

# DonateLife Victoria 2023

Year in review



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## Acknowledgement of Country

DonateLife Victoria acknowledges Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to the land, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to their Elders past and present.

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Members of our nursing team



# Message from the General Manager



## It was another big year here at DonateLife Victoria (DLV) in 2023.

As we look back on the past twelve months, we are proud to share the impactful initiatives, milestones and collaborative efforts that have shaped our journey. Together with our network and partners we have achieved so much.

What we do isn't possible without our donation specialist staff and our colleagues in Intensive Care Units and Emergency Departments across the state. We also extend a heartfelt thanks to the Health Services in our network who continue to support our people and our work with donors and their families. Of course, we continue to be guided in our work by the Organ and Tissue Authority (OTA) and align our activities to the national program.

In addition to saving lives, which is always at the forefront of everything we do, some other highlights for the year include:

- ▶ Having the first Australian case of organ donation after Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) and developing a guideline to support this work.
- ▶ Launching an online hub for our nursing team to keep them informed of everything they need to do their important work.
- ▶ Rolling out phase two of our Professional Success Program, focusing on specific professional development pathways for the nursing team.

- ▶ Launching a Medical Donation Specialist (MDS) focused newsletter to keep our MDS cohort informed and connected.
- ▶ Working with our colleagues at Lifeblood to add an organ donor prompt on the Lifeblood app, expanding our reach to increase registrations on the Australian Organ Donor Register (AODR).
- ▶ Launching an Incident Management System to ensure incidents are recorded and managed accordingly.
- ▶ Launching the DLV Good to Great Award, recognising how an individual or group demonstrates our strategic goals and/or values in their work.

## 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're so grateful to everyone who said yes to organ 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 life-saving outcomes in 2023.

I'd also like to thank our wonderful team of volunteers who enthusiastically help us out at events such as The Melbourne Royal Show and the Service of Remembrance. They're such a valued part of our team.

Thank you all again and look forward to working with you in 2024.

