



AARP Bulletin Poll “Getting Ready to Go” Executive Summary

January 2008



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AARP collected the data for this project through a telephone poll administered by International Communications Research (ICR). Dawn V. Nelson, Senior Research Advisor, AARP Strategic Issues Research, prepared the report with editorial assistance from Kathi Brown. For additional information contact Dawn Nelson at DNelson@aarp.org.

The AARP Bulletin recently commissioned a nationwide poll to explore end-of-life preparations and decisions adults make for themselves and their parents. The poll focused on the degree to which adults are aware of certain steps that they can take to prepare for end-of-life situations and whether they have in fact taken any of those steps. These steps include preparing a health care proxy or durable power of attorney for health care, establishing a living will, having a valid “Do Not Resuscitate Order,” authorizing the donation of one’s organs and/or tissue, pre-planning one’s funeral or burial, and creating a trust or last will and testament.

The poll findings suggest that most adults are aware of these steps that can be taken to prepare for end of life; however, many have failed to take action. Likelihood to have taken action varies by age and health status as well as whether the respondent has a living parent who has taken similar action. This brief summary report highlights some of the poll findings.

Poll findings include:

- **Most have some knowledge of the steps that they can take but have taken no action:** The vast majority of respondents reported awareness of these advance directives and pre-plans; however, less than half of the respondents reported having actually completed them. Of the six advance directives included in the poll, the last will and testament had been completed by the largest share of adults (46%) while almost as many (42%) reported that they had authorized the donation of their organs and/or tissue. Establishing a health care proxy and living will followed closely behind at 37% and 36%, respectively. Finally, both the “do not resuscitate” order and funeral/burial pre-plans each had been completed by just over one in four adults (27%) (**see table 1**).
- **Older respondents take action more frequently than younger respondents:** For five of the six advance directives and pre-plans, the likelihood of having completed it significantly increases with age. Those 60 years of age and older report completing these five advance directives and pre-plans twice as often as those 35-49 years of age (**see table 2**). However, the opposite appears to be true for authorizing organ donations. In this case, fewer of the 60 years and older respondents reported authorizing the donation of their organs and/or tissue than those respondents under the age of 60 years.
- **Healthy respondents’ actions differ from less healthy respondents’:** Over half of the respondents (52%) who are in “excellent” health reported completing an authorization form for organ/tissue donations compared to a little over a quarter (27%) of the respondents reported to be in “fair” or “poor” health (**see table 3**). This is also true for creating a last will and testament: 52% of respondents in excellent health reported having created a last will and testament compared to only 41% of respondents in “fair” or “poor” health. An opposite trend is found when reviewing funeral or burial pre-plans: 32% of respondents reporting a current health status of “fair” or “poor” say that they have completed funeral or burial pre-plans compared to only 20% of respondents reporting a current “excellent” health status.

- As respondents age, differences in actions across health status disappear:** Among the 35- to 49-year-old respondents, the likelihood of having established a living will differs by 20 points when comparing those reporting an “excellent” current health status (27%) to those reporting being in “fair” or “poor” health (7%). When making the same comparison among respondents 60 years and older, the point difference drops to 1 (45% and 44%, respectively) (**see table 4**). The poll did not explore the reason for these point differences, so explanatory analyses are not possible.
- Older respondents are less likely than younger respondents to authorize organ donations:** Poll results indicate older respondents are less likely to have authorized organ donations than younger respondents even though the National Kidney Foundation reports that:

“...acceptable organ donors can range in age from newborn to 65 years or more. People who are 65 years of age or older may be acceptable donors, particularly of corneas, skin, bone and for total body donation¹.”

This trend of fewer authorized organ donations from older respondents is consistent throughout the poll, even among respondents self-reporting an “excellent” health status (**see table 4**).
- Respondents’ parents take action more frequently than do their children:** Respondents who reported having a living parent(s) were asked if their parent(s) had completed the same six advance directives and pre-plans. Results indicate parents are more likely than their child(ren) to have completed five of the six advance directives or pre-plans (**see tables 5a and 5b**). 65% of the respondents report their parent(s) have completed a last will and testament while only 35% of the respondents reported completing a last will and testament for themselves. Similarly, 51% of respondents report their parents have made funeral or burial pre-plans, 50% of parents have established a living will and 48% of their parents have an established health care proxy compared to 18%, 29% and 27%, respectively, for respondents’ self-reported actions.

