



ISSUE

Establish a statewide POLST registry

MMA Position

Legislation is needed to implement a statewide program and registry for Provider Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST) forms. A POLST form captures a patient's end-of-life treatment preferences. Its use ensures that patient decisions are followed, especially at the end-of-life. If caregivers cannot access a patient's POLST form, the provider orders may not be followed, and patient treatment preferences may be ignored.

Background

A POLST form is a portable medical order that offers patients the option to exercise personal control over their end-of-life treatment. Unlike an advance directive, the POLST form is a medical order to implement a patient's preferences for care that are immediately actionable as the patient moves across care settings. This is the Institute of Medicine's preferred practice for end-of-life care.

The POLST Minnesota program was established in 2008 by an interdisciplinary steering committee that included physicians, nurses, ethicists, and others. A standardized POLST form was developed in 2010. It is widely used and recognized by hospital systems, long-term care facilities, medical professionals, and emergency medical services throughout Minnesota today.

Immediate access to end-of-life treatment information is especially important during medical emergencies. However, emergency responders often are unable to access a patient's paper POLST form. The POLST form is meant to travel with the patient between care settings, but the paper copy can become damaged or misplaced, therefore losing the patient's treatment preferences.

A statewide POLST program and registry was recommended by a Minnesota Department of Health work group in 2024, and would make this information available to any authorized provider, anywhere in the state, at any time. It would provide a reliable verification system if the paper POLST form or electronic health record are not available. With round-the-clock electronic and mobile phone access to POLST information, providers would be able to follow a patient's wishes even in the most stressful situations.

Talking Points

- Patients who have expressed their care preferences in a POLST form deserve to have their care plan followed.
- Today, patients are given a paper copy of their POLST form. If a patient misplaces the form, or doesn't have it with them in an emergency, it's possible that their end-of-life preferences will not be followed. With today's technology, patients should have their POLST form accessible without having a physical copy present.
- A POLST registry will help emergency care providers determine a patient's wishes when they arrive at a scene and cannot find the patient's paper POLST. Having a registry could help emergency providers from facing potential liability issues.
- In 2023, the Minnesota Legislature directed the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to develop recommendations for a statewide POLST registry. The advisory committee recommended that MDH be the coordinating entity for the POLST program and registry in Minnesota.