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

**Tony Holland**  
General Manager  
DonateLife Victoria

# Our network



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



**74**

People in our Network



**20**

Agency staff



**4**

Medical Consultants  
on-call



**30**

Donation Specialist  
Nurses



**20**

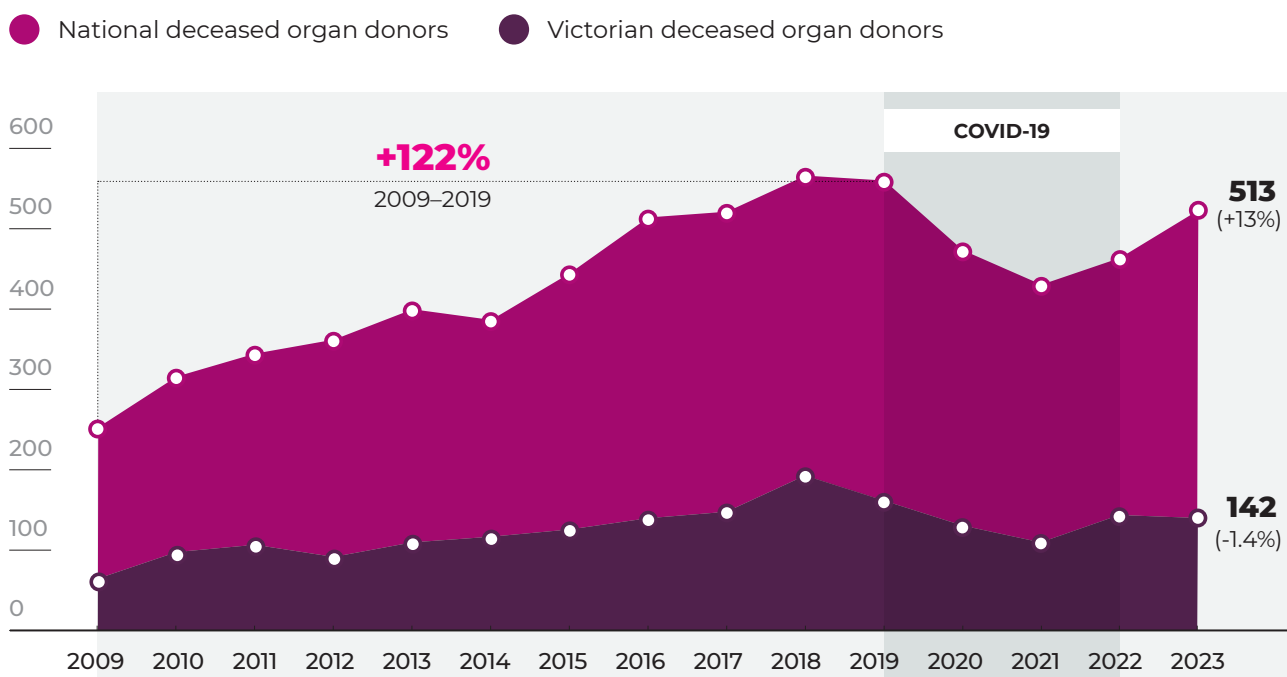
Medical Donation  
Specialists

Pictured above: members  
of our nursing team

# 2023 at a glance

	2023	2022	Difference
Deceased organ donors	<b>142</b>	144	-1.4%
Transplant recipients from Victorian donors	<b>361</b>	371	-2.7%
Routine referral	<b>90%</b>	88%	+2.3%
Collaborative requesting	<b>84%</b>	80%	+5.0%
Families consenting to donation	<b>54%</b>	52%	+3.8%
New registrations	<b>40,454</b>	47,554	-14.9%

Figure 1 / National and Victorian deceased organs donors (2009 – 2023)



# Highlights from 2023



## Our goals



### 1 Optimise organ donation outcomes

#### Key achievements

- ▶ 90% routine referral rate
- ▶ 24 education workshops delivered to Victorian Health Services, and four network meetings delivered to the DLV network
- ▶ 84% collaborative request rate



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

#### Key achievements

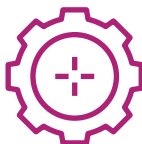
- ▶ Over 20 community events, including Melbourne Royal Show
- ▶ Prompt to register as an organ and tissue donor on Lifeblood app, Services Victoria app and on VicRoads licence renewal notices



### 3 Strengthen our culture of collaboration and excellence

#### Key achievements

- ▶ Phase two rollout of the Professional Success Program
- ▶ Establishment of the Good to Great Award to reward excellence and innovative thinking at DLV



### 4 Enhance systems and processes

#### Key achievements

- ▶ Launch of Nursing hub, a one-stop-shop for our nursing team to access important documents, updates and news
- ▶ Launch of our Incident Management System, allowing prompt response to clinical and non-clinical adverse events
- ▶ Generation of data dashboards to monitor movement, overtime and reasons for intended cases



## Australian-first organ donation after VAD in Victoria

Marlene Bevern was diagnosed with an aggressive form of Motor Neurone Disease and was given just months to live. She was steadfast in her wish to donate her organs to help others. Marlene became the first Australian to donate her organs after VAD. Through her generosity four people had their lives changed, receiving Marlene's lungs, liver and kidneys.

Behind the scenes our clinical team, Megan Plas, Larna Woodyatt, Dr Sam Radford and Dr Rohit D'Costa developed a VAD guideline to support this emerging area of organ donation. This was a significant project that had many ethical and legal considerations. We thank them for their hard work and dedication, to develop a thorough guide that will be used widely.

On Friday 22 September, the ABC ran a suite of stories across TV, radio and online sharing [Marlene's story](#).

## Increasing our community reach

We're grateful to Lifeblood, VicRoads and Services Victoria who collaborated with us to help increase our community reach this year.

