



# The Young Caregiver



## Supporting a Loved One through a Cancer Diagnosis

a guide developed by the  
VI Department of Health and  
USVI Cancer Coalition





# A Message from the USVI Cancer Coalition

## Our Mission

To reduce the incidence, mortality, and economic impact of cancer in the US Virgin Islands.

## Our Vision

To develop a cohesive approach to reduce the cancer burden through services, education, advocacy, prevention, and detection.

## Our Work

Implementing the *U.S. Virgin Islands Cancer Care Plan* to reduce the impact of cancer across the Territory by focusing on key stages of the cancer continuum—prevention, early detection, diagnosis and treatment, and survivorship — while emphasizing cross-cutting areas like health equity, data, and policy.

Recognizing cancer as the second leading cause of death in the USVI, the plan calls for collective action to address risk factors, disparities, and outcomes, with the aim of reducing cancer-related illness and death.



Scan to view the  
U.S. Virgin Islands Cancer Plan

## Join Us

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**You're not just helping  
— you're a caregiver.**



You may not call yourself a caregiver, but if you're helping someone you love navigate cancer, you already are.

Caregiving can look different for everyone.

**You might be a caregiver if you:**

- Help schedule or attend medical appointments
- Keep track of medications or treatment plans
- Provide emotional support during difficult moments
- Help communicate with doctors or ask questions
- Assist with daily needs like meals, transportation, or errands
- Support decision-making about care and treatment

**Many young caregivers take on this role unexpectedly — often while balancing work, school, or family responsibilities.**

# Why Planning Ahead Matters

Cancer journeys are often unpredictable. There may be times when your loved one is able to make decisions, and other times when they may not.

## Planning ahead helps ensure that:

- Their wishes are clearly understood and respected • Family members are not left guessing during stressful situations
- Decisions can be made more calmly and confidently
- Unnecessary conflict or confusion is avoided
- Care aligns with what matters most to the patient

Without a plan, families are often forced to make difficult decisions quickly, sometimes without knowing what their loved one would have wanted.

**Planning ahead is not about expecting the worst — it's about protecting the people you love from uncertainty.**





# What Is Advance Care Planning?

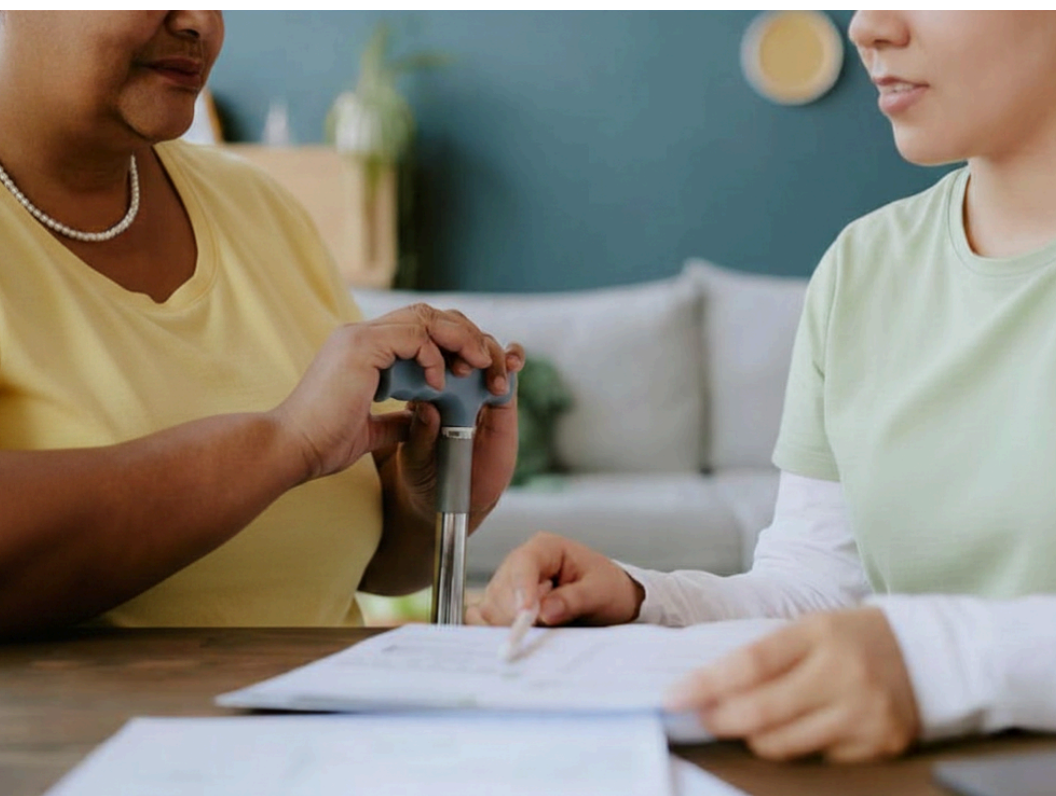
Advance Care Planning is the process of thinking about and discussing future medical care before a crisis happens.

