

# Community Action to hold advance directive info session

## From Staff Reports

OAKLAND — April 16 has been designated a National Healthcare Decisions Day with the theme “It always seems too early, until it’s too late.”

The purpose of the initiative is to address misconceptions about advance health-care planning and advance directives and to encourage all individuals 18 and over to have a health-care plan.

The Maryland Department of Aging website states: “Ultimately, National Healthcare Decisions Day strives to provide much-needed information to the public, reduce the number of tragedies that occur when a patient’s wishes are unknown and improve the ability of health-care facilities and providers to offer informed and thoughtful guidance about advance health-care planning to their patients.”

An advance directive is simply a written statement

of someone’s wishes regarding medical treatment if they should become unable to communicate them to a doctor. A severe illness or catastrophic injury can strike anyone at any age, and if an advance directive is not in place, the individual’s health-care decisions will be left to the discretion of others.

Drafting an advance directive is relatively easy to do and does not require the assistance of a lawyer. Any individual over 18 can create an advance directive, either by writing their plan in their own words or completing a standard form like the one found at [www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Pages/HealthPolicy/Advance-Directives.aspx](http://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Pages/HealthPolicy/Advance-Directives.aspx). The form allows the individual to designate a healthcare agent (someone to make decisions for you if you are not able), outline treatment preferences (often called a “living will”) and make their wishes known regarding organ and body donation.

Once the advance directive is completed, it needs to be signed by two witnesses, but does not require notarization. Copies should be distributed to the individual’s doctor, health-care agent(s), hospital or nursing home if applicable, family members, and close friends who should know.

In recognition of National Healthcare Decisions Day, Garrett County Community Action Aging and Nutrition will be sponsoring an information and help session for anyone interested in drafting an advance directive on from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Next Thursday in the Garrett County Community Action conference room at 104 E. Center St. in Oakland. Advance directive worksheets and forms will be available, and attorney Miriam Sincell will be on hand to answer questions.

For more information, contact the Maryland Access Point office at 301-533-9000.