

## Writing to transplant recipients

The donation experience affects everyone differently, and as individuals we will all vary in the way we cope. Some donor families find that sharing stories and information about their loved one is helpful in their grieving process.

For recipients, getting a transplant is a lifesaving event. In most cases, transplants happen rather suddenly, and the road to recovery is long. Receiving a letter from their donor's family may assist recipients with the emotional struggles that they experience.

The decision to write to your loved one's transplant recipient is a very individual and personal choice, and there is no timeframe for when you should reach out, should you want to.

It is important to note that there is no obligation for either the donor family or transplant recipient to write or respond, and there is no expectation that there should be an ongoing exchange of correspondence.

Anyone in your family may write.

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**I have written at least 100 letters to the recipients but never on paper. I feel guilty about this but at some stage it will happen.**

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## The correspondence process

Australia's organ and tissue donation program is confidential. The Human Tissue Acts, Transplantation and Anatomy Acts and associated policies in each state or territory prohibit health professionals and DonateLife staff from disclosing information that might publicly identify a donor or transplant recipient.

Donor families are able to write **anonymous** correspondence to transplant recipients via DonateLife. DonateLife staff forward the correspondence to the relevant hospital transplant unit, who will then forward the correspondence to the transplant recipient.

This process exists to maintain confidentiality.

**If you have any questions about the correspondence process, please contact your local DonateLife Agency for assistance.**

### DonateLife ACT

PO Box 11  
Woden ACT 2606

**T** 02 5124 5625  
**E** Organ.Donation@act.gov.au

### DonateLife NSW

PO Box 486  
Kogarah NSW 1485

**T** 02 8566 1700  
**E** seslhd-nsworgandonation@health.nsw.gov.au

### DonateLife NT

PO Box 41326  
Casuarina NT 0811

**T** 08 8922 8349  
**E** donatelife@nt.gov.au

### DonateLife QLD

Building 1, Level 4  
Princess Alexandra Hospital  
199 Ipswich Road  
Woolloongabba QLD 4102

**T** 07 3176 2350  
**E** donatelife@health.qld.gov.au

### DonateLife SA

PO Box 287  
Rundle Mall SA 5000

**T** 08 8207 7117  
**E** donatelifesa@sa.gov.au

### DonateLife TAS

GPO Box 1236  
Hobart TAS 7001

**T** 03 6270 2209  
**E** donatelife.tasmania@ths.tas.gov.au

### DonateLife VIC

Level 2  
19-21 Argyle Place South  
Carlton VIC 3053

**T** 03 8317 7400 or  
1300 133 050 (toll free)  
**E** donatelife@redcrossblood.org.au

### DonateLife WA

PO Box 332  
Northbridge WA 6865

**T** 08 9222 0222  
**E** donatelife@health.wa.gov.au

### Organ and Tissue Authority

(02) 6198 9800 | enquiries@donatelife.gov.au

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[www.donatelifegov.au](http://www.donatelifegov.au)



# Correspondence guidelines

## Donor families



## What to write

Many donor families have said they are overwhelmed with emotion and have difficulty in expressing their feelings in words. It may take months or even years before you feel ready to send correspondence.

### **Everyone will express their story in their own way, and this brochure hopes to guide you through this process.**

To begin your letter or card, you may like to start with **'Dear Recipient'** or make it more personal by saying **'Dear Friend'**.

Many transplant recipients welcome and appreciate learning about their donor, so you may like to tell them a little about your loved one, their family, occupation, hobbies and your relationship to them.

When ending your letter, consider signing off with a phrase such as **'from your donor's family'** or a similar phrase that reflects yourself such as **'from your donor's mother/father/sister/brother/partner'**.

## Some examples

### **Dear Recipient,**

**I find myself writing to you as I can't help wondering about how you are going.**

**I lost my beloved wife nearly six months ago, and find great comfort knowing she was able help another human being.**

**You are part of the legacy my husband left for me and our two young children.**

**I am finally daring to learn more about the recipients of my son's life-saving gifts, one of which is you.**

**To give another person a second chance at life is the greatest gift.**

**Sincerely,  
Your Donor's Family**

The correspondence between donor families and recipients is anonymous; therefore it is important that you do not include your name, address or any other personal contact details.

Always remember your DonatLife Family Support Coordinator is there to help you during this process, and can provide you with updates on the progress of the recipient at any time.

## Sending your correspondence

Please mail or email your correspondence to the DonatLife agency in your state.

If sending correspondence by mail, we would ask you to place your card or letter in an unsealed envelope.

On a separate piece of paper please write:

- your full name
- your contact information – email or mobile – to allow staff to notify you when your correspondence has been sent
- the donor's full name, and
- the date of their death.

This information will be used to make sure we can identify the transplant recipients correctly. If this information is not provided we may not be able to make a match with a transplant recipient.

To ensure that confidentiality is maintained, DonatLife staff will open and check your correspondence for identifying information. A copy of your correspondence is kept on file by DonatLife and the transplant unit so that a copy is available to you or the recipient in the future if misplaced.

If your correspondence includes identifying information DonatLife will contact you to discuss amending your words and can help you with these changes.

DonatLife will send the correspondence to the transplant hospital responsible for the recipient's care. The responsible transplant coordinator will then send the correspondence to the transplant recipient if they have consented to receiving correspondence. It may take several weeks for your correspondence to reach the transplant recipient.

In some instances correspondence will not be sent. This may be because the correspondence contains information that may publicly identify the donor, if DonatLife was unable to identify a recipient match, or if the recipient has indicated that they do not wish to receive correspondence at this time.

DonatLife will contact you when your correspondence has been sent. If your correspondence is unable to be sent they will explain why and try to help resolve any issues.

When sending correspondence to DonatLife, you will be consenting to this process.

## Will I hear from the transplant recipients?

Writing to donor families is a very personal decision.

Please remember that all recipients have experienced a debilitating or life-threatening illness, and many will require ongoing support and care post-transplant. Recipients may experience feelings of anxiety, depression or guilt post-transplant, which could affect their ability to write to their donor family. While some recipients may respond immediately, others may find it difficult to respond so they may take longer to write back or they may never write at all. This does not mean that they are not grateful.

In the event that a transplant recipient chooses to write, their letters will be sent to you with the same care taken to maintain confidentiality.

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**Writing the letter was quite challenging, but it gave me a very big sense of relief and realising how thankful I am to my donor family because I wouldn't be here without them today.**

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