POA CAREGIVER
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POA & HEALTH CARE AGENT

Quick-Reference Glossary

Common Terms. Plain-Language Definitions.

The same document can go by different names in different states, and the same word can mean slightly different things. Use this glossary to follow conversations with attorneys, financial institutions and care teams. Your own documents and your state's law control what any term means for you.

01 Power of Attorney

02 Health Care Directives

03 Estate & Planning

04 Care & Medical

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01 Power of Attorney

Power of Attorney (POA)	A legal document in which one person gives another person authority to act for them. The term usually refers to financial and property matters.
Principal	The person who signs a Power of Attorney and gives someone else authority to act for them.
Agent	The person named in a Power of Attorney to act for the principal. Sometimes called an attorney-in-fact. An agent does not need to be a lawyer.
Successor agent	A person named to serve if the first agent cannot or will not serve.
Co-agents	Two or more agents named at the same time. The document says whether they must act together or may act separately.
Durable POA	A Power of Attorney that stays in effect if the principal can no longer make decisions. Whether a POA is durable depends on its wording and state law.
General POA	A Power of Attorney that gives the agent broad authority over many financial matters, within the limits stated in the document.
Limited POA	A Power of Attorney for a specific task or period, such as one property sale or one transaction. Sometimes called a special POA.
Springing POA	A Power of Attorney that says authority begins only when a stated event happens, often when the principal can no longer make decisions. The document says what must happen first.
Fiduciary duty	The obligation to act honestly and carefully in the principal's interest, keep their money separate from your own, and keep records.
Revocation	The principal canceling a Power of Attorney. How to revoke it, and who must be told, depends on the document and state law.

> A financial Power of Attorney does not, by itself, give authority to make health care decisions. Those are usually named in a separate health care document.

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02 Health Care Directives

Health Care Agent	The person named to make health care decisions when the person who named them cannot, as authorized by the document and state law. Depending on the state, also called a health care proxy, surrogate or representative.
Advance Directive	A general term for written instructions about future medical care, a document naming a health care agent, or both. Living wills and health care powers of attorney are types of advance directives.
Health Care Directive	The name some states use for an advance directive. It may name a health care agent, record health care wishes, or both.
Health care power of attorney	A document that names a health care agent. In many states it is separate from a financial Power of Attorney.
Living Will	A document that records wishes about medical treatment, often near the end of life. It generally does not name an agent.
HIPAA authorization	A signed permission that allows health care providers to share a person's health information with the people named. It does not, by itself, give anyone authority to make decisions.
Decision-making capacity	A person's ability to understand the information about a specific decision, weigh it and communicate a choice. It is usually assessed for a particular decision and can change over time.
Informed consent	Agreeing to a treatment after being told its purpose, likely benefits, risks and alternatives, including the choice to decline.

> Names and forms for health care documents vary widely by state. Use your state's official forms or ask a qualified professional.

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03 Estate & Planning

Will	A document that says how a person wants their property distributed after death and who should settle their estate.
Estate	Everything a person owns and owes at the time of death.
Personal representative	The person who settles an estate after death. Often called an executor when named in a will, or an administrator when appointed by a court.
Probate	The court process for confirming a will, if there is one, appointing a personal representative and settling an estate. Procedures vary by state.
Trust	An arrangement in which one person or institution holds and manages property for the benefit of others, following the trust's written terms.
Trustee	The person or institution that manages a trust. A trustee's authority comes from the trust and the law, not from a Power of Attorney.
Successor trustee	The person named to take over managing a trust when the current trustee can no longer serve.
Beneficiary	A person or organization that receives property from a will, trust, insurance policy or account.
Beneficiary designation	A named beneficiary on an account or policy, such as a retirement account or life insurance. It often controls who receives that asset, regardless of the will.
Guardianship	A court appointment giving someone authority to make personal or health decisions for an adult the court finds unable to make them.
Conservatorship	A court appointment giving someone authority over another adult's finances or property. Some states use one term for both guardianship and conservatorship.

> A Power of Attorney ends at the principal's death. After death, the personal representative or trustee handles what comes next.

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04 Care & Medical

POLST / MOLST	A medical order, signed by a clinician, that records treatment choices for someone with a serious illness so they travel across care settings. Names vary by state.
DNR order	A Do Not Resuscitate order: a medical order not to attempt CPR if a person's heart or breathing stops. It is signed by a clinician and is not the same as a living will.
Palliative care	Care focused on comfort and quality of life during a serious illness. It can be given at any stage, alongside other treatment.
Hospice	Care for people near the end of life that focuses on comfort rather than cure. Eligibility depends on the program and the person's coverage.
Assisted living	A residential setting that offers help with daily activities, such as bathing, dressing and medications. Services and licensing vary by state.
Memory care	A residential setting or unit designed for people living with dementia or other memory loss.
Skilled nursing facility	A facility that provides 24-hour nursing care and rehabilitation, for short recovery stays or longer-term care.
Long-term care	Help with daily activities over an extended period, at home or in a care setting. How it is paid for varies widely.

> **A note on terms:** terminology and legal requirements vary by state. This glossary explains common meanings; it does not define any term for your documents.

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