

NAMI Homefront Mental Health Resources

for Military Service Members, Veterans and Their Families



Guide to Psychiatric Advance Directives

Do you want more say in your mental health treatment?

If you are someone who is in psychiatric treatment, you might be interested in finding out how to have more say in your treatment, especially when you are in crisis. This guide will help you understand how a psychiatric advance directive (PAD) might be useful to you.

It's always a good idea to start with your psychiatrist or other mental health treatment provider if you are interested in creating your own PAD. Ask if they know about PADs, and if they can help you create one. If they don't know about them, you can share this brochure with them so they can learn more, too. There are also volunteers in your community who will help you create a PAD.

What is a psychiatric advance directive?

A psychiatric advance directive is a legal document that tells treatment providers your preferences for treatment in a crisis. It goes into effect if you are incapacitated — that means if you are in a state of mind where you cannot speak for yourself. An example of being incapacitated would be if you were unconscious, or couldn't speak, or were experiencing significant confusion.

If you have a Wellness Recovery Action Plan, or WRAP Plan, or a Crisis Plan, there are some similarities with a PAD. A PAD is different because it is a legal document. To make it official, it must be signed in front of a notary public and two witnesses.

Treatment providers are required to follow your wishes stated in the PAD, unless those wishes include something they cannot do (like send you to a hospital in another state or to a hospital that has no beds available), or it's an emergency and they need to preserve your safety or the safety of others.

Where did the idea for PADs come from?

Medical advance directives have been used in medical settings for years for people who wanted more control over their medical care at times when they had a serious medical illness and knew they would not be able to express their wishes on their own — like if someone was at the end of life. They were created as the result of the Patient Self-Determination Act of 1990, a federal law designed to give all patients more say in healthcare decisions.

NAMI Homefront Mental Health Resources

for Military Service Members, Veterans and Their Families

Guide to Psychiatric Advance Directives (continued)

Are PADs always respected?

We hear from some people that their PAD was not followed during a crisis. They are not used often, and medical providers are just starting to learn more about them. By getting more PADs out there, we hope to strengthen the voice of people who live with mental illness and to encourage more shared decision making with their treatment providers.

Do you have a trusted person who will help you in a crisis?

A PAD can include a health care power of attorney (HCPA). The HCPA is a legal document that lets you put someone in charge of communicating your wishes to medical providers if you are not able to. The person appointed by the HCPA is called your health care agent. That person can speak for you in a crisis. It's your choice to have a health care agent or not. Sometimes family members are in this role, and sometimes friends or another person you trust and who can help you in a crisis.

Are there other benefits to having a PAD?

The process of creating a PAD helps you think through what you can do to prevent a crisis, what to do during a crisis, and how best to recover from a crisis. The conversations with your treatment providers, your family and friends, can help you take control of your mental health and improve communication.

What do I need to think about before I create a PAD?

What kind of treatment is helpful to you? What medications work for you? What medications don't work for you? Is there a hospital that you prefer? Who should be contacted if you are in a mental health crisis? What practical matters in your life — like childcare, pet care, contacting your employer or paying your rent — need to be tended to if you are not able? You can include additional instructions tailored to what support you need in your PAD.

Where can I get more information about PADs?

- National Resource Center on Psychiatric Advance Directives: <https://www.nrc-pad.org/>
- For information about PADs nationwide: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBSZ4ooRoZ8>
- Crisis Navigation Project: <http://www.crisisnavigationproject.org/>
- A project to promote the use of PADs. Go to this [link](#) for NAMI North Carolina resources.

Source: The Crisis Navigation Project is a collaborative project to promote the use of psychiatric advance directives. It is based at the NC Evidence Based Practices Center at Southern Regional Area Health Education Center, in affiliation with Duke University Medical Center. Funding for the project is provided by The Duke Endowment. NAMI North Carolina is a key partner in the initiative.