

Improving Access to Advance Health Care Directives

By Charlene Iboshi and Amy Hamane

Community First's committee on Advance Health Care Directives has met many challenges during this Covid pandemic. We're just a small group of volunteers but we're committed to our goal of encouraging all adults, regardless of health status, to prepare an Advance Health Care Directive (AHCD) and to share it with their loved ones and doctor.

The medical technology extending our lives means that death is no longer what we once thought of as "natural". Many people are dying in ways that they would not choose, and many survivors are left feeling guilty, depressed, and uncertain whether they made the right decisions for their loved one. Completing an AHCD and having a conversation about it is truly a gift that you should give to your loved ones.

The value of an AHCD is that it allows you to choose someone that your doctor will be able to consult regarding medical care that you would--or would not--want if you are unable to speak for yourself. This person is referred to as your Agent or Health Care Power of Attorney. It should be someone that you trust to carry out your wishes if you are not able to communicate because of illness or accident.

In 2020 when the pandemic began shutting down public activities, the committee quickly adapted its in-person workshops to a Zoom format. We discovered that our previous Hilo workshops could now reach folks island-wide. An added benefit of Zoom is that adult children on the mainland can now participate along with their parents living on the Big Island.

Recognizing that many seniors are unable to access Zoom, volunteer Rosemary Burnett and Tony Kent developed a successful outreach program using Android tablets. Using a kit of educational materials and the AHCD form, individuals were able to complete their AHCD at home when COVID prevented in-person opportunities.

In April, Patti Cook volunteered her energy and support and helped us reach out to many organizations in Kohala, Waimea and Honokaa. Shawn Saito offered to host our workshop at Tutu's House in Waimea. For the first time since the pandemic began, seniors and others without access to Zoom were able to view the presentation in person at Tutu's House at the same time with those using Zoom in their homes. Alice Bratton and Kami Bolster from Kona's Office of Aging coordinated a successful "hybrid" session in Kona. Last month, volunteers Sonja Gumbs, Annie Maeda and Patty Bourke hosted an in-person session at the Office of Aging in Hilo.

In 2022, Community First hopes that more folks will take advantage of our free workshops which will be held every other month beginning February 2 from 9 to 10:15 a.m. via Zoom.

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Simultaneously, in-person workshops will be held in Waimea at Tutu's House and in Hilo at the Office of Aging. Organizations willing to host an in-person AHCD workshop should contact Charlene Iboshi at 808-935-2544 or Amy Hamane at 808-443-4033.

The choices regarding end-of-life care are for each individual to decide. In our workshops we provide an understanding of these choices, and we encourage folks to document these choices now before a crisis occurs. Those who already have an AHCD learn how to review their document to be sure it meets their current needs.

To register for future workshops, go to <https://www.communityfirsthawaii.org> or call Rosemary at 808-987-4405 or Amy at 808-443-4033.

Community First serves as a neutral forum for the community to come together and as a catalyst for solutions to improve health and lower medical costs on Hawaii Island.