In February, Services Victoria added a link to the Australian Organ Donor Register on their app. From September 2023 to January 2024, there were 449 registrations to become an organ donor via the app.

In May, a prompt about becoming an organ and tissue donor was added into the VicRoads licence renewal email and paper letter. From September 2023 to January 2024, there were 1901 new registrations thanks to these reminders.

We also teamed up with our colleagues at Lifeblood to add a registration link on the Lifeblood app, going live in October. The app is used over 30,000 times a month by blood donors, increasing our reach significantly across the country. From September 2023 to January 2024, there were 1610 registrations to become an organ donor via the Lifeblood app.

# Nursing update

## A word from our Nursing Services Manager

**Donation activity remained strong in Victoria particularly the second half of the year; October and November were standout months of high activity. Our nursing team worked tirelessly to facilitate donation for life-saving transplantation with passion, resilience, and determination. We're so grateful for the work our nursing team does every day.**



Our Clinical Nurse Managers, Justine, Nina and Megan

We ended the year with thirty Donation Specialist Nurses (DSNs) facilitating the statewide service.

Striving for excellence and improving the service has been a constant theme. The ongoing support and drive of the Clinical Nurse Managers – Justine Holloway, Megan Plas and Nina Seng, together with the Education Team, led by Madhu Raman, has been pivotal.

They ensure the Nursing Team are supported and provided with the required skills, knowledge and tools to successfully advocate for donation in the Health Services.

The key highlights for the year include:

- ▶ The utilisation of the Nursing hub providing a platform to streamline communication with the broader team and have key communication in one place.
- ▶ The Professional Success Program (PSP) progressing to phase two, focusing on specific professional development pathways for the nursing team.
- ▶ The leadership team and executive team began an audit/review of the Clinical Practice Improvement Program (CPIP). This allowed for a better understanding of the work the nursing team do and offered an opportunity to enhance the tool.
- ▶ Work on the Simulation Program by the Education Team continued in preparation for the roll out of simulation sessions in 2024.
- ▶ The introduction of an internal Incident Management System (IMS) provided us with better oversight of incidents and issues. We developed a clear process for follow up and closing the loop from a quality improvement perspective.
- ▶ Victoria became the first state in Australia to facilitate organ donation after VAD. We're immensely proud of the efforts Larna Woodyatt, Megan Plas, and our clinical team who have developed a comprehensive VAD guideline to support this work. Larna has gone on to present her experience and the work in forums nationally, generating great interest.

Thank you to all our colleagues and teams in the donation network, both locally and interstate for your support. Your continued commitment and collaboration ensure we can continue to transform lives through donation and transplantation.



**Toulia Saltas**  
**Nursing Services**  
**Manager**

*on behalf of the nursing leadership team*



# Medical update

## A word from our State Medical Directors

**Organ donation after Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) was a key focus for 2023, representing to us a clear confluence of principles of autonomy and giving.**

The legal and ethical considerations were examined with wide consultation, and a guideline covering relevant aspects of donation after VAD was created. This guideline includes the application process, eligibility requirements, legislative requirements and hospital requirements. It also contains information leaflets for; those considering organ donation after VAD and their families, health service and hospital staff, VAD clinicians, and retrieval and transplant teams. A very big thanks to Larna Woodyatt for taking the lead on this with expertise and passion.

Another one of our very own, Dr Forbes McGain, MDS at Western Health, was awarded a Medal (OAM) in the General Division for service to medicine. In the King's Birthday honours, Forbes was recognised for his dedication and service including being the co-inventor of the McMonty Medihood which helps protect healthcare workers from aerolised COVID-19 virus exposure. Congratulations Forbes on this very well-deserved honour.

We were also happy to launch a quarterly MDS specific newsletter. This compliments our face-to-face engagement activities with the MDS cohort to keep them informed and connected to all that's happening in the wider team at DLV.

