

DonateLife Victoria 2024

Year in review



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Acknowledgement of Country

DonateLife Victoria acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of the lands and water on which we live, learn, work and play. We pay respects to Elders both past and present and stand together with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders of today and tomorrow.

Some members of our Nursing Team



Message from the General Manager



Victoria once again led the nation with 162 donors in 2024, an increase of 14% on our 2023 figure and our equal second-best year on record for donor activity. Thanks to our generous donors and their families, 358 Australians received life-saving transplants.

We're very proud of what we achieved as a team. This wouldn't be possible without the dedication and commitment of our donation specialist staff, agency staff, and all our colleagues in Intensive Care Units (ICU) and Emergency Departments across the state who continue to prioritise donation.

The number of lives saved through donation will always be our proudest achievement. We're also very proud of our commitment to continuous improvement. The constant evolution of our practices and processes continued in 2024. Our goal is to maintain our position as an industry leader by offering exceptional education to our clinical team and fostering a curiosity about global advancements and practices within our field.

During October, myself, Dr Dash Gantner, and Dr Sam Radford had the privilege of undertaking a study tour of Spain and England, with the purpose of an overall comparison of our system to their models. The opportunity to meet with such a broad range of donation and transplantation colleagues across two countries provided us with a wealth of information and ideas. A project plan has been developed to explore ideas we've highlighted as possible opportunities for us in Victoria, and potentially around the country.

Other highlights from 2024 include:

- ▶ DonateLife Victoria's (DLV) Donation and Transplantation Symposium held in September, which brought donation and transplantation experts together to share ideas and perspectives.
- ▶ Being the first state in Australia to establish high-fidelity simulation sessions tailored to both our nursing and medical workforce.

- ▶ Our Regional Nursing Managers (RNMs), Justine Holloway and Nina Seng received the inaugural Brooker Prize Leadership Development Award for their efforts in developing the Professional Success Program at DLV.
- ▶ Dr Forbes McGain, one of our Medical Donation Specialists (MDS) received the Australian and New Zealand Intensive Care Society (ANZICS) President's Medal. Forbes received the prestigious accolade for his significant contribution to intensive care medicine.

The biggest challenge we face, along with many other jurisdictions, is how to address the dropping number of new registrations on the Australian Organ Donor Register (AODR) and persistently lower consent rates than historically observed. Our current consent rate is 53%. This is the same as the national figure, which hasn't recovered to pre-pandemic rates. We'll be doing targeted research in Victoria to discover why individuals aren't registering and if there are any unknown factors affecting consent rates. This will be one key focus in 2025.

A special thank you to donors and their families

None of our life-giving work would be possible without the selflessness and generosity of all organ and tissue donors and their families. We are so grateful to everyone who said yes to donation and changed the lives of those in desperate need of transplants.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to acknowledge our exceptional network of professionals who have worked tirelessly to deliver nation-leading outcomes in 2024.

I'd also like to thank our wonderful team of volunteers who enthusiastically help us out at events such as the careers expos and the annual Service of Remembrance. They are such a valued part of our team.

We thank you all again and look forward to working with you in 2025.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Holland'.

