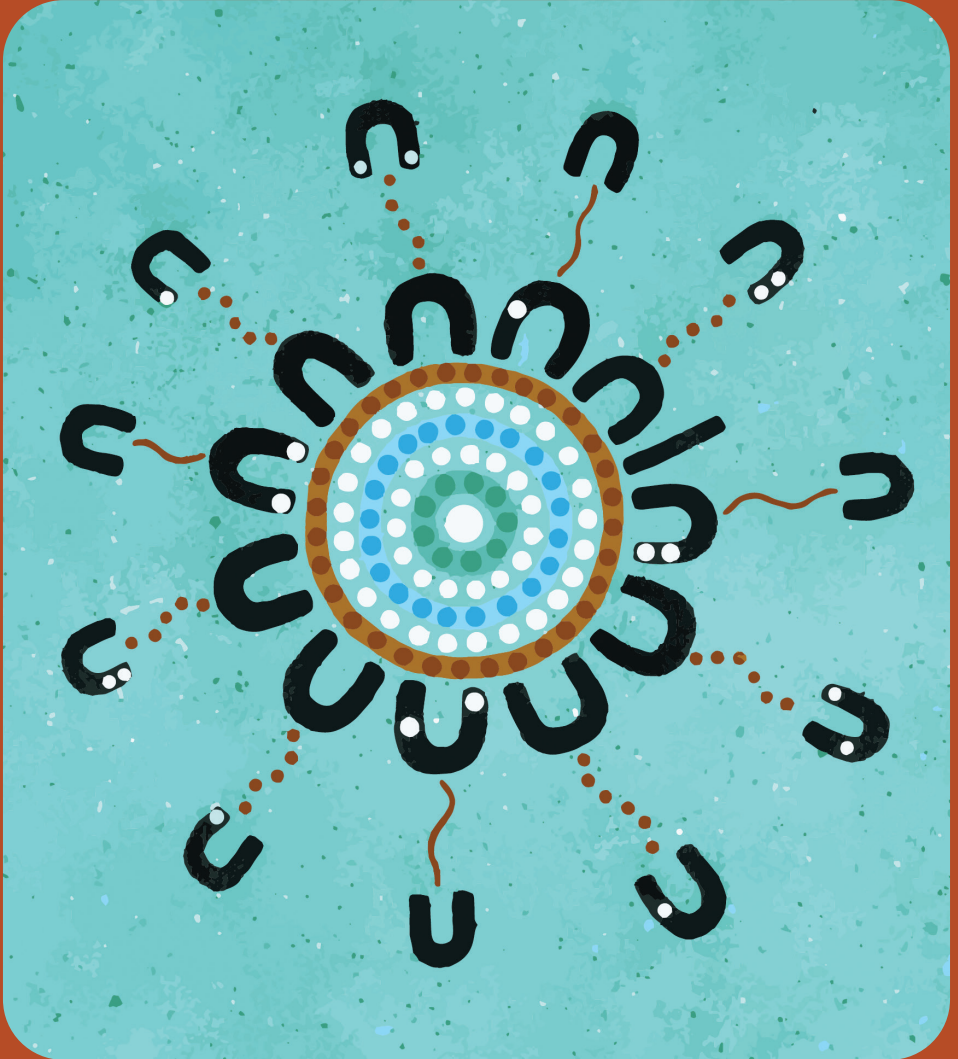


# The Organ and Tissue Donation Story



Talking together about organ and tissue donation helps make a healthier community.

*Artwork by Turid Calgaret*

## What is a transplant?

When a person's organs are healthy they can live a normal life. People with unhealthy body parts like lungs, livers, hearts, kidneys, pancreas and intestines can become very sick. They might be able to get a new organ through an operation called a transplant.

A transplant happens at a hospital. The doctors take a healthy organ and put it inside the body of the sick person so they can live a healthy life. Doctors are able to transplant the heart, lungs, kidneys, liver, pancreas and intestines, and tissues such as parts of the eyes and bones.

## What is organ donation?

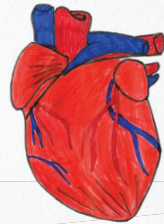
A person can donate organs if they pass away in very specific circumstances.

Anyone 16 years or older can choose to register as an organ and tissue donor. People under 16 years can still donate if their family supports this choice.

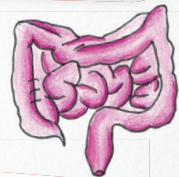
A healthy living donor could also offer to donate a kidney for transplant.



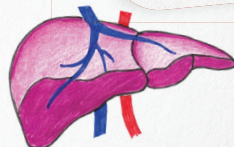
*Dialysis patient waiting*



*Heart*



*Intestines*



*Liver*



## Having a yarn to family

It is important your family know your wishes to donate after your passing, this will help your family. You can start the yarn about donation with your mob when you sit down for a feed, talk about getting your licence, yarn about your health, at cards, when talking about a Will or talking to your Aboriginal Health Worker.

## Where can I register?

The Australian Organ Donor Register is a list of people who have decided that if they were to pass away suddenly, their healthy organs could be given to someone on the waitlist who needs them. You can join the register by filling in a form at your local Medicare office, through your online Medicare or MyGov account, visiting [donatelifelife.gov.au](https://donatelifelife.gov.au) or scanning the QR code on the back of this booklet.