In 2024 we'll be focusing on some key areas including:

- ▶ Organ Donation after VAD, particularly how this activity may be undertaken at local Health Services.
- ▶ Refinement of the Clinical Practice Improvement Program, including how best to share highlights and barriers experienced at particular services.
- ▶ DLV's Donation and Transplantation symposium, which will happen in September.
- ▶ Opportunities for MDS knowledge sharing including at National MDS workshops in Canberra.

We're lucky to have such a great team of medical professionals who continue to blaze the trail for organ donation and transplantation.



**Dr Rohit D'Costa**  
State Medical Director



**Dr Sam Radford**  
Deputy State Medical Director



Marketing and Communications Team – Phoebe, Nerissa and Liz



## Marketing and Communications highlights

**The Marketing and Communications team had a busy year, continuing to raise awareness in the Victorian community of the importance of registering to be an organ and tissue donor, and having the conversation with your family about your decision.**

Utilising large scale events, media and mixed format advertising, the team worked to deliver the national community messages. The team has also joined forces with their interstate communications colleagues to share and develop resources to benefit the national program.

### Media snapshot

Through proactive media we were able to share stories across a variety of channels. There were 31 print and online news articles published across several media outlets. In addition to this, there were also 16 radio spots and 12 TV interviews or segments. There were also two podcasts and three magazine articles.

Australia's first case of organ donation after Voluntary Assisted Dying was shared exclusively by the ABC across multiple national platforms, including ABC television, ABC online, and ABC radio.

We're grateful to all the donor families and transplant recipients, who so generously shared their stories to raise awareness about the importance of registering to be an organ donor.

### Community events snapshot

Supported by our fantastic team of volunteers we were able to have a presence at over 20 expos and community events, with a focus on engaging with people under the age of 25. This year also marked our fourth year at the Melbourne Royal Show.

In November we held our annual Service of Remembrance, to honour organ and tissue donors and their families. Around 200 people attended the service and afternoon tea. As always, the service was a moving experience for all.

# Education highlights

**In 2023, the Education team facilitated two training programs which provided education and support to five new DSNs joining the DLV team. We also welcomed three team members back from leave.**

Additionally, the team focused on providing ongoing education by delivering nursing study days and coordinating network meetings. The purpose of these is to provide a forum to collaborate, share experiences, enhance knowledge and practice vital skills needed to perform the various roles required in this sector.

The team continued to coordinate the delivery of statewide donation education workshops to both regional and metropolitan Victorian Health Services. In, 2023 the team delivered 24 workshops across the state. This includes clinical workshops, reaching over 330 health professionals, plus university presentations.

For the first time, the team had the opportunity to collaborate and provide educational resources to interpreter services and Ambulance Victoria. Along with establishing these resources, the team have progressed their work in the build of a high-fidelity simulation course, which will go live in early 2024.



# 24

workshops delivered across the state



# 330

health professionals reached

Below: Education Team, Jess, Madhu, Monique and Indra



# The people on the ground



**Dr Jane Lewis is a Medical Donation Specialist at Austin Health**

## Why do you do this job?

This job is ultimately about supporting patients and their families. It is humbling to witness families who are so passionate about their loved ones ability to provide this gift and save other lives in the midst of immense grief for them. This act of giving and being allowed to observe and support them is such an honour.

## What do you love about it?

The ability of the families, medical and nursing teams to come together to honour these patients gifts is truly humbling and makes our job so meaningful.

It's so important to coordinate all the different teams to share this gift with others and save their lives. I get to be a cog in the wheel behind the scenes to provide support, education, and knowledge to so many within Austin Health.

## What's your highlight from 2023?

I am so very proud of our work here at Austin Health; working with amazing DSNs who support our staff and our families as well as the hospital working together in every way possible to ensure our patients can provide this gift at a time that is the most supportive and meaningful for their families.



