

Organ and Tissue Donation in Ontario



Trillium Gift of Life Network

Trillium Gift of Life Network is a not-for-profit agency of the Government of Ontario and is responsible for planning, promoting, coordinating and supporting organ and tissue donation across Ontario and improving the system so that more lives can be saved.

The challenge for Trillium Gift of Life Network (TGLN) is to significantly increase organ and tissue donation across the province and improve related processes and functions.

Trillium Gift of Life Network is mandated with the responsibility to manage all aspects of the organ and tissue donation system in Ontario. Progress to improve the system has been made in many areas, such as healthcare awareness and education efforts that have produced increases in referrals of deceased donors in neurosurgical/trauma hospitals and community hospitals, as well as increases in tissue donation referrals.

The organizations mandate also includes the following:

- Coordinate and support the work of designated facilities in connection with organ and tissue donation and transplant
- Manage the procurement, distribution and delivery of organs and tissue
- Establish and manage waiting lists for organs and tissue in addition to establishing and managing a system of fair allocation
- Make reasonable efforts to ensure that patients and their families have appropriate information and opportunities to consider whether to consent to the donation of organs and tissue and facilitate the provision of that information
- Provide education to the public and to the healthcare community about organ and tissue donation and facilitate the provision of such education by others

Organ and Tissue Donation in Ontario

Organ and tissue donation is a critical component of Ontario's healthcare system. Not only does it help to dramatically improve the quality of life of thousands of Ontarians each year, it also saves hundreds of lives each year. In fact, donations from one individual can help dozens of others. As our population steadily ages, organ and tissue donation will become increasingly important as organ transplantation is often the only treatment for organ failure, the risk of which increases as chronic diseases take their toll in people of advancing age.

However, despite the compelling case for organ and tissue donation, and Ontarians' almost unanimous approval of the practice, the province's donation rates remain low.

Why? In part because many individuals who support donation have not signed donor cards and/or have not shared their decision to donate with their families. In the event of an individual's death, hospital staff will talk to the family about their feelings regarding donation and what their loved one would want, even if that individual has signed a donor card.

It is difficult for families who are grieving to make a decision about donating a loved one's organs and/or tissue if they are not aware of their loved one's wishes.

An Ongoing Concern

In Ontario, the need for organ and tissue donation consistently outweighs the availability. Currently there are over 1650 men, women and children in Ontario waiting for life-saving or life-enhancing organ transplants. Some of these individuals will die before suitable donors are found.

It is interesting to note that almost nine in 10 Ontarians (87 per cent) report they would be willing to accept an organ or tissue transplant.¹ However, fewer than half (49 per cent) of Ontarians say they have signed a donor card.²

Fewer still have spoken with their families about their wishes to help ensure their wishes will be respected at the time of death. These gaps need to be bridged.

Ontario A World Leader in Transplant Milestones

Ontario is an international leader and recognized pioneer in the field of transplantation. Its strong history in transplant-related research and patient care is supported by a series of "world first" milestones.

| | | |
|------|---|---------------------|
| 1956 | World's first heart valve transplants | Toronto |
| 1983 | World's first successful lung transplant | Toronto |
| 1986 | World's first successful double lung transplant | Toronto |
| 1988 | World's first successful liver-bowel transplant | London ³ |
| 1997 | World's youngest multi-organ recipient | London |

¹ *Decima Research. Ontario Attitudes Regarding Organ Donation. 2000.*

² *Trillium Gift of Life Network. 2003.*

³ *Health Canada. 2003.*

Facts on Organ and Tissue Donation

- Everyone is a potential organ and tissue donor, regardless of his/her age. The oldest Canadian organ donor was over 90 years of age while the oldest tissue donor was 102 years old.
- Ultimately the ability to become an organ and tissue donor depends on several factors including the potential donor's medical condition at the time of death.

- Recovery of organs and tissue is carried out with respect and dignity. It does not interfere with funeral practices and no one will know about your gift of life unless your family tells them.
- Organs and tissue that can be donated after death include the heart, liver, kidneys, pancreas, lungs, corneas, heart valves, bone and skin.
- Most major religions support organ and tissue donation. If your religion restricts the use of a body after death, consult your religious leader. Restrictions may not apply if the donation could save another life.
- Studies show that donating the organs and tissue of a loved one who has died can provide immediate comfort and long-lasting consolation to family members in their grieving.
- Once you decide to become a potential organ and tissue donor, the most important way to make your wishes known is by *talking to your family* so they can understand, support and respect your wishes in the future.
- You can also register as an organ and tissue donor with OHIP. Visit your local OHIP office or download an Organ and Tissue Donation Form at: www.giftoflife.on.ca
- One person in Ontario dies every three days waiting for an organ transplant.

Statistics on Organ Donors and Waiting Lists

Organ Donor 10-Year History

| Year | Actual Ontario Donors | Out of Province Donors | Living Donors | Total |
|-------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| 2007 | 200 | 67 | 264 | 531 |
| 2006 | 172 | 99 | 274 | 545 |
| 2005 | 148 | 72 | 249 | 469 |
| 2004 | 153 | 64 | 210 | 427 |
| 2003 | 143 | 71 | 194 | 408 |
| 2002 | 137 | 76 | 191 | 404 |
| 2001 | 128 | 78 | 193 | 399 |
| 2000 | 166 | 55 | 183 | 404 |
| 1999 | 133 | 62 | 156 | 351 |
| 1998 | 152 | 64 | 156 | 372 |
| 1997 | 151 | 63 | 132 | 346 |

Year to Date figures can be found at www.giftoflife.on.ca

Waiting List 10-Year History

| Date | Kidney | Kidney Pancreas | Pancreas only | Liver | Heart | Lung | Heart Lung | Total |
|-------------|---------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| 2007 | 1155 | 45 | 23 | 357 | 39 | 54 | 3 | 1676 |
| 2006 | 1142 | 52 | 30 | 428 | 32 | 58 | 3 | 1745 |
| 2005 | 1236 | 37 | 17 | 355 | 33 | 42 | 0 | 1720 |
| 2004 | 1288 | 44 | 15 | 412 | 48 | 44 | 5 | 1857 |
| 2003 | 1438 | 46 | 5 | 347 | 40 | 43 | 4 | 1913 |
| 2002 | 1456 | 41 | 2 | 309 | 47 | 34 | 5 | 1892 |
| 2001 | 1367 | 45 | – | 264 | 58 | 28 | 4 | 1766 |
| 2000 | 1324 | 34 | – | 224 | 34 | 31 | 3 | 1650 |
| 1999 | 1106 | 28 | – | 229 | 40 | 54 | 4 | 1461 |
| 1998 | 1067 | 25 | – | 207 | 54 | 47 | 8 | 1408 |
| 1997 | 1030 | 19 | – | 146 | 36 | 33 | 7 | 1271 |

Year to Date figures can be found at www.giftoflife.on.ca .

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Making Your Wishes Known

There are two steps to indicating your wishes to be an organ and tissue donor:

Talk to your loved ones about your decision so they can understand, support and respect your wishes in the future. It is important they know about your intentions, as they will be asked to give final consent to your organ/tissue donation in the event of your death.

Register as an organ and tissue donor with OHIP. You can register your intentions through OHIP's donor registry. Information is held in a central information bank and coded into health cards. OHIP Organ and Tissue Donation Forms can be obtained by visiting your local OHIP office or by downloading from the TGLN website (www.giftoflife.on.ca).

For more information contact:

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