

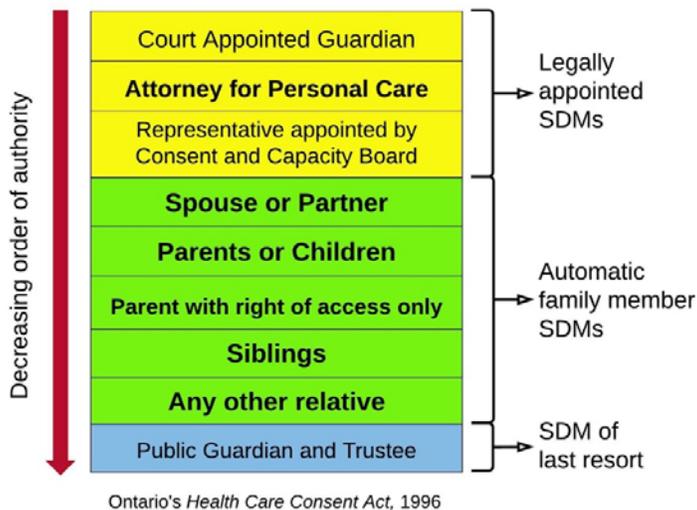
Information for a Substitute Decision Maker for COVID-19

This information is intended to support you to understand the role and responsibilities of the [Substitute Decision Maker \(SDM\)](#). Under Ontario Law, a doctor must get consent from the patient or their SDM(s) for any health care decisions, consent does not come from a piece of paper, it must come from a person so being prepared for this role is essential.

During so much uncertainty amid the COVID-19 pandemic, we can all consider what is important to us if we were to become seriously ill. The best time to consider future health or personal care wishes is before a medical crisis occurs. It is more important than ever that a Substitute Decision Maker(s) (SDM(s), family and healthcare team understand what matters most in the event that a person becomes seriously ill, is unable to speak for themselves and decision-making transfers to the SDM(s).

[Advance care planning](#) in Ontario involves two steps, one is reflecting on and sharing what is important to us if our health were to change. (e.g. values, wishes & goals) and the second step is to identify and prepare our SDM(s). If you are someone's SDM, (or future SDM) do you know the health care wishes and goals of that the person well enough to use that information to guide decision making if they became very ill with the COVID-19 infection?

What is a Substitute Decision Maker (SDM)?



A SDM is the person who makes healthcare decisions for you when you're no longer mentally capable to make them for yourself. The Health Care Consent Act provides a [hierarchy](#) (ranked listing) of your possible automatic SDMs (see illustration) **Or** if you prefer to have someone else other than your automatic SDM, then you can choose and name a person, or more than one person, to act as your SDM. You would do this by preparing a document called a [Power of Attorney for Personal Care \(POAPC\)](#). This legal document can be done with the assistance of a lawyer or you may do it yourself accessing the document on the [Ontario attorney general website](#).

When does an SDM start to make decisions?

An SDM will only make healthcare decisions for a person if they are not mentally capable of making them for themselves. There's no way to tell if a sudden illness, such as COVID-19, could leave a person unable to make their own decisions but in the event that a person become too sick to make these decisions, a SDM(s), supported by the family may need to make decisions about health and personal care.

How do I know if I'm ready to be a SDM?

Acting on behalf of someone else if needed to make future health care decisions is an important role.

You should be able to answer yes to all of these questions:

- Am I 16 years of age or older?
- Am I willing to accept this role?

- Am I willing to talk with the person about their goals, values and wishes?
- Can I follow the person's wishes and preferences? (even if I do not agree with them)
- Am I able to make decisions at difficult moments? (under stress, differing opinions, crisis)
- Can I be available when decisions need to be made?

How can I prepare to be a SDM?

Engage in conversations about what matters most to the person.

It's important for future SDMs to have conversations to find out what's important to those you'd be making decisions for – what quality of life means to them. This will prepare you to step into their shoes if needed and make future health care decisions that they would have made for yourselves. Health can change without warning. You may need to suddenly make complex health and personal care decisions such as may be the case if the person became seriously ill with COVID-19. By having conversations and learning more about what is important to your family member you would be prepared to consider and apply those wishes, values and beliefs to decisions being asked.

Ideas to prompt conversations are:

"Has your doctor shared about the risk of becoming very sick if you were to become infected with Coronavirus? Can we talk?"

"Have you thought about what is happening with the COVID virus and if you were to become very ill in light of all your other health worries? Can we talk about what's important to you; your future care?"

"I've been thinking about what would happen if you were to become very sick with the Coronavirus and hoped we could talk about what's important to you. Can we talk?"

"If you were to become very ill, I would like you to know about your biggest worries or fears are in this situation, how your beliefs or faith can be met, what would be comfort to you etc."

Making decisions as an SDM requires that you are willing to learn about the person's wishes, about what they value; be willing to ask questions and learn about their health in light of serious illness with coronavirus and engage with the health care team to understand the benefits and burdens of treatment in the context of the person's medical condition. Learning, sharing and understanding is preparation for a time when you may be called on to make decisions on behalf of another person.

Let's keep the conversation going

Healthcare providers may reach out to individuals to discuss their health and the risks with COVID-19 and individuals can also reach out to their health care provider to talk about their health situation. It would be important for you to be included in these opportunities as the future SDM.

These conversations can be challenging especially in these uncertain times. Think of these discussions as a gift of knowledge to you who may be required to act as the SDM. Knowing what matters most will support and guide you to be in the best position to speak on and represent the person's values, goals and wishes.

For more information about Advance Care Planning and the role of the Substitute Decision Maker you can visit:

[Speak Up ON: Resources for Individuals and Families](#)

To access up to date information about the 2019 Coronavirus (COVID-19) you can visit: [Public Health Ontario COVID-19](#)

Adapted April 2020 from Speak Up Ontario Advance Care Planning resource materials - www.speakupontario.ca And Respecting Choices COVID resources for Proactive Planning and Healthcare Agent © Copyright 2019-2020