Tony Holland
General Manager
DonateLife Victoria

2024 at a glance

Our network

87 people in our network

41 

Donation
Specialist Nurses

20 

Agency staff

22 

Medical Donation
Specialists

4 

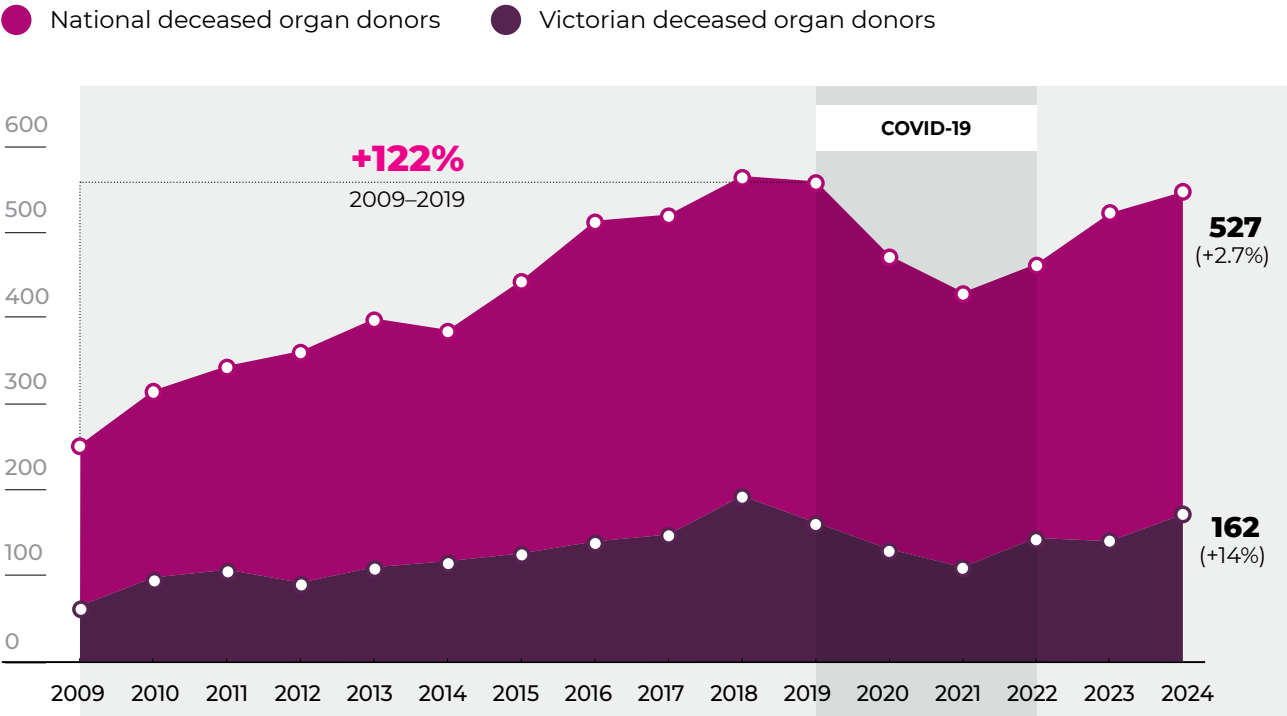
Medical Consultants
on-call



Our results

	2024	2023	Difference
Deceased organ donors	162	142	+14%
Transplant recipients from Victorian donors	358	361	-1%
Routine referral	94%	90%	+4.0%
Collaborative requesting	90%	84%	+6.0%
Families consenting to donation	53%	54%	+1.0%
New registrations	36,651	40,454	-9%

Figure 1 / National and Victorian deceased organs donors (2009 – 2024)



Highlights from 2024

Our purpose is to save and improve the lives of more Australians by optimising organ donation for transplantation in Victoria.



Our goals



1 Optimise organ donation outcomes

Key achievements

- ▶ 94% routine referral rate.
- ▶ 90% Collaborative requesting.
- ▶ Deployment of high-fidelity simulation training for our medical workforce.



2 Increase registrations on the Australian Organ Donor Register and community awareness of organ and tissue donation

Key achievements

- ▶ Over 30 community events held across the state.
- ▶ 42 media stories published in print and online.



3 Strengthen our culture of collaboration and excellence

Key achievements

- ▶ Donation and Transplantation Symposium event to bring both sides of the sector together to collaborate.
- ▶ Creation of a nation-first Family Communication Nursing Coordinator role to further the development of the donation after Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) program.



4 Enhance systems and processes

Key achievements

- ▶ Study tour of our counterparts in Spain and England to compare their model to ours and to explore quality improvement in the management of organ donation services in Victoria.
- ▶ Continued to use information and data to measure and review key performance indicators, such as routine referral and adherence to best practice when requesting organ donation.



