

Medicare and Hospice Overview

(The information below is from Medicare.gov)

When is the right time to ask about hospice?

You and your close family members can talk to your doctor to determine if hospice care is right for you. If your doctor certifies that you are terminally ill and have six months or less to live, you are eligible for the Medicare Hospice benefit. If you live longer than six months, you can still receive hospice care when the doctor recertifies that you are terminally ill. You have the right to stop hospice care at any time.

Hospice is covered by Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance)

Original Medicare will cover everything you need related to your terminal illness and related conditions. After your hospice benefit starts, you can still get covered services for conditions not related to your terminal illness.

Medicare Advantage Plan (an HMO or PPO) must help you find a hospice provider in your area and it will cover everything you need related to your terminal illness and related conditions.

Where do you get hospice care?

The **Medicare Hospice benefit** allows you and your family to stay together in the comfort of your home unless you need care in an inpatient facility. If your hospice team determines that you need inpatient care, they'll make arrangements for your stay.

The Plan of Care created by the hospice team includes:

- Doctor services and nursing care
- Medical equipment (wheelchairs, walkers)
- Medical supplies (bandages, catheters)
- Prescriptions drugs for symptom control or pain relief
- Physical/occupational therapy and speech-language pathology services
- Hospice aides (Certified Home Health Aides provide personal care, report any changes in need and offer comfort measures; minimum two days a week or more often if needed.)
- Social work services
- Dietary counseling
- Grief and loss counseling for you and your family
- Short-term inpatient care for pain and symptom management
- Short-term respite care (If your caregiver needs a rest, you may get inpatient care at a Medicare-approved facility.)
- Any other Medicare-covered services needed to manage your pain and other symptoms related to your terminal illness and related conditions, as recommended by your hospice team.

Where to find information about the Medicare Hospice benefit.

Type **medicare.gov** in your computer browser. Click on "Find and Compare Providers" in the blue box. Then put your Zip code in the first box. In the second box click on the arrow and select "Hospice Care" in the list of providers. Then click on "Search."

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At the top of the list of Hospice agencies you'll see "Filter by." Click on the arrow and the list will show Non-Profit, For-Profit, etc. Check the ones you want to see, and then click on "Apply."

The list shows Hospice agencies serving your area in alphabetical order. When you click on an agency, lots of information about that agency will appear, such as: Conditions Treated, General Information, Quality, and Details.

In the "Quality" section there is a heading "Family caregiver experience." It contains results from a national survey that asked a family member or friend of a hospice patient about their experience with that agency. Some categories are - communication with family, getting timely help, treating the patient with respect, etc. Some facilities are Medicare certified but have no data available. If you call one of them, you can ask if they have collected that data.

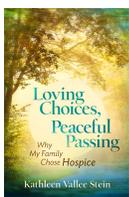
At the bottom of the page of all the agencies you'll see: "Consider this when choosing a hospice agency." Click on these links to get more information about questions to ask when choosing a hospice, how Medicare covers hospice care, and alternatives to hospice care.

Advance Health Care Directives

An **Advance Health Care Directive** lets your physician, family, and friends know your preferences about your own health care. When you give someone power of attorney for health care, he or she can make health care decisions for you if you become incapable of making your own decisions. You can also allow him or her to make those decisions for you now even though you are still capable. You can modify or change the form at any time. Get more information and download a form from the Office of the Attorney General's web site at nia.nih.gov.

Five Wishes is an advance directive that is written in everyday language and helps people express their wishes concerning the personal and spiritual in addition to the medical and legal. The document names the person you want to make health care decisions for you when you can't make them for yourself, the kind of medical treatment you want or don't want, your wish for how comfortable you want to be, for how you want people to treat you, and what you want your loved ones to know. Get more information and download a form at fivewishes.org

Physician Order for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST) is signed by both the doctor and the patient and specifies the types of medical treatment he or she wishes to receive. California law requires that the physician orders in a POLST must be followed by healthcare providers. *The POLST form complements an Advance Directive and is not intended to replace it.* Get more information and download a form at nia.nih.gov.



Bob Vallee passed peacefully from this life in his own home under the care of his daughter, author Kathleen Vallee Stein. After he died, she wrote *Loving Choices, Peaceful Passing: Why My Family Chose Hospice*. Ms. Stein is available to speak to groups about her family's experience. She can be reached at valleeview.com.