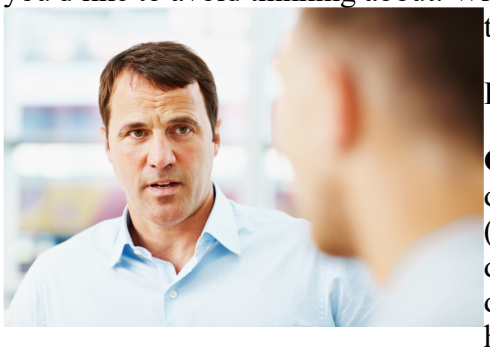
Planning for the unthinkable

If you're healthy and happy now, contemplating life after you're gone or critically ill is probably something you'd like to avoid thinking about. While it might not be a comfortable topic for most, it's an important one that can affect you and your loved ones down the line.



Here are some considerations you should make:

Get your paperwork in order. Even if you don't have extensive assets, drawing up a will can ensure family members are adequately cared for (children, grandchildren, spouse, etc.) and that your wishes for the distribution of your property are understood and followed. It can also deter family squabbles over your estate from cropping up. A lawyer can help you draw up a will that assigns an executor, divides your estate up according to your wishes, and is flexible enough to accommodate changes that arise such as the birth of a family member (e.g., child or grandchild) or a divorce.

If you have a financial planner or advisor he or she may also work in conjunction with your lawyer to create an estate plan that allots your assets in the most efficient manner and minimizes taxes for your inheritors.

Draw up a living will. While the name of this legal document varies from province to province—including advanced care plan, advanced health care directive, etc.—the objective is the same: To create a plan that lays out how you would like your health and personal care delivered if you are incapable of communicating your wishes. A lawyer can draft this document or you can do it on your own, so long as you stick to your province's requirements.

During the personal care planning process consider what is important to you. Preserving your life no matter what your condition? Remaining comfortable instead of aggressively treating a terminal illness?

Other considerations include:

- Pain management
- Your wishes for end of life or palliative care
- Treatment options that may prolong your life though decrease your quality of life
- Equipment: e.g., Intravenous, feeding tubes, ventilator, dialysis
- Emotional and spiritual care you feel is important
- The kind of care you would expect for curable, incurable and life-threatening conditions
- The use of CPR (Cardiopulmonary resuscitation) in a situation where it merely prolongs an irreversible, terminal condition

Decide on power of attorney. Though the laws and names vary from province to province, there are essentially two kinds of power of attorney:

1. **Power of attorney, property** gives the assigned individual the ability to pay your bills, access to bank accounts, sell your home and sign documents on your behalf. Together with your lawyer you can establish who you want to take on this role, set limits on his or her powers and establish circumstances for when these powers would come into effect.
   A **continuing power of attorney, property** names a person to be responsible for your financial and property affairs if you become mentally incapable of doing so, while a **non-continuing power of attorney, property** allows another person to look after your financial and property affairs but does not apply if you become mentally incapable. It's often used if you're away and need someone to pay bills or handle property matters during your absence.
2. **Power of attorney for personal** care lets you assign someone to make decisions about your health care treatment, living arrangements and other personal care if you're not able to communicate your wishes. Depending on which province you reside in, the power of attorney for personal care may also be called a **durable power of attorney for health care or a health care proxy.**

Communicate your decisions. Though it's a difficult topic to broach, talk to loved ones about your care, power of attorney and estate decisions so that they understand your wishes and the logic behind them. Doing so will avoid surprises and confusion during an incredibly stressful time. It's also wise to work through any advanced care plan with your doctor and clarify instructions or treatment requests.

Annually review your plans. Circumstances might change your thoughts about your care plan or will, so it's wise to go over these documents every year and adjust them accordingly.

Instead of hastily made decisions during a crisis, a proactive approach to your financial, legal and medical requests before illness or death strikes can clarify your wishes about important issues, reduce stress and conflict amongst family members and ensure your wishes are properly carried out. In your planning, be sure to discuss your intentions with your lawyer and financial advisor.