Victoria leads the nation with the highest number of generous donors

Victoria again led the country with 162 actual donors for 2024, a 14% increase on 2023, and Victoria's equal second highest tally on record, matching the 2019 total. This was achieved despite a far lower consent rate (53% in 2024 compared to 63% in 2019) and was driven by the highest recorded values in all key performance metrics and the volume of referrals.

In 2024 there were over 600 more referrals to DLV than 2019, and we requested donation 160 more times. Almost a third of organ donors in Australia last year became donors at Victorian hospitals. This is a testament to the processes embedded in our hospitals and the dedication of our expert healthcare workers.

Nursing update

A word from our Nursing Services Manager

Delivering a successful donation service in Victoria is only possible with the unwavering commitment to teamwork. Our dedicated nurses have a dynamic, diverse, at times challenging and incredibly rewarding role.

It's been a year marked by continued care and advocacy for donor families, collaboration with Health Services and transplant teams, and striving for operational efficiency. Investing in the professional growth of our nursing team remains a top priority.

The Nursing Leadership had a restructure following the departure of Toulia Saltas in June. Megan Plas was appointed as the Nursing Services Manager (NSM) and returns from long service leave in March 2025. The new structure of one Nursing Services Manager and two RNMs aligns DLV with the structure of other jurisdictions.

We had a few other changes to our team in 2024 including:

- ▶ Farewelling Madhu Raman, our Education Team Lead who has been instrumental in enhancing our education program. Madhu has joined the Organ and Tissue Authority's Clinical Programs team. We welcomed Melissa Bantick as Madhu's successor.
- ▶ Welcoming eight new Donation Specialist Nurses (DSNs). A key element of clinical staff training now incorporates simulation in partnership with St Vincent's simulation centre. This is also part of ongoing training for the wider nursing team.

Highlights from 2024 include:

- ▶ DLV's Donation and Transplantation Symposium, which will shape our collaborative work into the future. Advancing technologies such as machine perfusion of donated organs is optimising recipient outcomes and assists in reducing the number of people on the transplant waiting list.
- ▶ The appointment of a pilot Family Communication Nursing Coordinator role to focus on our approach to offering donation to families of potential donors, and support for complex donation cases, including donation after VAD.



From left to right: Regional Nurse Managers, Justine and Nina, and Nursing Services Manager, Megan.

- ▶ Three of our donation nurses travelled internationally to complete conferences and/or study tours. Many others are pursuing additional studies and have attended conferences and workshops locally or nationally. A regular professional development forum for the nursing leadership team has also been introduced.

Thank you to our nursing team who deliver our service and an extensive range of education initiatives to provide the highest possible care to donors and their families. We also appreciate our network both locally and interstate who work with us to achieve the best possible outcomes in organ donation.

Thank you to Megan Plas, Nina Seng, Larna Woodyatt (acting RNM) and Madhu Raman for their leadership, contribution, and support of the nursing team throughout year.



Justine Holloway
Acting Nursing
Services Manager

on behalf of the nursing leadership team

Medical update

A word from our State Medical Directors

The big question that we sought to answer in 2024 was how we continue to save as many lives as possible in the face of external challenges. One big challenge that remains for us is lowered consent rates, which have not seen a recovery to pre-pandemic levels.

We continue to use our data to work on some key areas to mitigate the effects of this, by identifying other areas for improvement. We have great educational resources for both donation specialist nurses and doctors to help expand our skillsets when it comes to discussing donation. We continue to strive to help our team make the most of these resources with the belief that an optimum consent rate will be associated with optimum volume of training and experience.

Sam, our General Manager Tony, and Dr Dash Ganter, were also privileged to undertake a study tour of our counterparts in England and Spain to learn more about their systems and processes, all to identify areas for improvement in our own program. There were many positives to the time abroad, the

biggest perhaps was to review trends in consent rates and promotion of donation since COVID in both countries, and what work has been done in understanding ongoing impacts on consent post-pandemic.

