

## ESSENTIAL DOCUMENTS A SENIOR SHOULD HAVE IN PLACE FOR THEMSELVES, AGING PARENTS, OR RELATIVES

For example, a senior applying for certain benefits is required to demonstrate their financial need, and will have to provide comprehensive documentation of past and present finances.

“If a family member cannot locate important documents like tax returns or bank account information, it could delay or even cause a senior to be denied benefits like Medicaid or veterans benefits,” says Tiffany Wise, senior director of customer development at A Place for Mom.

Important paperwork for the elderly:

- A list of all bank accounts
- Pension documents, 401(k) information, and annuity contracts
- Tax returns
- Savings bonds, stock certificates, or brokerage accounts
- Partnership and corporate operating agreements
- Deeds to all properties
- Vehicle titles
- Documentation of loans and debts, including all credit accounts
- **Power of attorney** (financial proxy)

### Health care documents

Regardless of good or bad health, it's vital that the senior's preferences be stated clearly in a **living will**. This document includes their general wishes and care instructions regarding life support, the donation of organs, and other medical issues. This is also known as a health care or advanced directive.

A living will also designates a trusted person to be your power of attorney, which is someone who oversees and carries out financial decisions documented in the living will.

“When you have an older parent, you never know when you might need to visit the hospital,” says **Melissa Pratt**, a Senior Living Advisor at A Place for Mom.

“Being able to quickly grab official paperwork such as durable power of attorney or an advanced health care directive can eliminate lots of stress. Doctors want proof that you are the decision-maker.”

Having quick access to a senior's medical history can be lifesaving during a medical emergency. For example, a single piece of medical information, such as a certain current medication, could dramatically influence treatment.

Medical records are necessary when applying for benefits, including VA assistance and Medicaid. They are also needed when moving to a senior community.

Important health care documents:

- Health care proxy or power of attorney
- Authorization to release health care information
- Living will (health care directive)
- Personal medical history
- Insurance card (Medicare, Medicaid, Independent)
- Long-term care insurance policy
- Emergency information sheet

### **End-of-life and estate planning documents**

We can save ourselves and our loved ones the burden of added stress during an already difficult time by making sure that documents related to estate planning and end-of-life have been drawn up, are up-to-date, and are easily accessible.

Otherwise, if a senior passes away without having drafted a will, families can be thrown into unnecessary legal and financial chaos.

Essential end-of-life documents:

- A will
- Trust documents
- Life-insurance policies
- End-of-life instructions letter (regarding wishes or items not covered in a will, for example regarding memorial terms, a car, property such as jewelry and furniture)
- Actions letter (regarding wishes or items not covered in a will, for example regarding memorial terms)

## Miscellaneous documents

Marriage certificates and military records are required when applying for veteran benefits such as **Aid and Attendance**, and are also required in applications for many kinds of state and federal assistance. Seniors may even need their birth certificate on occasion.

For example, some states require that voters have a photo ID. If a senior doesn't have a photo ID, a birth certificate is usually needed in order to get one.

Miscellaneous important papers:

- Marriage papers
- Divorce papers
- List of online usernames and passwords
- List of safe deposit boxes and the location of their keys
- Military records
- Birth certificate
- Driver's license
- Social Security card
- Passport

## Tips on storing important documents

It's not enough to merely have these legal documents for aging parents — they need to be accessible. Experts recommend important documents be added to a master folder or box. The folder should be kept in a safe place, for example, a safe deposit box, fire-proof safe, or with an attorney.

The National Institute on Aging has additional tips to help you and your family plan and sort affairs accordingly. We've also created a quick and handy Essential Document Locator Checklist, which includes advice on assembling and organizing.

For more information about approaching this conversation with your family and determining which documents are necessary, please check out our in-depth guide by elder-care attorney, Stuart Furman: "An Elder Law Attorney's Perspective on Aging Parents."