



# End of Life Mythbuster

May 2025

# Assisted dying: what it is, what it isn't, and ensuring the debate around it does not stop us making plans for our health and care wishes in later life.

The question of whether assisted dying should be legalised in England or not is a debate over which many different people hold different views. This debate has recently been brought to the forefront of the news agenda through the proposed 'Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill' that is currently being considered by Parliament. The Bill proposes to allow 'adults who are terminally ill, subject to safeguards and protections, to request and be provided with assistance to end their own life.'

The Parliamentary process is quite lengthy and will not finish until the end of 2025 or even 2026. Then, if the Bill passes into law, the Government and others will have to decide how to implement it and set up the practical arrangements - a crucial and complex task. This means that assisted dying will not be an option in England for a while, if it is approved at all.

Although we are still waiting to see what happens to the Bill, Age UK is becoming increasingly concerned about some of the unintended consequences and misunderstandings that the debate around assisted dying has created. This includes Age UK hearing about a growing number of older people who are becoming hesitant to have Advance Care Planning conversations with loved ones and professionals. They may be unaware of the benefits of these conversations, confused about what they're for, or fearful that the conversations could be used to push them towards an assisted death that they do not want.

In fact, Advance Care Planning conversations involve thinking about, and recording, all the health and care preferences that are important to us when thinking about the end of our life. They may include thinking about where we would like to die, and what sort of end-of-life treatments we would want (or not want), if available to us. At Age UK, we think these conversations are generally a good thing and bring real benefits. They ensure our wishes are known so that professionals and loved ones have a clear idea of what matters to us, and they can help us in the right way when the time comes and if we can't communicate them ourselves.

It would be unhelpful if misunderstandings about assisted dying, which is currently illegal in England, prevented people from having these very important conversations about their future wishes, if they choose to have them. That's why we have created this resource, to help give you the facts about Advance Care Planning and make sure that every one of us can make a plan for the end of our life that suits us, if and when we want to and regardless of the progress of the 'Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill'.

For more information around Advance Care Planning and how you might best prepare for these conversations, you may want to read our Age UK [Advance Care Planning resource](#).

You can also [download our guide](#), Thinking about end of life, or order your free copy by calling the Age UK Advice Line on 0800 678 1602.

# Busting the myths:

***“Advance Care Planning and discussing my preferences for the end of my life is similar to assisted dying”***

This isn't true. Talking about your future health and care wishes is very different to assisted dying, which remains illegal in England at this time. Although draft legislation called the 'Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill' is being considered by Parliament, assisted dying is unlikely to become legal and available in England until 2029, if at all.

Advance Care Planning is not about deciding to end your life early, it's about recording your preferences for your future health and care, so that professionals involved in your care and your loved ones can help you in the best way possible if you are unwell and at the end of your life.

***“Deciding that I would like to refuse certain treatments as part of my Advance Care Plan is the same as asking for an assisted death”***

This isn't true. Deciding against having certain treatments (such as Cardiopulmonary resuscitation, commonly known as CPR) in the event that we become very unwell, because we may not think they are in our best interests or align with our beliefs, is very different to assisted dying. Assisted dying, which remains illegal in England at this time, would mean a doctor giving someone drugs that end their life early.

***“I am scared that having conversations about my future health and care wishes means that people think I want to die”***

Saying what you would like at the end of your life does not mean that you want it to come any sooner. Sharing and recording these wishes is about planning and preparing, ensuring your wishes are known for future decisions to be made.

***“My doctor wants to talk about health and care at the end of my life, but I'm not ready to talk about this yet”***

That's absolutely fine, you don't have to. These conversations are completely optional, you don't have to engage in one unless and until you wish to and feel ready.

## ***“I don’t know where to start with having conversations about the end of my life”***

Talking about death, dying, and wishes for the end of your life is not easy. If you want to have these conversations and aren’t sure where to start Age UK has some helpful resources and information below that can help you think through the key questions and next steps.

## ***“I’ve heard about decisions being made about the end of someone’s life without their understanding or agreement”***

During the pandemic there were situations where some people felt forced into decisions that were being added to their health records, (like do not administer cardiopulmonary resuscitation orders, commonly known as DNR orders), without understanding what that meant, or even against their will. It is completely understandable that this bad practice has worried people.

This is another reason though why having an Advance Care Planning conversation can be helpful, because it can help you make informed decisions and provides the opportunity to chat through any questions that you may have.

## **Further information and support:**

[\*\*Age UK advance care planning booklet\*\*](#) – exploring what advance care planning is and how you can have conversations with families and healthcare professionals about death and dying and making future care wishes

[\*\*Let’s talk about death and dying booklet\*\*](#) – how to have difficult conversations with families and friends, grown up children, and grandchildren about death and dying

[\*\*Thinking about end of life information guide\*\*](#) – practical and emotional guidance that can help you when preparing to make decisions about the end of your life

[\*\*Advance decisions, advance statements and living wills factsheet\*\*](#) – a helpful factsheet covering all the things you can do to make sure others know which medical treatments you would want to refuse and how you would like to be cared for, should a time come when you cannot make or communicate these decisions yourself