In 2025 we will continue to explore ideas and possible improvements to come out of our study tour of the UK and Spain, as well as continue the evolution of the MDS role to ensure we're staying at the forefront in all facets of our field.



Dr Rohit D'Costa
State Medical Director



Dr Sam Radford
Deputy State Medical Director



Marketing and
Communications
Team: Liz, Nerissa
and Phoebe

The Oz
Transplants gig.
Photo credit:
Andrew Chapman

Speakers at
our Service of
Remembrance
Werribee donor
centre event



Marketing and Communications highlights

It was another busy year for the Marketing and Communications team, raising awareness in the Victorian community of the importance of registering to be an organ and tissue donor and telling your family that you've registered. We're grateful to our incredible team of volunteers and storytellers who supported all our community and media activities.

Media snapshot

Through proactive media there were 42 print and online articles published across multiple media outlets. Additionally, eight stories aired on TV, plus eight radio segments, and two podcast interviews.

Media highlights included:

- ▶ Nationally syndicated stories with News Corp publications about waitlist and recipient toddler, Harlen Busuttill, our cover star.

- ▶ A suite of back-to-school print and online stories featuring children who have received a liver transplant.
- ▶ A TV, radio and online media package with SBS featuring Moh Rezaee whose wife Arghavan became an organ donor.

Community events snapshot

Celebrating our multicultural community

DonateLife Victoria and Lifeblood collaborated to host a community information session at the Werribee Donor Centre. Kidney recipient Hussein spoke about his experience as did his sister Ikram.

The Oz Transplants music gig

Led by Paulie Stewart and Fiona Maynard, all members of the Oz Transplants have received a transplant or are living donors. This special, free public concert to kick-off DonateLife Week, was held at MEMO Music Hall St Kilda and proudly supported by a DonateLife Community Awareness Grant.

Education highlights

In 2024, the Education team undertook two training programs to support and guide the education and training of eight new DSNs joining the DLV team. The emerging DSNs provided the donation support for both regional and metropolitan Victoria.

The team continued to support the sector by facilitating our quarterly all-staff network meetings and coordinated and delivered the first Victorian Donation and Transplantation Symposium in nearly six years. The symposium was a huge success with high numbers of attendance, robust discussions led by expert guest speakers and panel members. In addition to these initiatives, the Education team implemented the pilot simulation program for donation nurses. During this pilot, 22 of our DSNs were taken through the foundational program, with overwhelmingly positive feedback received.

The Education team also had the exciting opportunity to implement another pilot project – the Preceptorship Program. This program was built to support the preceptors who undertake

the vital role of clinical support to our new and emerging DSNs. The program was delivered in a series of face-to-face workshops and accessible resources for professional development for this leadership role. The pilot program had nine members and expressions of interest for 2025 have confirmed 13 members for the next iteration of the program.

Along with the new initiatives, the team continued to coordinate the delivery of the statewide donation education workshops to both regional and metropolitan Victorian Health Services.



25

workshops delivered across the state



600

health professionals reached

Education Team: Ciara, Clare, Monique, Melissa and Indra



The people on the ground



Danielle Griffiths is a Donation Specialist Nurse at Peninsula Health

Why do you do this job?

I started working in ICU back in 2000, at a large trauma hospital where I cared for patients who became organ and tissue donors and patients after their liver transplantation. I was in awe of the generosity of families to think of others during their time of grief by consenting to donation as well as seeing firsthand the life-saving effects of liver transplantation.

What do you love about it?

Empowering and supporting families to make a donation decision that's right for them. Listening to families share stories of their loved ones including their wishes at end-of-life. Working in collaboration with the wider hospital team inclusive of nurses, doctors, allied health and executive staff to support organ and tissue donation as an end-of-life care option for patients at Peninsula Health.

