state/territory that covers frequently asked questions on the legal requirements of ACP including:

- Is advance care legal?
- How does statute law support advance care?
- How does Common Law (case law) support advance care?
- How compatible are ACP documents across Australia?
- What factors assist in assessing the legal validity of advance care directives?
- When is advance care legally possible? o Advance care with individuals lacking decision-making capacity
- Decision-making standards<sup>6</sup>



For more information see the Advance Care Planning Australia website, 'For health and care workers'.

### ACP and the role of an FCN

As FCNs you have an important role to play in making people aware of the need for an ACP and to assist them to create one by opening conversations with their friends, family, carers, and other health professionals.

You can facilitate the conversation with individuals, bringing together a group from your faith community or your local community. There are many resources around to promote the conversation and provide additional topics for specific people. See our resources section, especially the My Choices resource which is specifically written for use by churches in their health and pastoral care ministries. (You can read about it in this issue.)

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### References

1. National Advance Care Planning week, viewed 12 April 2018, <https://www.advancecareplanning.org.au/acpweek>
2. Ibid
3. Ibid
4. Advance Care Planning Australia, viewed 12 April 2018, <https://www.advancecareplanning.org.au/for-health-and-care-workers>
5. Ibid
6. Advance Care Planning Australia, viewed 12 April 2018, <https://www.advancecareplanning.org.au/for-health-and-care-workers/legalrequirements>