# Family members deciding

Sometimes if people pass away in specific circumstances, the doctors will ask the family members to decide if they wish to donate their loved ones organs or tissues. It is hard for the family to think about such a serious thing, but this is the only time this can happen.

Sometimes the person has told their family their wishes of wanting to donate. Sometimes the family doesn't know what that person would have wanted so they have to make the decision as a family.

Family members don't have to decide straight away and can talk to other family and friends about what to do. The decision

does need to be made in a day or so. This is to make sure the organs will stay healthy enough, so they can be used for transplant.

If the family decides they are comfortable donating their loved one's organs and tissue, they can choose which ones to donate. A family member will be asked to sign a consent form, saying they give permission.

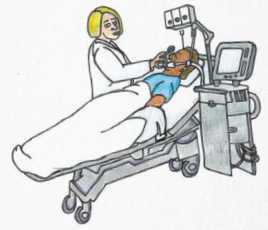
## What happens if the family agree to donate?

The doctors test to make sure your loved one's organs are healthy and can be used for transplant. While these simple tests are being done, the person may also receive some medicine to make sure their organs stay healthy for transplant.



## Brain death

Even though the person has passed away the doctors will keep them connected to a breathing machine. The machine keeps oxygen going into the body and the oxygen is needed to make sure the organs stay healthy until they are removed for transplant.



*Breathing machine*

## Circulatory death

Sometimes the person is so sick that the doctors do not think they have any chance of living without the breathing machine and medicines, and they will pass away when these are removed.

The person is given medicines to ensure they have no pain or suffering. Their family and friends can be with them when the breathing machine is stopped. After the breathing machine and tube are removed it can be difficult to know how quickly the person will pass away. Often, this may happen within 10-20 minutes, but some people may not pass away until some hours or days later.

After the machines are removed, doctors will monitor the person's breathing and blood pressure. When the person stops breathing the doctor will wait five minutes before confirming the person has passed away. This is the date that appears on the death certificate. Only then can donation take place.



*Calming medicine*



*Injured brain*



## What happens to the organs you donate?

There are many sick people on the waiting list in Australia who need new organs.

When you register to be a donor, you cannot choose who your organs go to.

The Donor Coordinator receives a list of potential recipients for the organs and calls hospitals all over Australia to find the best match to receive the transplant.

After the recipients have been found and all the tests have been done, the removal of organs happens in the operating theatre.



## The donation operation

Depending on how many organs are donated the operation can take up to 6 hours. There is only one cut made during the operation. After the operation is finished the cut is closed and covered with a special dressing. The body of the person who has passed away is then transferred to the hospital mortuary and the family can start planning the funeral. After the operation the family can see their relative if they wish to.

## What happens after the operation?

The organs are now transported to where the transplant recipient is located – sometimes even outside of Western Australia. All transplants done in WA have to take place in Perth Metropolitan Hospitals.



## Tissue donation

If a person cannot donate organs, they may still be able to donate tissues that could help other people. A corneal transplant can help a person see. The cornea is the clear part at the front of the eye.

The person might also be able to donate part of their bones that could fix another person's damaged bones. This can help people with bone cancer.

After donation the person would still look the same and the funeral would not be any different.



*Cornea*



*Bone*

## What happens after donation?

After a few weeks, the Donor Coordinator will contact the family to let them know which organs or tissues were transplanted and how the recipients are doing after their operation. Although the law says the family cannot find out the name and address of the recipients, they can write to them through DonateLife, to talk about themselves and their loved one who passed away.

Letters sent to DonateLife will be sent on to the transplant recipients. The recipients may also write to the donor family (through the transplant units) and talk about their life and how much better they feel.

# Join the Australian Organ Donor Register

Registering is easy – it only takes a minute to register as an organ and tissue donor at [donatelife.gov.au](https://donatelife.gov.au) or in person at a Medicare office, via Medicare or MyGov Online accounts when downloading your COVID-19 vaccination certificate, or scan here:



It's important to talk to your family about your choice to register so that they understand your wishes.

For more information about organ and tissue donation go to [donatelife.gov.au](https://donatelife.gov.au) or contact DonateLife WA

1800 950 155

[donatelifewa@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:donatelifewa@health.wa.gov.au)

*Adapted with permission from resources developed by DonateLife NT, Northern Territory Department of Health.*



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## **Cover Artwork: Kurongkurl Kaartdijin (2021) by Turid Calgaret**

*Kurongkurl Kaartdijin is a Noongar phrase that means 'coming together to learn.' In the artist's words, the painting represents a "community of men and women coming together to discuss and learn about the concept of organ and tissue donation." Noting that organ and tissue donation is not a traditional practice, the colours represent a calming, mutual environment to discuss a serious topic.*

### **About the Artist**

*Turid Calgaret uses art as therapy and as a reconnection to her family, ancestors, country and culture. Her mother is Nyungar and was part of the Stolen Generation. Turid is also connected to the Kimberley through her grandfather, a Mirrawong-Gadgerong man.*