The opportunity to engage and network with colleagues throughout Victoria and the whole of Australia to coordinate organ and tissue donation – it takes a whole village to facilitate donation.

What's your highlight(s) from 2024?

I'm thankful for the whole-of-hospital approach to donation at Peninsula Health, supporting myself and my colleagues to seamlessly facilitate donation.

During a very busy period of donation activity in April 2024, which saw seven families consent to donation within a two-week period, this included two rapid retrievals in two days. All staff went above and beyond to support DonateLife and donor families.



Georgia and Alexandra are members of the Volunteer team at DonateLife Victoria

Why do you do this job?

We're volunteers with DLV so we can get out in the community and talk to people about the importance of registering as an organ and tissue donor and letting their family and loved ones know about their wishes. This is all to honour our Dad, Rob who became an organ donor. We're so proud of the fact that whilst his life was cut short, that he was able to save the lives of others.

What do you love about it?

We feel so privileged and grateful to be volunteers at DonateLife and feel passionate about inspiring others to have the conversation with their loved ones. Dad wasn't registered, but our parents had spoken about it together. It made the decision to donate his organs simple, because we knew what he wanted. Volunteering at DonateLife is something that connects us to our dad and we will forever be proud of our dad's legacy. We miss his love and guidance every day, but we are so grateful to have had his values instilled in us.

What are your highlight(s) from 2024?

Our highlight from 2024 was having the opportunity to share our Dad's story at the DLV Service of Remembrance. Our dad was a kind, empathetic, intelligent man who shaped the way we live our lives today. He was a very funny man, known by many as quick-witted and humorous. He was always joking around and playing pranks on people. He didn't take life too seriously and was always up for a fun time. It was so special for us to honour him in this way.



Dr Christian Karcher is a Medical Donation Specialist at The Royal Melbourne Hospital

Why do you do this job?

End-of-life care and organ donation are integral parts of critical care; I find a lot of satisfaction in supporting patients and families during some of their most challenging moments. I've witnessed the profound impact of organ donation—not just for recipients but for donor families who find comfort in knowing their loved one has helped others. Being part of this process and contributing to something so meaningful is an enormous privilege.

I see my role as MDS in bridging the gap between the ICU and the donation process through awareness, education and support.

What do you love about it?

I love the collaboration with a diverse range of people within DLV, particularly the nursing and medical group. Working alongside such amazing people, all striving towards the shared goal of improving donation outcomes, is incredibly rewarding.

I'm amazed by the big leaps organ donation has made over the last decade. There's been huge progress made in medicine, standards, training, and the way we support families. Plus, meeting key benchmarks to improve donation rates and outcomes. It's exciting to be part of a field that's always evolving.

What's your highlight(s) from 2024?

A highlight for me was contributing to the development of the new organ donation course for College of Intensive Care Medicine trainees. Working alongside professionals from across Australia and New Zealand provided a fantastic opportunity to collaborate with like-minded educators in the sector. It is amazing to see the collective effort and expertise come together to enhance education and training in this area of intensive care.



Jessica Amsden is the Family Communication Nursing Coordinator at DonateLife Victoria

Why do you do this job?

Since I began as an Organ Donor Coordinator in 2012, my passion for giving families a sense of control during difficult times has remained strong. Witnessing the ongoing impact of this work fuels my dedication. Throughout my various roles, my commitment to providing the best care for families and donors has been unwavering. My experiences and knowledge have helped me grow as a clinician and educator, enabling me to tailor programs that help others develop their skills in offering this rare opportunity to families and saving the lives of those awaiting transplants.

What do you love about it?

I love helping others enhance their knowledge and skills, including DLV staff and stakeholders, particularly around organ donation following VAD. Building relationships and processes with key stakeholders is highly rewarding. I also enjoy mentoring our staff to support families in making enduring decisions about organ donation.

What's your highlight(s) from 2024?

