



Organ Donation & Transplantation

A Special Report from
State Senator Velmanette Montgomery



State Senator

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Dear Friend:

Did you know that more than 85,000 people nationwide, including many thousands of New Yorkers, are waiting for organ transplants? Or that tens of thousands more are waiting for tissue transplants? Indeed, 16 to 17 people die every day in this country while waiting for a transplant of a vital organ, such as a heart, kidney, pancreas or lung.

Organ and tissue transplantation has saved or enhanced the lives of thousands of men, women and children nationwide. According to the New York State Department of Health, one person who donates his or her organs (heart, lungs, liver, kidney, pancreas and intestines) can save up to eight lives, while a tissue donor (cornea, bone, skin, heart valve, tendons, veins) can significantly improve 12 or more lives by restoring eyesight, helping to fight infections in burn patients, and preventing the loss of arms and legs.

Each year in New York State, more than 1,000 kidneys, livers and hearts are transplanted thanks to hundreds of donors. However, with many thousands of New Yorkers still on waiting lists, the need for organ donations greatly outnumbers availability.

In addition to containing valuable information surrounding organ and tissue donation procedures in New York State, this brochure lists statewide and national organizational resources available to those interested in participating in the donation of organs and tissues.

In light of the growing shortages that exist in the supplies of organs and tissues available for transplantation, please consider giving someone this "Gift of Life."

I hope that this information is helpful, and clarifies many of the issues surrounding organ and tissue donation. As always, please feel free to contact my office with any questions or concerns, or if I can be of further assistance to you.

Sincerely,

Velmanette Montgomery
Senator Velmanette Montgomery

18th Senatorial District



Frequently Asked Questions about

What is Organ Donation and Transplantation?

Organ and tissues from one human being (*the donor*) are put into another person's body (*the recipient*).

Why are organs and tissues needed?

There currently is a critical shortage of organs and tissues for transplantation. In addition to those New Yorkers awaiting organ transplants, thousands of others await tissue donations for lifesaving transplants, as in the case of burn and cancer patients. Without these surgeries, many will die or remain permanently disabled.

Why do we need an Organ and Tissue Donor Registry?

In New York State, family consent is required for organ and tissue donation. The New York State Organ and Tissue Donor Registry will ensure that an individual's wishes to become a donor upon his or her death will be honored by family members and health care providers.

How do I enroll in New York's Organ and Tissue Donor Registry?

You will be enrolled automatically if you check the donor box on your driver license or non-driver identification (*ID*) card application or renewal form. You can also enroll through the State Health Department's web site at www.health.state.ny.us.

Who can become a donor?

Anyone can indicate their intent to donate. A person's medical history or age does not automatically exclude him or her from becoming a donor. Medical suitability for donation is determined at the time of death.

What happens when I say "yes" to enrollment?

Enrollment in the Donor Registry declares your intent to donate your organs and tissues after your death. In the event of your death, the local organ procurement organization or tissue bank will inform your family of your decision. Your family will still have to give consent, so it is important to tell them about your wishes to become a donor. You may also want to tell your family health care provider, lawyer, and your religious leader that you wish to be a donor.

If I enroll in the Donor Registry, will it affect the quality of medical care I receive at the hospital?

No! Every effort is made to save your life before donation is considered. A transplant team does not become involved with the patient until doctors have determined that all possible efforts to save the patient's life have failed.

What can be donated?

- ◆ **Organs:** heart, kidneys, pancreas, lungs, liver, and intestines
- ◆ **Tissue:** cornea, skin, bone marrow, heart valves, and connective tissue
- ◆ **Bone Marrow**

Does the donor's family have to pay for the cost of organ donation?

No. The donor's family neither pays for, nor receives payment for, organ and tissue donation. The transplant recipient's health insurance policy (or Medicare or Medicaid) usually covers the cost of transplant.

Out Organ Donation & Transplantation



Does organ donation disfigure your body or prohibit an open casket funeral?

No. Donation does not change the appearance of the body. Organs are removed surgically in a routine operation. It does not interfere with having a funeral, including open casket services.