**Andrew Young is a Donation Specialist Nurse at Eastern Health**

## Why do you do this job?

The role I have suits me perfectly. I am fortunate to work on a part time basis with such a supportive team. The role is both very autonomous but very team based at the same time. I really enjoy the collegial work with the other DSNs and the wider DLV, Eastern and hospital networks. I do the role because I want to help explore all donation possibilities, so all families can know with certainty that donation has been 100% fully considered.

## What do you love about it?

The variety of the role is wide, and no two days are ever the same. In the morning, I might be working on policy documents and in the afternoon could be meeting with a family of a patient who is at end-of-life care. I enjoy the challenge (and responsibility) that comes with the role. To meet with a family and give them information on donation is very rewarding on a personal and professional level.

## What's your highlight from 2023?

Knowing that the work we do is making a difference, to following the wishes of people who put their name on the AODR, to donor families and the wider community. While not a highlight as such, I think the DSN role is brilliant, and I couldn't think of doing anything else.



**Bridget Walters is a Donation Specialist Nurse at Northern Health**

**Why do you do this job?**

As a junior ICU nurse, I had the privilege of caring for patients at end-of-life and their families who had consented for organ and tissue donation. I was fortunate enough to be mentored by the Northern DSN when I was the organ and tissue donation nurse champion learning different aspects of the role.

Now that I'm in the DSN role, I thoroughly enjoy continuing to positively impact staff and provide compassionate, empathetic care to families during the donation journey.

**What do you love about it?**

My job is a unique and privileged role that allows me to meet with families and learn what is important to them and their loved one. It's very humbling to sit with a family and learn about their loved one, whilst they're feeling such grief. Yet they find it within themselves to consent to donation, providing the ultimate gift of life to another.

I enjoy working as part of the Northern team which care holistically for the Northern community – as well as the DonateLife Victoria team who have supported me since I started in the role a few years ago.

**What are your highlights from 2023?**

I'm really proud of the work and continual awareness the Northern Donation team have achieved at Northern Health in 2023. Through education and study days within the hospital, we have maintained 100% for AODR checking before having a conversation with a potential donor's family.



My job is a unique and privileged role that allows me to meet with families and learn what is important to them and their loved one. It's very humbling to sit with a family and learn about their loved one, whilst they're feeling such grief. Yet they find it within themselves to consent to donation, providing the ultimate gift of life to another.



We've also improved from 63% to 93% in our collaborative family donation conversations. I was fortunate to present at the Northern Health's organisation wide forum during DonateLife Week and for Thank You Day with 270 staff attending. Since these presentations, staff members have told me that they went home and had conversations with their families and registered on the AODR.

There has also been further collaboration established with the wider hospital teams such as the Transcultural and Language Services team and Spiritual Care Coordinators. This supports our culturally diverse community in the Northern catchment when offering organ and tissue donation.

## A recipient story

# The life-saving gift

**Liver recipient, Jessica Chappell waited a long time to get the call that saved her life. She shared her story with us.**

As a new mum, Jessica expected to feel tired and depleted after the birth of her daughter Meadow in 2010. She thought nothing of it until she wound up in hospital months later, diagnosed with the life-threatening condition autoimmune hepatitis.

“When the doctors explained the condition to me, they likened it to your body setting itself on fire. At that time, I knew there was something deeply wrong with my health. Jessica said. “They explained that it was a really rare condition that was triggered by childbirth. It was so overwhelming – not only for me, but my husband and family as well.”

What followed was a difficult 12 years for Jessica and her family after the diagnosis. Numerous medications and repeated hospital visits left Jessica unsure if she would make it, leading her to record videos for Meadow for the milestones she thought she wouldn't be around to celebrate with her.

Jessica's health remained poor but stable, but by the beginning of the COVID pandemic, she was told she'd need a liver transplant to survive. “Imagine the fear associated with waiting to be told there is a liver available for you” Jessica recalls. Thankfully, Jessica received the call she'd be waiting for, a suitable donor was found, and she would get a liver transplant.