Poll methodology

A national sample of U.S. adults 35 years of age and older were polled by telephone from November 20 to 28, 2007 by International Communications Research (ICR) using its national omnibus survey service. A total of 1,013 respondents completed five closed-ended questions within the AARP section of the omnibus poll. The overall omnibus survey’s response rate was 11.6%, the contact rate was 71.6% and the refusal rate was 60%.² ICR weighted the data to provide nationally representative estimates of the U.S. adult population 35 years of age and older.

¹ “25 Facts about Organ Donation and Transplantation,” National Kidney Foundation, located on WWW at <http://www.kidney.org/news/newsroom/fsitem.cfm?id=30>

² Final dispositions were calculated using AAPOR’s standardized formulas: Response Rate #3 (with e=.205), Contact Rate #2, and Refusal Rate #2.

AARP Bulletin Poll “Getting Ready to Go” Detailed Data Tables

Table 1: Combined poll results for question series 1A-F

Which of the following advance directives and other pre-plans have you <u>heard about and completed</u> . . .	<u>Heard and completed</u>	<u>Heard but not completed</u>	<u>Not heard of</u>	<u>Number responding (N)*</u>
Health care proxy / durable power of attorney for health care	37%	56%	7%	1006
Living will	36%	56%	8%	1004
“Do Not Resuscitate” order	27%	59%	14%	1000
Organ/tissue donation form	42%	53%	6%	998
Funeral arrangements or burial pre-plans	27%	65%	8%	1001
Trust or last will and testament	45%	49%	6%	1007

--* Number responding excludes “don’t knows” and item-level refusals

-- Numbers are row percentages which may not always sum to 100 because of rounding.

Table 2: Likelihood of completing advance directive or pre-plan increases with age

	35-49 years <u>(N=381)*</u>	50-59 years <u>(N=292)*</u>	60 years & older <u>(N=325)*</u>
Health care proxy / durable power of attorney for health care	24%	39%	51%
Living will	25%	36%	47%
“Do Not Resuscitate” order	15%	32%	38%
Organ/tissue donation form	43%	47%	36%
Funeral arrangements or burial pre-plans	12%	30%	42%
Trust or last will and testament	32%	44%	62%

-- Percentages reflect number who reported hearing about and completing the advance directive or pre-plan.

-- * The number of responses varies by item due to the exclusion of the “don’t know” responses and item-level refusals. The sample cell sizes reported above are the minimum number who responded across the 6 items. Actual sample cell sizes may be larger by 1 to 5 respondents.

Table 3: Likelihood of completing advance directive or pre-plan varies across reported health status

	Current health status reported as:			
	Excellent (N=221)*	Very Good (N=318)*	Good (N=290)*	Fair / Poor** (N=165)*
Health care proxy / durable power of attorney for health care	40%	43%	30%	35%
Living will	36%	44%	28%	32%
“Do Not Resuscitate” order	28%	33%	20%	27%
Organ/tissue donation form	52% A	48%	35%	27% A
Funeral arrangements or burial pre-plans	20% B	29%	27%	32% B
Trust or last will and testament	52% C	54%	34%	41% C

-- Percentages reflect number who reported hearing about and completing the advance directive or pre-plan.

-- Significant statistical differences are identified by capital letters A, B, C. For example, 52% of the respondents who are in excellent health reported having completed an organ donation authorization form. This percentage is statistically larger than 27%, which is the percentage of respondents who are in fair or poor health and reported having completed an organ donation authorization form

-- * The sample cell sizes reported above are the minimum number who responded across the 6 items. Actual sample cell sizes may be larger by 1 to 5 cases.