In 2024, I had two major highlights. First, was the establishment and implementation of the DLV simulation program, a significant career achievement that required extensive learning and patience. I am excited to see its future development.

Second, I was appointed to the newly created Family CNC role, which DLV is piloting nationally. This role focuses on developing the donation after VAD program, increasing awareness and engagement with VAD professionals and the community. This initiative parallels my previous work on the Donation after Circulatory Determination of Death (DCDD) pathway and aims to boost overall donation numbers.

The opportunity to give

At just 34, Moh's beloved wife Arghavan – devoted mother to their two children – had a seizure that led to cardiac arrest. Moh and Arghavan had never discussed organ and tissue donation, but knowing his wife's generous, giving nature and her love of helping others, Moh made the decision to say yes to donation. He shared her story with us.

After leaving Iran over a decade ago, Moh and Arghavan settled in Australia with the dream of building a life and starting a family. Arghavan was smart and loved languages, speaking Persian and French before learning English in her first year in Australia.

While Arghavan worked as a dental nurse, she was also passionate about health and fitness and had just started pursuing her dream career as a model before she died. Her greatest passion however was raising their two young daughters, Hannah and Jana.

When reflecting on the day of Arghavan's passing, Moh said when she was taken to hospital he still had hope that something would change. Sadly, Arghavan deteriorated and in this moment of devastation, Moh made the decision that his wife would become an organ donor.

Though they hadn't ever discussed organ and tissue donation, Moh was a registered donor himself, and believed Arghavan would have wanted to donate her organs if it meant helping others.

"I knew that she had such a generous, giving nature, always helping everyone. I knew she'd be very happy that she could save lives," says Moh.

Arghavan went on to give several people a second chance at life through organ donation.

Moh is comforted knowing that Arghavan's organs were able to save the lives of others. He also believes it is important to have the discussion about organ and tissue donation with family and friends, no matter what their decision is.

Moh is now raising Hannah, 8, and Jana, 4, and is helped by the knowledge that Arghavan's generosity lives on.



Moh says, "I'm sure she would be happy as well, and I'm sure the kids... once they grow up and understand, they'll be proud of their mum."



Arghavan, Moh and their daughters, Hanna and Jana

The life-saving gift



Image: Harlen's story featured in the weekend lift out in the Herald Sun as part of the Good Friday Appeal. Photo credit: The Herald Sun.

Little Harlen was in desperate need of a liver transplant and had been on the waitlist for around five months when his health deteriorated rapidly. His parents Kristy and Matt feared he might not make it. At the eleventh hour, a suitable donor was found and Harlen had lifesaving transplant surgery. Harlen, now two-and-a-half, is thriving and his parents are forever grateful to his donor and their family.

Harlen was jaundiced at birth and Kristy and Matt became concerned when he wasn't improving. At his 8-week maternal health appointment, the nurse advised them to go straight to emergency at their nearest hospital. From there they were rapidly transported to the Royal Children's

Hospital. Harlen was diagnosed with biliary atresia, a rare liver disease in infants that blocks and scars bile ducts. An emergency Kasai procedure didn't improve Harlen's condition and Kristy and Matt were told he would need a liver transplant to survive.

After Harlen was placed on the organ transplant wait list, he endured a raft of procedures, surgeries and treatments while his parents waited for the call.

Harlen's condition became so critical that Kristy started to prepare to donate part of her liver to save her son's life.

At the eleventh hour, a suitable donor was found and Harlen underwent a gruelling 10-hour liver transplant surgery.

Kristy and Matt say they'll never be able to adequately express their gratitude to Harlen's generous donor and their family. They have since written to the family anonymously to thank them.

"There's a family out there who have gone through a horrific experience, they've lost someone they've cared for and loved. But through their loss, Harlen has a chance at life," Matt says.



Kristy adds, "It was an amazing gift they gave Harlen and also the other people that they saved. We can't thank them enough for what they've done for us."





DonateLife
VICTORIA

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Some members of our Agency Team