Through the generosity of her donor and their family, Jessica has her life back and she's so grateful.

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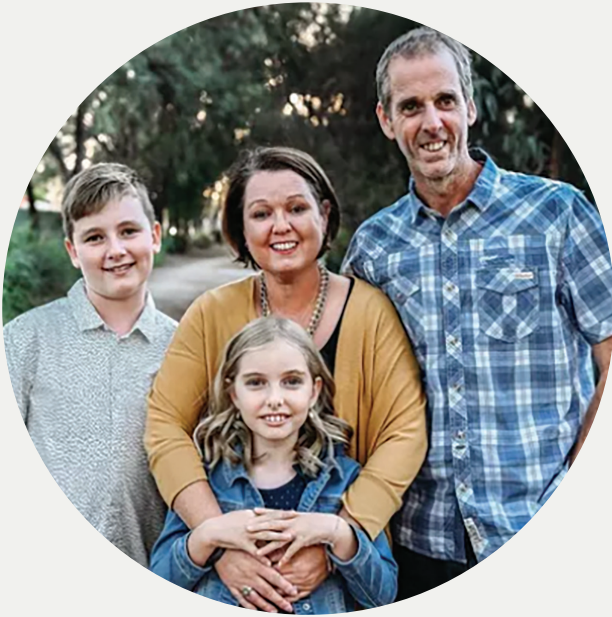
Now I talk about organ donation as much as I can, in honour of that person who gave me their liver. Because of them I can see my daughter grow. It's not just life-changing for me either. It is also for my husband who's now not a single parent. For my daughter to have a mother. For my mum and dad to not have to bury their child. And for my twin sister not to have lost her twin. On so many levels, it is a gift.

”



## A donor family story

# The opportunity to give



Laura Benham, middle, donor, with husband Travis, and children Wil and Audrey.

**A donor and their family had generously given Laura a chance, and now Laura's family would do the same. We spoke with Kerri Daw, DonateLife Victoria volunteer, and mother of Laura Benham who became an organ donor.**

Laura was a generous and kind-hearted person, always positive, and saw the best in everyone. She always said she lived in the best village, and that village smothered her in love. Laura's family meant everything to her. She was a devoted mother to two beautiful children, wife to a loving husband, an adored sister, and our beloved daughter, who we cherished.

She was a dedicated and passionate teacher who was adored at school, by her students and her colleagues. She treated the children like they were her own. Every child received a handwritten letter from Laura, letting them know how proud she was of them. If anyone was in need, she was there to help them. If someone was having a bad day, she had a little box of goodies that she would go to, to make up a little present. She would drop it to their door with an anonymous note to make them feel better.

Those who knew Laura admired her unwavering sense of positivity. It was an extraordinary quality, especially in the face of an aggressive and incurable lung condition, which would ultimately see her waitlisted for a lung transplant. Laura's illness took her down a path she, nor any of us, ever expected.



**It was a difficult time, but in her usual way, Laura faced each day with optimism and an enormous smile.**



A year after she was waitlisted, Laura received that special call. Her lung transplant was going ahead. Sadly, due to complications, Laura lost her battle. She became a recipient and a donor within a few days. As a family, we were heartbroken and shocked. Laura was a registered organ donor for a long time before her diagnosis. We had already made our decisions earlier in our life that if something happened to any of us, we wanted to be organ donors, so it wasn't a difficult decision for us to make.

Together we discussed donating Laura's organs. A donor and their family had generously given Laura a chance, and we wanted to do the same. It's what Laura would have wanted. It's devastating that it wasn't her time. However, we are forever grateful that another family gave Laura a chance – and that Laura was able to pass that chance onto several other people also.

It's an incredible feeling to know that so many people thought so much of our daughter. It's a privilege to know that she was so loved. I also know Laura would be extremely pleased, looking down, knowing she has helped other people.



## Contacts

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Some members of our DLV Agency Team