-- ** Because of small cell sizes, “Fair” and “Poor” were collapsed into one subgroup

Table 4: Percentage completing advance directive or pre-plan varies by age and reported health status

	Current health status reported as “EXCELLENT”			Current health status reported as “FAIR” or “POOR”		
	35-49 yrs (N=43)*	50-59 yrs (N=44)*	60+ yrs (N=81)*	35-49 yrs (N=94)*	50-59 yrs (N=64)*	60+ yrs (N=66)*
	Health care proxy / durable power of attorney for health care	28% A	48%	49%	12% A	34%
Living will	27% B	43%	45%	7% B	34%	44%
“Do Not Resuscitate” order	15%	32%	41%	5%	32%	36%
Organ/tissue donation form	54% C	55%	46%	18% C	34%	29%
Funeral arrangements or burial pre-plans	10%	18%	37%	7%	21%	51%
Trust or last will and testament	39% D	58%	64%	16% D	40%	55%

-- Percentages reflect number who reported hearing about and completing the advance directive or pre-plan.

-- Significant statistical differences are identified by capital letters A, B, C, D

-- * Sample cell sizes reported above are the minimum number who responded across the 6 items. Actual sample cell sizes may be larger by 1 to 5 cases.

Table 5A: Combined poll results for question series 2A-F

Has your parent (Have your parents) completed a . . .*	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Number responding (N)</u>
Health care proxy or durable power of attorney for health care	48%	26%	26%	514
Living will	50%	29%	21%	513
Do Not Resuscitate order	31%	39%	30%	515
Organ donation authorization form	22%	45%	33%	508
Pre-planned funeral arrangements or burial plans	51%	34%	15%	511
Trust or last will and testament	65%	20%	15%	514

* Question series asked of those respondents reporting one or both parents still alive

Table 5B: Percentage of parents and respondents completing advance directive or pre-plan

	<u>Parents' completion rate*</u>	<u>Respondents' completion rate**</u>	<u>Number responding (N)</u>
Health care proxy or durable power of attorney for health care	48%	27%	514
Living will	50%	29%	513
Do Not Resuscitate order	31%	20%	515
Organ donation authorization form	22%	42%	508
Pre-planned funeral arrangements or burial plans	51%	18%	511
Trust or last will and testament	65%	35%	514

-- *Completion rate = percentage who reported their parent had completed the advance directive or pre-plan.

-- **Table includes respondents who reported a living parent(s); thus, respondent completion rates differ from other tables

AARP Bulletin Poll “Getting Ready to Go” Annotated Questionnaire

1,013 respondents (ages 35+)

INTRO: READ TO ALL RESPONDENTS:

In this section of the survey we ask questions about awareness and experiences with advance planning and preparation for end of life issues. We recognize this may be a sensitive topic for some, but your answers will greatly help the survey sponsor better understand how people think about these matters.

Let’s begin.

GR-1 First, we are interested in knowing your experiences with Advance Directives. Advance directives allow people to make their health care choices known in advance of an incapacitating illness or death. Which of the following advance directives and other pre-plans have you heard about and completed? Have you... (READ LIST)

(SCRAMBLE LIST)

- a. A health care proxy or durable power of attorney for health care that gives the person you select the legal right to make health care decisions for you if you no longer can

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Have heard about AND completed	374	37.2 %
Have heard about but NOT completed	558	55.4 %
Have not heard about	74	7.3 %
(DO NOT READ) DON’T KNOW	3	
(DO NOT READ) REFUSED	4	

- b. A living will or other written instructions in which you state the kind of life-sustaining health care you want or don’t want under certain circumstances

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Have heard about AND completed	357	35.5 %
Have heard about but NOT completed	562	56.0 %
Have not heard about	85	8.5 %
(DO NOT READ) DON’T KNOW	3	
(DO NOT READ) REFUSED	5	

- c. A valid “Do Not Resuscitate” order that authorizes emergency services personnel to honor your DNR status

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Have heard about AND completed	273	27.3 %
Have heard about but NOT completed	591	59.1 %
Have not heard about	136	13.6 %
(DO NOT READ) DON’T KNOW	9	
(DO NOT READ) REFUSED	4	