It involves conversations about:

- Personal values and beliefs about care
- Preferences for treatment in serious illness
- Who should make decisions if someone cannot speak for themselves
- What quality of life means to them

This process can happen over time and may change as circumstances change.

Advance care planning is not a one-time conversation — it is something families can revisit as needed.



**These conversations help ensure that care decisions reflect what matters most to your loved one.**

# What is an Advance Directive?

An **Advance Directive** is a legal document that outlines a person's wishes for medical care if they are unable to communicate those decisions themselves.

It helps guide doctors and family members during serious or emergency situations.

An Advance Directive typically includes:

- **Health Care Proxy, or Medical Power of Attorney**, is a person chosen to make healthcare decisions on behalf of the patient if they are unable to do so.
- **Living Will** is a document that outlines the types of medical care a person would or would not want, such as life-sustaining treatments.

Having an advance directive:

- Provides clarity during difficult moments.
- Reduces stress for caregivers and families.
- Helps ensure decisions reflect the patient's wishes.

**It's important to share this document with family members and healthcare providers.**



# What Is Palliative Care?

**Palliative Care** is specialized medical care focused on improving quality of life for people living with serious illnesses, including cancer.

It addresses not only physical symptoms, but also emotional and psychological needs.

Palliative care can help with:

- Pain management
- Fatigue and physical discomfort
- Nausea or side effects from treatment
- Stress, anxiety, or depression
- Communication with healthcare providers

Palliative care is provided by a team of professionals who work alongside doctors to support both the patient and their family.

**Palliative care can be provided at any stage of illness and can be given alongside curative or life-prolonging treatment.**





# What Is Hospice Care?

**Hospice Care** is a type of care focused on comfort, dignity, and quality of life when a serious illness is no longer responding to treatment.

Hospice care supports:

- Pain and symptom management
- Emotional and spiritual support
- Family and caregiver needs
- End-of-life care in a respectful and compassionate way

Hospice services are often provided in the home but may also be available in healthcare facilities.

Hospice care can help families:

- Feel supported during a difficult time
- Better understand what to expect
- Focus on comfort and connection

**Choosing hospice care is not about giving up — it's about focusing on comfort, dignity, and support.**







## Starting the Conversation

Talking about future care can feel uncomfortable — especially with someone you love. You don't have to have all the answers. The goal is simply to begin.

### You can start by asking:

- Have you ever thought about what kind of care you'd want if you got very sick?
- What matters most to you if your health changes?
- Who would you trust to make decisions for you if needed?
- Are there treatments you would or wouldn't want?

**It may take more than one conversation — and that's okay. Listening is just as important as asking.**

# You Don't Have to Do This Alone

Being a caregiver can be emotionally and physically demanding — especially for young adults who may not feel fully prepared.

It's important to remember:

- You are not expected to know everything
- You can ask questions and seek guidance
- Healthcare providers are there to support you
- There are community resources available

Taking care of yourself is also part of caregiving.

**You can support your loved one best when you also take care of yourself.**



# Resources & Support



**Cancer.findhelp.com**



**Patient Resource Guide**

**Support is available for both patients and caregivers:**

- VI Department of Health
- Cancer support programs
- Hospice and palliative care providers
- Legal resources for advance directives
- Behavioral Health services

## **✓ Steps You Can Take Today**

- Start a conversation with your loved one
- Ask about their wishes for care
- Identify a trusted decision-maker
- Learn about advance directives
- Speak with a healthcare provider
- Reach out for support services



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