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NEW COALITION WILL HELP MARYLANDERS MAKE CHOICES SURROUNDING END-OF-LIFE CARE

BALTIMORE, April 16, 2021 — MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society, the Horizon Foundation of Howard County, The Maryland Hospital Association, and AARP Maryland have formed the Maryland Honoring Choices Coalition. Announcing its launch on National Health Care Decisions Day, this statewide group will educate Marylanders and advance policy solutions to make it easier to make and document choices surrounding their end-of-life care and ensure those choices are respected through the use of advance health care directives. By doing this, the Coalition aims for Maryland to be a state in which all patients receive medical care that is consistent with their values, goals, and preferences.

Gene Ransom, MedChi CEO, states “naming a health care agent or completing an advance care plan helps health care providers honor wishes when patients are unable to communicate those wishes themselves. Families who discuss these wishes for end-of-life care in advance typically experience less distress, bereavement, and financial hardship after a loss.”

The newly-formed coalition will not only focus on raising awareness about the importance of naming one’s health care agent, but also educate Marylanders about end-of-life issues and the ability to upload their advance healthcare directive documents electronically for their doctors to access. The coalition will reach out to health care providers, insurers, legislators, and state administration and advocate for changes to statewide practices to ensure residents are regularly prompted to name a health care agent and/or complete an advance care plan.

The Horizon Foundation, which is the largest independent health philanthropy in the state of Maryland, has been working on advance care planning issues in Howard County since 2018 through its Speak(easy) Howard initiative. The campaign helps residents think through their preferences for care, talk about them with loved ones, and name a health care agent.

“Talking about your health care wishes with your loved ones and naming a health care agent ensures that your voice will be heard, but not enough people prepare for this point,” says Nikki Highsmith Vernick, president and CEO of the Horizon Foundation. “The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of advance care planning, and now is the time to ensure that all Marylanders have easy access to the tools and resources they need to prepare.”

The Honoring Choices coalition will work to implement recommendations of the State Advisory Council on Quality Care at the End of Life to increase the completion of advance care plans in Maryland. These recommendations include support for options such as:

- encouraging insurance companies to offer advance care planning services as a covered benefit, and/or presenting opportunities to complete an advance care plan during open enrollment;

- embedding advance care planning into health system workflows, with a particular sensitivity to underserved communities;
- making it easier to complete, upload, and retrieve electronic advance directives;
- presenting the option to complete an advance care plan when residents access state services;
- encouraging state leaders to publicly recognize National Health Care Decisions Day, and
- supporting existing public awareness campaigns surrounding advance care planning.

The Maryland Hospital Association and AARP Maryland have joined the coalition in recognition of the alignment of the coalition’s mission with their organization’s objectives.

“Maryland hospitals care for Marylanders through all phases of life. That is why MHA and our member hospitals are committed to helping patients and families make informed decisions about end-of-life care,” adds Bob Atlas, President & CEO of the Maryland Hospital Association. “The Maryland Honoring Choices Coalition will go a long way to educate Marylanders about the importance of advance health care directives, which can ensure treatment goals near end of life are understood and respected.”

“Covid-19 has shown how important it can be for doctors and family members to know what medical care you would want, even if you became too sick to speak for yourself. But, in our culture people are reluctant to talk about advance care health issues,” says AARP Maryland volunteer Ted Meyerson, who leads the organization’s outreach and advocacy on advance care planning. “Encouraging insurance companies to offer advance care planning services as a covered benefit would help change the culture, and more people would be prompted to have an advance directive. That would be a win for the patient, the patient’s family, the docs and health care providers, and the carriers.”

The Maryland General Assembly has also asked the Maryland Health Care Commission to study improving access to advance care planning. The Coalition looks forward to helping explore these opportunities and working with individuals and groups to raise awareness about these important health care choices and eliminate barriers to completing advance care plans. Interested organizations are encouraged to visit www.medchi.org/Maryland-Honoring-Choices-Coalition to learn more and join the coalition.

About MedChi

MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society, is a non-profit membership association of Maryland physicians. It is the largest physician organization in Maryland. The mission of MedChi is to serve as Maryland's foremost advocate and resource for physicians, their patients and the public health of Maryland. For more information, please visit www.medchi.org.

About the Horizon Foundation

The Horizon Foundation is the largest independent health philanthropy in Maryland. We lead community change so everyone in Howard County can live a longer, better life. We are committed to improving health through innovative initiatives, collaborative partnerships, strategic grantmaking and thoughtful advocacy. Learn more at www.thehorizonfoundation.org.

About the Maryland Hospital Association

The Maryland Hospital Association serves Maryland’s 60 nonprofit hospitals and health systems through collective action to shape policies, practices, financing and performance to advance health care and the health of all Marylanders. For more information, visit www.mhaonline.org.

About AARP

Representing 860,000 Marylanders and their families, AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering people 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With a nationwide presence and nearly 38 million members, AARP strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to families: health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. AARP also produces the nation's largest circulation publications: AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. To learn more, visit www.aarp.org, www.aarp.org/espanol or follow @AARP, @AARPenEspanol and @AARPadvocates, @AliadosAdelante on social media.