

# Caregiver Resources

## Palliative Care - Caregiver Sheet

*Caregiving throughout the cycle of life can be supported.*



**Serious illness** can wear at the threads that hold a quality life together for both the Veteran and caregiver. A primary guiding principle of palliative care is enhancing the quality of life for those who suffer from serious illness and supporting and engaging the caregivers and family who care for them.

### What is VA Palliative Care?

- Palliative care is specialized medical care for those suffering from serious or life-limiting illnesses at any age or stage of illness.
- Palliative care is provided by a team of specialists, which may include a doctor, nurse, social worker, chaplain, and other medical professionals who provide consultation or work in conjunction with the Veteran's current medical providers.
- Palliative care may be considered when a Veteran has been diagnosed with a severe or chronic illness such as cancer, heart condition, lung disease, dementia, or kidney failure.
- Palliative care is best to start early to enhance the quality of life throughout the illness.
- Veterans receiving palliative care may be receiving treatment meant to cure the illness.

### What is the goal of palliative care?

Palliative care is patient-centered, meaning the care team supports the Veteran and their unique values, preferences, and needs to improve the quality of life for the individual. Goals include the following:

- To assist the Veteran in finding relief from pain and other physical symptoms and the emotional distress sometimes associated with serious illness and its treatment.
- To recognize and support the significant role of the Veteran's family and caregivers and include them in planning.
- To provide support in coordinating and navigating the health care system and providers of the Veteran's care.
- To provide clear information to help guide the Veteran in making informed decisions about their health care, including understanding life-sustaining treatments and developing an advanced care plan.
- To help Veterans and caregivers make sure health care lines up with their priorities with tools such as the [Conversation Guide for Patients and Caregivers for Identifying their Health Priorities](#)



## Advance Care Planning:

- Every adult over 18 should understand the importance of advanced care planning. It is especially critical if they have been diagnosed with a chronic disease. Advance care planning ensures that health care providers and family members know what the patient considers to be necessary and their preferences for treatment now and in the future.
- If the patient becomes too sick to express their wishes or make health care decisions, a surrogate will be called upon to make the decisions on their behalf. If the patient wishes, they can identify a person who can advocate for their wishes if they cannot. Designating a person to serve in this role through the completion of an Advance Directive allows everyone involved in the patient's care to clarify the next steps. Advance care planning documents are available through VA providers or by visiting [Advance Care Planning - Geriatrics and Extended Care](#) Non-Veterans may also want to visit [caringinfo.org](https://www.caringinfo.org) for more information.

