



Australian Government  
Organ and Tissue Authority



DonateLife

# GET THE FACTS ABOUT ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Resource for GPs and community  
health professionals



# ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This is a practical resource to help GPs and community health professionals raise awareness about organ and tissue donation with patients and answer any questions they may have.

For someone who is seriously ill, an organ or tissue transplant can mean the difference between life or death, being healthy or sick, seeing or being blind, and being active or never walking again. One organ donor can save the lives of up to 7 people and help many more through eye and tissue donation.

With 1,800 Australians on waitlists for a transplant, and a further 14,000 on dialysis, many of whom could benefit from a kidney transplant – the need for more donors is critical.

We recommend that you share this resource with others in your practice to educate and increase their understanding about the importance of getting Australians registered as organ and tissue donors. We also encourage you to share information with your patients by:

- including an article in your practice newsletter and/or on your website
- publishing posts on your social media channels
- displaying resources such as posters, factsheets and brochures in your patient waiting area
- discussing organ and tissue donation with patients as part of your consultation.

For more information visit [donatelifegov.au/gp-resources](https://donatelifegov.au/gp-resources)

---

## Follow us



[donatelifegov.au](https://donatelifegov.au)



[@DonateLifeAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/DonateLifeAustralia)



[@DonateLifeToday](https://www.instagram.com/DonateLifeToday)



[@Organ-and-Tissue-Authority](https://www.linkedin.com/company/organ-and-tissue-authority)



[@DonateLifeToday](https://twitter.com/DonateLifeToday)

# OPPORTUNITIES TO DISCUSS DONATION

**We know that you have limited time with your patients, and talking about organ and tissue donation at the right time is key.**

Many people think that their medical history will mean they're not eligible to be a donor. It doesn't matter how old you are, your lifestyle, what country you're from or how healthy you are – you can still register as an organ and tissue donor.

## PREVENTIVE HEALTH

Consultations for screening, blood pressure, pathology, vaccinations, routine tests, annual health checks and other preventive health appointments could be suitable opportunities to discuss donation.

*MBS item numbers include: 701, 703, 705, 777, 715.*

## SOCIAL HISTORY

When taking a patient's social history, you'll ask questions about their lifestyle, which could include drugs and alcohol, smoking and vaping, work, family and home. You can use this point to discuss common myths about organ and tissue donation.

## ADVANCE CARE PLANNING/ ADVANCE CARE DIRECTIVES

When advance care planning with older patients, you'll likely ask questions about end-of-life decisions, which could include a discussion about enduring power of attorney. You can use this point to discuss organ and tissue donation.



## **AUNTY PAT WILLIAMS AND UNCLE BILLY MUNRO, GOORENG GOORENG ELDERS**

When their brother Ross sadly passed away, siblings Billy and Pat knew that organ donation was the only option. It was what Ross would have wanted.

The family now keeps in touch with Ross' organ recipient through beautiful anonymous letters with updates that tell them all is well. Ross' gift of organ donation has changed lives for the better.

Billy says it's critical that more Australian families begin talking about donation together.

**'Do it now. You should talk to your family about it. Be straight up and be honest about it, that this is what you would like to do.**

**The recipients will forever be part of our family. It was through my brother's kindness and heartfelt feelings for other people he decided to donate. He'd be so happy that the recipients are well and part of our family now, he'd really love that.'**

– Ross' brother, Billy Munro

# COMMON MYTHS

Having the right facts about organ and tissue donation in Australia can help your patients consider it. Here are some common myths we hear from people who think they can't register. Please help us set the record straight.

## HOSPITALS

**MYTH** If I'm a registered donor, doctors won't work hard enough to save my life.

**FACT** The doctor's first priority is always to save your life. Organ and tissue donation will only be considered if you have died, or when death is inevitable.

**MYTH** If I'm a registered donor, I'll automatically become one when I die.

**FACT** It's unlikely. Only around 2% of people who die in Australian hospitals meet the criteria to become an organ donor. This is why every potential donor is precious. Your family also needs to give consent to donation.

Many more people can become eye and tissue donors as death doesn't need to occur in a hospital. Tissue donation saves and transforms lives in many ways including saving burns victims, restoring sight, repairing heart defects in babies and adults, rebuilding tendons and reconstructing bones.