If I enroll in the Donor Registry, should I still sign the back of my driver license or non-driver ID card?

Yes. This will help to ensure that your wishes are carried out.

Can I change my mind after I enroll?

Yes. If you decide to you do not want to become an organ or tissue donor and you want your name removed from the Donor Registry, write to:

**New York State Organ
and Tissue Donor Registry**
New York State
Department of Health
Bureau of Standards Development
433 River Street
Hedley Park Place, 6th Floor
Troy, New York 12180

Why should minorities be particularly concerned about organ donation?

Members of minority groups (*African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian and Pacific Islanders*) suffer from more diseases—like diabetes, kidney disease, and high blood pressure—that can lead to organ failure. Finding organ donors can be challenging for minorities. Members of different racial and ethnic groups are usually more genetically similar and more likely to find organ donors within their own ethnic groups. For example, the most likely match for a kidney transplant is between a donor and patient of similar ancestry. Consequently, a shortage of organs donated by minorities can contribute to death and longer waiting periods for transplants for minorities.

What is the process for receiving an organ for transplantation?

- ◆ If you need an organ transplant, your health care provider will help you get on the national waiting list.
- ◆ To get on the waiting list, you need to visit a transplant hospital. Every transplant hospital is a member of UNOS. You can find a transplant hospital by using the hospital member directory at www.unos.org/members/search.asp
- ◆ Your name will be added to a pool of names. When an organ donor becomes available, all the patients in the pool are compared to that donor. Blood type, tissue type, organ size, medical urgency, time already spent on the waiting list, and distance between donor and recipient, are main factors considered. The organ is offered first to the candidate who is the best match. The organs are distributed locally first, and if no match is found, they are offered regionally and then nationally until a recipient is found.

How many people are currently waiting for each organ to become available so they can have a transplant?

The number of people requiring a life-saving transplant continues to rise faster than the number of donors. Approximately 300 new transplant candidates are added to the waiting list each month. For the number of patients now on the waiting list, please go to the **Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network** web site at www.optn.org



Further information about organ and tissue donation procedures in New York State may be obtained by contacting the following organizations:

- ◆ Albany-Center for Donation & Transplant (518) 262-5606 or 1-800-256-7811
- ◆ Buffalo-Upstate New York Transplant Services (716) 853-6667 or 1-800-256-7811
- ◆ Rochester/Syracuse-Finger Lakes Donor Recovery Network (585) 272-4930 or 1-800-810-5494
- ◆ New York City Metro Area-New York Organ Donor Network (646) 291-4444 or 1-800-443-8469
- ◆ Statewide-The New York State Organ and Tissue Donor Registry 1-866 NYDONOR (1-866-693-6667)
- ◆ Or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/donor/main.htm



The following national organizations also serve as excellent resources about organ donation and transplantation:

- ◆ **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary's Organ Donation Initiative**
Internet Address: www.organdonor.gov
- ◆ **American Kidney Fund**
Phone Number: 1-800-638-8299
Internet Address: www.akfinc.org
- ◆ **Office of Minority Health, Office of the Secretary**
Phone Number: 1-800-444-6472
Internet Address: www.omhrc.gov
- ◆ **American Lung Association**
Phone Number: 1-800-586-4872
Internet Address: www.lungusa.org
- ◆ **The National Women's Health Info. Center (NWHIC)**
Phone Number: 1-800-994-WOMAN (9662)
Internet Address: www.4woman.gov
- ◆ **American Organ Transplant Association**
Phone Number: 1-800-373-1646
Internet Address: www.a-o-t-a.org
- ◆ **American Heart Association**
Phone Number: 1-800-242-8721
Internet Address: www.americanheart.org
- ◆ **Coalition on Donation**
Phone Number: 1-800-355-SHARE (7427)
Internet Address: www.shareyourlife.org or www.donatelife.net
- ◆ **American Liver Foundation**
Phone Number: 1-800-465-4837
Internet Address: www.liverfoundation.org

****This brochure was compiled by utilizing information from the New York State Department of Health, The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and an array of private organizations, many of which are listed here as resources.****