

# Whānau COVID-19 Serious Illness Conversation Guide

This guide will support you to gather important information from whānau to support decision-making if the patient no longer has capacity OR the patient has nominated whānau to talk on their behalf.

**Prepare** – before talking to the patient’s whanau, think: *what treatment decisions do we need to make in case this person deteriorates further?* This will help frame the conversation.

| Stage                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Patient-tested language                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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| <p><b>Set-up</b></p> <p>Introduction yourself and acknowledge the situation</p>                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>‘I am so sorry we are in this situation...’</p> <p>‘We want to make sure your XXX has the best care possible at this difficult time.’</p> <p>‘To help us to make the best decisions for your XXX we want to understand from you what’s important to your XXX. We’re not going to ask you to make decisions. Is that ok?’</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <p><b>Assess</b></p> <p>Check whānau understanding</p> <p>Seek permission</p>                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p>‘To make sure we are on the same page, can you tell me your understanding of what’s happening with your XXX’s health at the moment?’</p> <p>‘Is it okay that I share my understanding of where things are at?’</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <p><b>Share</b></p> <p>Provide information about the patient’s current condition</p> <p>Choose one of these prognostic statements based on your assessment of the current situation and the patient’s prognosis</p> <p>Acknowledge this is difficult news</p> | <p><i>If recovery is hopeful:</i> ‘It can be difficult to predict what will happen with your XXX’s health. I hope that they will continue to do well, but it is possible they could become more unwell quickly. It is important we prepare for that possibility.’</p> <p>OR</p> <p><i>If recovery is uncertain:</i> ‘I hope that this is not the case, but I am concerned that your XXX might not recover even if we give them all possible treatment and they may deteriorate quickly.’</p> <p>OR</p> <p><i>If death is likely imminent:</i> ‘I wish this were not the case, but I’m concerned that time could be as short as a few hours (or days).’</p> <p><b>AND</b></p> <p>‘I know this is not what you wanted to hear/I am so sorry we are in this situation.’</p> |
| <p><b>Pause</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>Allow silence, respond to emotion with empathy before moving on.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <p><b>Explore</b></p> <p>Find out what is most important for the patient</p>                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p>‘Did XXX ever talk about what their priorities would be if their health did get worse, (despite everything we could do)?’</p> <p>‘Did XXX ever talk to you about what worries them most if their health changed?’</p> <p><i>If needing to make clinical judgements about whether a person is likely to recover to an acceptable quality of life:</i></p> <p>‘What abilities are so important for your XXX, that they could not imagine living without them?’</p> <p>‘How much do you think your XXX would be willing to go through for the possibility of more time?’</p> <p>‘That is very helpful to know – thank you.’</p>                                                                                                                                          |
| <p><b>Close</b></p> <p>Summarise</p> <p>Share the goal of care and medical treatments - if you need time to consider this or</p>                                                                                                                              | <p>‘I have heard you say [...] is really important to your XXX.’</p> <p>‘Keeping what is important to XXX in mind, I suggest that we...’</p> <p>A. ‘... do everything we can to support your XXX to pull through this infection; if it becomes clear they might die despite our best efforts, we will do everything we can to keep them comfortable.’</p> <p>OR</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

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| <p>consult with a colleague, let the person know you will talk with them again very soon about the plan</p> <p>Document the plan on the shared goals of care form</p> | <p>B. ‘... do everything we can to support your XXX to pull through this infection; we wouldn’t attempt to re-start their heart if it stopped; if it becomes clear they might die despite our best efforts, we will do everything we can to keep them comfortable.’</p> <p>OR</p> <p>C. ‘... focus on improving your XXX’s symptoms and wellbeing; if it becomes clear they are dying, we will do everything we can to keep them comfortable.’</p> <p>OR</p> <p>D. ‘... focus on keeping your XXX comfortable and allow a natural death.’</p> <p><b>AND</b></p> <p>‘How does this plan seem to you?’</p> <p>‘I will do all I can to help your XXX get the best care possible.’</p> <p>‘Is there anything you would like to go over again/ask/talk about?’</p> <p>‘Is there anyone you would like me to contact to update them about this conversation?’</p> |
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## Conversation flow – sharing prognosis and gathering relevant information from whānau

### Prepare *before* seeing the patient’s whānau:

- Be sure you are planning to talk to the right person (prioritise Enduring Power of Attorney or person nominated by the patient).
- Check which medical interventions are likely to help and are available to this patient if they deteriorate acutely (see local guidelines).
- Check for any pre-existing advance directives and/or advance care plans.

### Set up the conversation

- Introduce yourself and other members of the care team present.
- Introduce the importance of having this conversation and that we are not asking them to decide.
- Ask permission.

### Assess health understanding – ask what the person already knows.

### Share prognosis

- Choose the appropriate prognosis to share, deliver it clearly.
- Allow silence and acknowledge any emotion that arises.

### Explore what matters most to the patient

- Specifically explore what the patient has told their whānau about the patient’s priorities and worries if the patient’s health did change.
- If you think you will need to make clinical judgements about whether a person is likely to recover to an acceptable quality of life, explore critical abilities and trade-offs.

### Close the conversation

- Summarise what you have heard, thank them, share a recommendation that aligns with a goal of care on the shared goals of care form and share any additional plans. If you need time to consider this or discuss with a colleague, let the person know you will talk with them again very soon, and let them know the plan.
- Affirm your commitment to them and check whether there are any other questions or concerns, or if there is someone else they would like you to update about this conversation.

### Document the conversation on the shared goals of care form or local equivalent.