GR-1 (CONTINUED) Which of the following advance directives and other pre-plans have you heard about and completed?

d. Authorization to have your organs and/or tissue donated after you die for use by others in need of transplants

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Have heard about AND completed	415	41.6 %
Have heard about but NOT completed	526	52.7 %
Have not heard about	57	5.7 %
(DO NOT READ) DON'T KNOW	10	
(DO NOT READ) REFUSED	5	

e. Funeral arrangements or burial pre-plans in which you plan or purchase in advance any goods or services for yourself

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Have heard about AND completed	270	27.0 %
Have heard about but NOT completed	655	65.4 %
Have not heard about	76	7.6 %
(DO NOT READ) DON'T KNOW	5	
(DO NOT READ) REFUSED	7	

f. A trust or last will and testament that will distribute your money and other property according to your wishes after you die

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Have heard about AND completed	459	45.6 %
Have heard about but NOT completed	490	48.7 %
Have not heard about	58	5.8 %
(DO NOT READ) DON'T KNOW	1	
(DO NOT READ) REFUSED	5	

The next question series asks about your parents' experiences with advance directives. If both of your parents are deceased, please let me know and we'll skip over the question.

<input type="checkbox"/> FATHER DECEASED, ASK GR-2A-F ABOUT MOTHER	}	→	N=516
<input type="checkbox"/> MOTHER DECEASED, ASK GR-2A-F ABOUT FATHER			
<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH PARENTS DECEASED, SKIP TO QUESTION 4			N=482
Refusal to answer question			N= 13

Asked of total respondents aged 35+ with a living parent (n= 516)

GR-2 (Have your parents / Has your parent completed) (INSERT)?

(SCRAMBLE LIST)

a. A health care proxy or durable power of attorney for health care		
	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Yes	248	48.0 %
No	134	26.0 %
(DO NOT READ) Don't know if parents completed one	133	25.9 %
(DO NOT READ) REFUSED	1	
b. A living will		
	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Yes	257	49.9 %
No	150	29.1 %
(DO NOT READ) Don't know if parent completed one	108	21.0 %
(DO NOT READ) REFUSED	1	
c. A Do Not Resuscitate order?		
	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Yes	159	30.9 %
No	202	39.2 %
(DO NOT READ) Don't know if parent completed one	154	29.9 %
(DO NOT READ) REFUSED	1	
d. An organ donation authorization form?		
	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Yes	110	21.3 %
No	228	44.3 %
(DO NOT READ) Don't know if parent completed one	177	34.3 %
(DO NOT READ) REFUSED	1	
e. pre-planned funeral arrangements or burial plans?		
	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Yes	263	51.1 %
No	177	34.3 %
(DO NOT READ) Don't know if parent completed one	75	14.6 %
(DO NOT READ) REFUSED	1	
f. a trust or last will and testament		
	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Yes	333	64.7 %
No	101	19.6 %
(DO NOT READ) Don't know if parent completed one	81	15.8 %
(DO NOT READ) REFUSED	1	

Asked of total respondents ages 35+ with a living parent and not refusing 2A-F(n= 515)

GR-3. Do you (or another family member or trusted friend) know the location of your parents' important papers, such as birth certificates, insurance policies and bank records?

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Yes	412	80.0 %
No	78	15.3 %
(DO NOT READ) Don't know	24	4.7 %
(DO NOT READ) REFUSED	1	

Asked of all respondents (n=1013)

GR-4. Does a family member or trusted friend know the location of YOUR important papers?

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Yes	844	83.7 %
No	153	15.2 %
(DO NOT READ) Don't know	11	1.0 %
(DO NOT READ) REFUSED	5	

GR-5. In general, how do you rate your own health now? Would you say it is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Excellent	226	22.3 %
Very good	323	32.0 %
Good	293	29.0 %
Fair	113	11.2 %
Poor	56	5.5%
(DO NOT READ) DON'T KNOW		
(DO NOT READ) REFUSED	1	