

Frequently Asked Questions for Patients and Families

1. *What is the POLST form?*

POLST is a medical order that helps give seriously ill and frail patients more control over their end-of-life treatments. It directs the care in a medical crisis. POLST orders give seriously and frail patients control over the treatments they do or do not want to receive in a medical crisis. POLST is thoughtful, facilitated advance care planning conversations between a healthcare provider and you. A POLST form is based on an individual's expressed treatment preferences. As a result, POLST can prevent unwanted treatment, reduce patient and family suffering, and help ensure that the individual's wishes are honored. POLST can also support patients who want to prolong life to the greatest extent possible to receive their desired care.

2. *Why was POLST developed?*

POLST was developed to improve patient care and reduce medical errors by creating a system that identifies individuals' wishes regarding medical treatment and communicates and respects them by creating portable medical orders for those who are seriously ill or frail. Arizona is part of National POLST, an evidence-based approach endorsed by National Quality Forum as a best practice. The system focuses on a growing segment of the United States population, those seriously ill patients with advanced, chronic progressive illness and those with advance frailty. Completion of advance directives, a legal document that provides guidance about what types of treatment one may want to receive in case of a future is always encouraged. The purpose of POLST is to provide a portable, actionable medical order to healthcare providers so they can deliver the treatments individuals want, and avoid those treatments they DO NOT want, during an expected medical emergency.

3. *Who should have an POLST form?*

POLST is designed for those with serious illness or frailty—such as advanced heart disease, advanced lung disease or cancer that has spread—for whom the health care professional wouldn't be surprised if the patient died within 1-2 years.

4. *Is POLST mandated by law?*

Completion of a POLST form is entirely voluntary.

5. *How does POLST differ from traditional Healthcare Directives or the Prehospital Medical Care Directive (orange form) and does it replace these forms?*

The POLST form is a medical order set, not a healthcare directive. It is designed for seriously ill patients or those who are medically frail. The POLST form complements a Healthcare Directive and the Prehospital Medical Care Directive and is not intended to replace these documents. Arizona's Advance Directive is the legal document that allows an individual to choose a

Healthcare Representative- someone to make healthcare decisions if they are unable to speak for themselves. It also allows the individual to write down their wishes for care and life-sustaining treatments. The Prehospital Medical Care Directive gives emergency medical services (EMS) provider's direction. A Prehospital Medical Care Directive should still be completed for people who choose "Do Not Resuscitate."

6. *Who can complete an POLST Form?*

A POLST form is completed by a health care professional (Physician, Nurse Practitioner or Physician Assistant) during a conversation with an individual who is seriously ill. Since it is a medical order it must be signed by a health care professional to be valid and the individual or their surrogate must sign the form.

7. *Can a POLST form be completed for individuals who can no longer communicate their treatment wishes?*

Yes. A healthcare agent or surrogate decision maker can complete the POLST form based on their understanding of the individuals wishes. The individuals appointed healthcare agent or surrogate can then sign the POLST form on their behalf.

8. *Can a POLST form be changed?*

Yes, the POLST form can be modified or revoked verbally or in writing, at any time. Because it is a medical order the individual needs to contact their healthcare provider and ask the POLST be revoked or modified. If the individual should lack capacity, changes can also be requested by their healthcare agent or surrogate, based on new information or changes in their condition.

9. *Where is POLST/POLST being used now?*

POLST exists at some level in 50 states and Washington DC: *Existing* is a spectrum from just having legislation passed, to implementing POLST with regional pilots, to having implemented POLST so it is standard of care within that state. The POLST form is called by differing names depending on the state. For example, in New York it is called a MOLST form, in Colorado a MOST form, and in West Virginia a POST form. In 2019, National POLST participating states worked to standardize the form with the intent it would reduce confusion, provide standardization, and make it easier for people moving between states. Arizona formally adopted National POLST Form, it is called POLST, a portable medical order. The form is currently being used in Arizona. For more information on National POLST effort, including published research and a complete listing of states using this form or one similar to it, visit [POLST.org](https://www.polst.org).

10. *Can my loved one use a POLST form to request physician-assistant suicide?*

No. National POLST recognizes that allowing natural death to occur is not the same as killing. While several states allow assisted suicide, it is not legal in Arizona currently.

11. *Will my POLST form be valid when traveling to another state?*

Whether an individual's POLST form will be honored in another state is determined by the laws of that state. A valid POLST form presented to a healthcare provider in another state will likely carry a great deal of weight as a strong indication of patient preferences with the endorsement of the healthcare provider who signed the form; however, providers in other states might not be obliged to follow the orders. When traveling outside Arizona, it is a good idea to take both Healthcare Directive and POLST forms with you. Both documents, even if not legally binding, will help healthcare providers know and honor an individual's wishes.

12. *Is the POLST form available in other languages?*

The POLST form is not yet available in other languages. National POLST is working to develop translations into other languages.

13. *Who is leading the POLST initiative in Arizona?*

Thoughtful Life Conversations (TLC), a program of the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association, provides leadership and oversight for POLST outreach activities in Arizona, with support from many partners throughout the state.

14. *How can I find out more about POLST?*

For questions about POLST in Arizona contact us at ArizonaPolst.org. Visit the National POLST website at POLST.org for additional information and resources.