Discover the facts about organ and tissue donation in Australia

Organ and Tissue Donation

Would You Donate Life?

DISCOVER the facts about organ and tissue donation
DECIDE about becoming a donor
DISCUSS your decision with the people close to you
What is organ and tissue donation?

Organ and tissue donation is a medical process which involves removing organs and tissue from a donor and transplanting them into someone who is very sick or dying from organ failure. Few people die in such a way that they can become organ donors – only about 1-2% of people who die in hospital will be eligible to donate their organs. Many more people can donate tissue.

There are approximately 1600 people on Australian organ transplant waiting lists. On average, people are on a transplant waiting list for between six months and four years.

Some people spend weeks or months in hospital, and others make several trips to hospital every week for treatment.

Many people require tissue transplants for conditions that have a significant impact on their lives such as corneas to restore sight or skin grafts to cover burns while they heal.

According to the Multi Organ Harvesting Aid Network Foundation (MOHAN) in Chennai, it is estimated that between 3,000 and 3,500 kidney transplants occur in India every year.

What determines whether or not someone can donate organs and tissues is where and how a person dies, and the conditions of their organs and tissue. While age and medical history will be considered, you shouldn’t assume you are too young or too old or too unhealthy to donate.
The Government of India passed the Human Organ Transplant Act (HOTA) in 1994, which legalised brain death facilitating cadaveric organ transplantation.

Many people from India are familiar with the concept of organ donation due to the ongoing publicity about the donation of eyes.

Organ donation awareness is increasing in India with organizations such as the MOHAN Foundation working to educate the public about organ donation and transplantation.

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Australia is a world leader for successful transplant outcomes. In 2011, 337 organ donors gave 1001 Australians a new chance at life.
Most religions support organ donation including Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity and Islam.

**Hinduism:**
The Hindu religion does not prohibit the donation of organs or tissue to alleviate the suffering of other humans:

“It is said that the soul is invisible, knowing this you should not grieve for the body.” Daan is the act of selfless giving. Bhagvad Gita, chapter 2:25

**Islam:**
In 1983, the Moslem Religious Council initially rejected organ donation by followers of Islam, but it has reversed its position, provided donors consent in writing prior to death. The organs of Islamic donors must be transplanted immediately.

Islam strongly believes in the principle of saving human life.

“Whosoever saves the life of one person would be as if he saved the life of all mankind.” Holy Quran, chapter 5:32

**Sikhism:**
Sikh philosophy and teachings put great emphasis on the importance of giving and putting others before oneself. Sikhs believe life after death is a continuous cycle of rebirth but that the physical body is not needed in this process – a person’s soul is their essence.

“The dead sustain their bond with the living through virtuous deeds.” Guru Nanak, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Pg 143.

**Christianity:**
Sacrificing and helping others are consistent themes in Christianity, which teaches the principle of seeking for others what you hope others would do for you.

“Freely you have received, freely give.” Matthew, chapter 10:8

For more information about your religion and organ donation, please speak with your religious or spiritual advisor.
Discussing Organ Donation with your Family

When a person dies in a situation where they can become an organ and/or tissue donor, the medical team raises the possibility of donation with the family.

Fewer than one per cent of all people who die in hospital each year die in a way that will allow organ donation to occur.

It is important to discuss your donation decision with your family and those who are close to you. Your family need to know your decision because they will be asked to confirm your wishes if the situation arises.

Even if you have registered to become an organ donor, your family will still be asked to confirm your wishes.

Around 40% of families in Australia do not give consent for organ donation to proceed. In many cases this is because the family does not know the deceased person’s wishes.
I have registered my decision to become an organ donor, do I need to do anything more?

Yes. You need to discuss your decision with those who are close to you. Even if you have registered to become an organ and tissue donor, donation will not proceed unless your family confirms your donation wishes. It is also important that you know your own family’s wishes.

Will my family have to pay if I donate my organs?

No. There are no costs associated with donating your organs.

How do they know I am really dead?

There are two causes of death – brain death and cardiac death. Most people die a cardiac death, where they stop breathing and have no heartbeat. Most cardiac deaths mean organ donation is not possible, though tissues can be donated.

Brain death occurs when the brain is so badly damaged that it stops functioning permanently, usually as a result of bleeding in the brain, stroke, infection or an injury to the head. Your organs will not be removed until two senior doctors have separately tested and confirmed that you are brain dead. If you die a brain death in hospital, you can be kept on a ventilator that keeps your organs functioning until donation can take place.

Can I have a normal funeral?

Yes. Funeral arrangements are not affected by organ donation. Organ and tissue donation will happen quickly after you die. Your body will appear as if you have had normal surgery and clothing will cover the stitches.

Am I too young or too old to donate?

You are never too young or too old to become an organ donor. There have been people in their eighties who have saved the lives of people much younger than them. If you are under 16, you can’t register to donate but you are able to discuss your wishes with your parents or guardians.
Organ Donation Process

When a person dies in a situation where they can become an organ and/or tissue donor, the medical team raises the possibility of donation with the family.

Even if the person is registered on the Australian Organ Donor Register the family will be asked to confirm their donation wishes. A DonateLife clinician will meet with the family and talk to them about donation.

The family of a potential donor will be given time to discuss their decision of whether or not donation will proceed.

Timing is critical in the organ donation process. Tissues can be donated up to 24 hours after death, regardless of how the person died.

Organ donors need to have died in an intensive care unit or emergency department in hospital while on life support, which will keep their organs artificially functioning for a limited period of time.

The very nature of these circumstances means that there is usually no chance to discuss the wishes with the person.

In Australia, the family will always be asked to confirm the donation wishes of the deceased before donation for transplantation can proceed. That is why you need to ask and know the donation wishes of your loves ones. It is much easier for the family to make a decision if they know the wishes of their loved one.

The donor’s body is always treated with dignity and respect.
Registering your decision

Once you have discussed your decision with those close to you, and if you are aged 16 or older, you can register your decision on the Australian Organ Donor Register.

The Australian Organ Donor Register is the official national register for people to record their decision about becoming an organ and/or tissue donor.

The Donor Register ensures a person’s donation decision can be verified 24 hours a day, seven days a week by authorised medical personnel anywhere in Australia.

You can register your decision by either:

- Going to www.donorregister.gov.au and registering online
- Calling 1800 777 203
- Visiting your local Medicare office

If you need an interpreter, call TIS 131 450 (Translating and Interpreting Service)

But remember, even if you register your wish to be a donor, your family will still be asked to confirm your donation wishes.

This project is sponsored by:

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www.donatelife.gov.au