**MYTH** Donation will disfigure my body.

**FACT** Donation surgery is conducted with the same care as any other operation. Your body will be treated with dignity and respect and your family can still have an open casket viewing if desired.

## HEALTH

**MYTH** I'm not healthy enough to donate because of my lifestyle choices or medical history.

**FACT** If you smoke, drink, vape or have an unhealthy diet you can still register to be a donor. You don't have to be in perfect health.

There's every chance that some of your organs and tissues may be suitable for donation. Only a few medical conditions may prevent you from being a donor. You can trust the medical team at the time of your death to assess if you can be a donor.

**MYTH** I can't be a donor because I lived in the UK.

**FACT** You can donate your organs but not your tissues. If you lived in the UK between 1980 and 1996 for a period of 6 or more consecutive months, you can still donate your organs. You are not able to be a tissue donor due to the risk of transmitting variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

## AGE

**MYTH** I'm too old to be a donor.

**FACT** Age is not a barrier – people over 80 have become organ and tissue donors. If you die in a way that gives you the opportunity to be considered for donation, leave it to the medical team to assess if you can become a donor, and if so, they will talk with your family.

## RELIGION

**MYTH** My religion doesn't support donation.

**FACT** All major religions support organ donation. This includes Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Christianity.

# WHY IS REGISTRATION IMPORTANT?

Here's why it's important for patients who support donation to take action by registering and talking to their family about donation.

## WHY REGISTER?

We know that 4 in 5 Australians aged 16+ support organ and tissue donation – yet only 1 in 3 are registered.

When you register as an organ and tissue donor, you provide a clear indication to your family that you want to be a donor in the future.

Around 8 in 10 families say yes to donation when you are registered. Only 4 in 10 families say yes to donation if they are unsure what to do.

## HOW ORGAN DONATION WORKS

### WHAT HAPPENS NOW

If you want to be an organ and tissue donor, it's important to register on the Australian Organ Donor Register and to let your family know you want to be a donor.

This will give your family the certainty they need to support your decision as donation will never proceed if your family objects.

### WHAT HAPPENS IN THE FUTURE

Only 2% of people who die in Australian hospitals, die in a way that makes it possible for them to donate their organs. This is why every potential donor is precious.

Organ donation will only go ahead with the support of your family and hospital donation teams will never proceed with organ donation if your family objects.



## WHY AREN'T PEOPLE REGISTERING?

Organ and tissue donation is poorly understood and not top of mind for many Australians. When asked, most people have questions about the process and gaps in understanding.

The top reason people aren't registered as an organ and tissue donor is because they don't know enough about the process. This is followed by people saying they don't like to think about dying, or it being out of sight, so out of mind.



### RILEY GREEN, QUEENSLAND TODDLER

Baby Riley underwent her first open heart surgery when she was just 2 weeks old.

Weighing 2.5kg and born with several serious heart defects, Riley was intubated while doctors waited for her to become stable enough for a life-saving operation. At 2 weeks, Riley underwent a gruelling 10-hour open heart surgery that required a donated heart valve.

Now aged 3, Riley is a thriving toddler and a proud big sister to Coralee.

**'That thought always crosses our mind – the donor and donor's family were thoughtful enough to donate and save lives. We will be forever grateful.'**

– Riley's Mum and Dad, Samara and Jeff Green



**Baby Thea was on the waitlist for a liver transplant**

# HOW TO REGISTER

If your patients want to be an organ and tissue donor at the end of their life, please encourage them to register and talk to their family about donation.

It's easy and quick to register. It takes just 3 taps to register on the Express Plus Medicare app, or just one minute at [donatelife.gov.au](https://donatelife.gov.au).

In South Australia, locals can also register via their driver licence. This currently isn't the case in other states and territories.

## WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

Everyone over the age of 16 can register to donate their organs and tissues.

It doesn't matter how old you are, or even if you think you're not healthy enough – you can still register.

## IT'S TIME TO CHECK

If many years have passed since you registered or if you're unsure, it's best to check you're registered.

Around 70% of Australians who have registered did so more than 15 years ago. The easiest way to check is through your Express Plus Medicare app.



**Kristy received a kidney transplant**



Australian Government  
Organ and Tissue Authority



DonateLife



Scan to download GP resources  
from the DonateLife website

**[DONATELIFE.GOV.AU/GP-RESOURCES](https://donatelife.gov.au/gp-resources)**