

The Death with Dignity Act

Information for our patients and families

This handout explains the Death with Dignity Act in Washington state.

What is the Death with Dignity Act?

The *Death with Dignity Act* (the Act) lets adults with a *terminal* illness end their own life. A terminal illness is one that cannot be cured and will lead to death within 6 months.

Washington state voters passed the Act in 2008, with changes in 2023. Under the Act, certain patients may ask their *qualified medical provider* (QMP) to prescribe a *lethal* (fatal) dose of medicine. A qualified medical provider is a licensed physician (MD or DO), licensed physician assistant (PA), or a licensed advanced registered nurse practitioner (ARNP).



The Death with Dignity Act enables a patient with a terminal illness to make choices about their death.

Who can request this medicine?

The Act states that the patient **must**:

- Be 18 years or older and making their own medical decisions; **and**
- Be a legal resident of Washington state; **and**
- Have an illness that their QMPs say will lead to death within the next 6 months.

How is the medicine given?

The patient must be able to take the medicine on their own. They may:

- Drink a powdered medicine mixed into a liquid.
- Take it through a feeding tube.
- Use other means approved by their QMPs.

How does the patient prove they are a legal resident?

The patient must have one of these legal forms of proof that they live in Washington state:

- Washington state driver's license
- Washington state voter registration
- Evidence that they own or lease property in Washington state

This proof of residency may be shown to the attending QMP or to the patient's Death with Dignity coordinator, if they have one.

How does a patient make their request?

To receive the prescription, the patient must:

1. Talk with 2 Qualified Medical Providers (QMPs)

The patient must have 2 QMPs who are willing and able to take part in the Act. These providers must be either an MD, DO, ARNP, or PA. **At least one** of the providers must be an MD or DO.

- One of these QMPs is called the *attending* (prescribing) QMP.
- The other QMP is called the *consulting* QMP. This provider must confirm the patient's diagnosis, prognosis, and mental capacity.
- The QMPs may **not** have a direct supervisory relationship with each other. This means neither provider can be supervising the other.

2. Make 3 Verbal Requests

The patient must make a total of 3 verbal requests to the 2 QMPs listed above:

- Two requests must be made to the **attending QMP**. **The first request must be made in person or by telemedicine visit.** These 2 requests must be made at least 7 days apart.
- One request must be made to the **consulting QMP** any time after the first verbal request to the attending QMP. **This request must also be made in person or by telemedicine visit.**

3. Submit a Written Request Form

After making verbal requests to the attending and consulting QMPs:

- The patient must fill out the form “Request for Medication to End My Life in a Humane and Dignified Manner.” Please see “To Learn More” on page 4 to learn how to access this form.
- The patient must sign and date the DOH form.
- 2 witnesses must also sign and date the DOH form **on the same date as the patient** (see “Who may be a witness on the DOH form?” below).
- After the DOH form is signed by the patient and the 2 witnesses, it can be given to the patient’s attending QMP or to their Death with Dignity coordinator, if they have one.

Who can be a witness on the DOH form?

- At least 1 witness must be a person **who is not**:
 - The patient’s relative by blood or by law.
 - A person who, at the time the request is signed, would be entitled to any part of the patient’s estate upon the patient’s death or under any will or by operation of law; **or**
 - An owner, operator, or employee of a healthcare facility where the patient is living or receiving medical care.
- UWMC - Montlake or HMC employees, staff, volunteers, attending providers, consulting providers, or employees of the providers may **NOT** sign as a witness on the form.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: *If someone requests medicine under the Act, will it affect their life insurance or other insurance policy?*

A: No. The Act states that taking part in the Act, including ingesting a lethal dose of medicine under the Act, will not have any effect on a person’s life, health, annuity, or other insurance policy.

Q: *Are healthcare facilities, providers, or pharmacists required to take part in the Act?*

A: No. Only willing providers should take part in the Act. Any provider or facility may choose not to take part in the Act.

Q: If a provider, pharmacist, or facility does not want to take part, does the Act require them to refer the patient to a QMP, pharmacist, or facility who will?

A: No. But, if the patient wishes to be cared for by another provider, the current provider must transfer the patient’s records to the new QMP.

Q: Can UW Medicine providers take part in the Act?

A: UWMC - Montlake and HMC allow their QMPs to take part in the Act. But, any QMP, other provider, or employee at either site may choose not to take part.

Q: How do UWMC - Montlake and HMC respond when a patient makes a request under the Act?

A: Both hospitals use a “team approach” to help patients who make requests under the Act. If a patient makes a request to a QMP who is willing to take part, other staff will work with this provider, the patient, and the patient’s loved ones.

If a UWMC - Montlake or HMC patient makes a request under the Act to a QMP who is not willing to take part, the team may be able to help the patient find other providers to help with their request. Or, they may give the patient information about other resources or options.

To Learn More

To learn more about the Death with Dignity Act, please call the social worker at your care facility:

- HMC 206.744.8030
- UWMC - Montlake 206.598.4370

To read the Death with Dignity Act and get the DOH form, visit:
<https://doh.wa.gov/data-and-statistical-reports/health-statistics/death-dignity-act>

If you do not have access to the internet:

- Your QMP may be able to help you get copies of the DOH form.
- Call End of Life Washington at 206.256.1636 (the toll-free number is 877.222.2816).

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Your provider’s name and phone number:
