

Patient & Family Guide  
2021

# Organ and Tissue Donation



Aussi disponible en français :  
*Don d'organes et de tissus* (FF85-2218)



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# Organ and Tissue Donation

Health care providers want to be sure that the families of all patients who may be eligible are offered the option of organ and tissue donation.

Organ and tissue donation can improve or save the lives of many people. A single organ donor can save up to 8 lives. Eye and tissue donors can improve the lives of up to 75 people.

## Who can donate organs or tissues?

**Every person is a possible donor.**

- There is no age limit for organ donation.
- Tissue donors must be 70 years old or younger.

Organs and tissues are checked for eligibility just before a person's death. Just like when you donate blood, organ and tissue donors are medically screened to make sure the organs and tissues are safe for transplant recipients.

Most major religions support the donation of organs and tissues for transplant, or respect a person's choice to donate or receive organs and tissues. Most religions see organ and tissue donation as a charitable act of love and giving. Please talk with your spiritual or religious leader if you have any questions or concerns.

It is important that you:

- **Decide** about donating your organs and tissues.
- **Discuss (talk about) your decision** with those closest to you so they can support your choices.
- **Register** your decision.

## How do I register my decision?

You can choose which organs and tissues you want or do not want to donate. You can register your decision to donate or not to donate (opt out):

- By mail when you renew your provincial health card.
- By calling MSI at:
  - › Phone: 902-496-7008
  - › Phone (toll-free): 1-800-563-8880
- Online at:
  - › [www.novascotia.ca/organ-tissue-donation](http://www.novascotia.ca/organ-tissue-donation)

Donors who decide to donate all of their organs and tissues are classified as “Donor 1” on their health card.

Donors who decide to donate only certain organs and tissues are classified as “Donor 2”.

## **What if I do not register my decision?**

If you have not registered a decision and you are eligible, you will be seen as having consented to donating your organs and tissues after death. This is called “deemed consent”.

Deemed consent does not apply to:

- › People under 19 years old
- › People without decision-making capacity (not able to make an informed decision for themselves)
- › People who have lived in Nova Scotia for less than 12 months (1 year)
- › Canadian Armed Forces and RCMP members and their families who are posted to Nova Scotia

## **Who can access my decision?**

The Legacy of Life Program and Regional Tissue Bank staff can access your registered decision.

**Your family will be asked to confirm your choices for organ and tissue donation, so it is important that you tell them your decision.**

Health care providers will care for you and your family no matter what decision you have made.

## **What organs and tissues can be donated?**

The following organs can be donated:

**Kidneys:** The kidneys clean the blood and control the amount of water in your body.

**Pancreas:** The pancreas makes insulin (a hormone).

**Heart:** This muscle pumps blood through your body.

**Liver:** This organ removes harmful substances from your blood.

**Lungs:** These are the breathing organs in your chest.

**Small bowel:** This organ connects your stomach to your large bowel. It absorbs (takes in) nutrients from the food you eat.

When these organs are transplanted, they can improve and sometimes save the lives of many people whose own organs do not work properly.

The following tissues can be donated:

**Cornea:** This tissue covers the front of your eye. It looks like a contact lens. The cornea protects your eye from germs and dust, and lets light enter. Cornea transplants restore vision and relieve pain.

**Sclera:** This is the white part of the eye. It is used to treat cancers, eye diseases, and trauma to the eye.

**Skin:** Our skin protects us from germs and gets rid of waste through sweat. It also helps to keep us warm. Skin grafts are used to treat burn patients, and can be life-saving.

**Bones:** These hard, strong tissues make up your skeleton. Bones are used in many different types of surgeries, such as fracture repairs, spinal surgery, and removal/repair of tumours.

**Tendons:** This tissue is used to repair many types of injuries.

**Heart valves:** The heart valves control the flow of blood in and out of your heart. They are commonly transplanted into people with heart defects or infection and can be life-saving.

The Regional Tissue Bank manages tissue donations and provides tissue for transplants. Please contact the Regional Tissue Bank (see page 8) if you have questions about tissue donation.

## **Transplantation**

Transplantation is the only treatment option for many people.

Since 1969, more than 4,700 Atlantic Canadians have received life-saving organ transplants. Thousands more have received life-saving tissue transplants. In Atlantic Canada, many people are waiting for organ and tissue transplants.

The recovery of organs and tissues is done in an operating room with the same standards and respect that are used in other surgeries. There is no impact on funeral arrangements or on the ability to have an open casket. There are no costs to your family in relation to donation.

## **Who will receive my organs and/or tissues?**

The donation of organs and tissues is anonymous. The donor's family will not know the identity of the recipients. The recipients of the organs and tissues will not know the identity of the donor.

Donors cannot choose who will receive their organs and tissues when they die. The only donor who can designate a recipient is a live donor providing a kidney through the Living Donation Kidney Donation Program. Please contact the Program for more information (see page 8).

Organ or tissue donor families and transplant recipients may wish to contact each other by anonymous letters or cards. This can be done with the help of the Legacy of Life Program, the Regional Tissue Bank, and the Multi-Organ Transplant Program.

For more information:

- Organ donor families
  - › contact the Family Support Liaison.
- Tissue donor families
  - › contact the Regional Tissue Bank.
- Recipients
  - › contact the Multi-Organ Transplant Program.

For organ donations and transplants that take place in Nova Scotia after January 18, 2021, some donor families and transplant recipients may be eligible to contact each other directly. This direct contact is voluntary and can happen only if the donor family and the recipient meet specific criteria. Contact may only happen at least 1 year after the transplant. Please contact the Family Support Liaison for more information (see page 8).



## **For more information:**

### **Legacy of Life Organ Donation Program**

- › Phone: 902-473-5523
- › Phone (toll-free): 1-877-841-3929
- › Email: [LegacyofLife@nshealth.ca](mailto:LegacyofLife@nshealth.ca)
- › [www.nshealth.ca/legacy-life](http://www.nshealth.ca/legacy-life)

### **Family Support Liaison**

- › Phone: 902-718-9124
- › Email: [DonorFamilySupport@nshealth.ca](mailto:DonorFamilySupport@nshealth.ca)

### **Regional Tissue Bank**

- › Phone: 902-473-4171
- › Phone (toll-free): 1-800-314-6515
- › [www.cdha.nshealth.ca/regional-tissue-bank](http://www.cdha.nshealth.ca/regional-tissue-bank)

### **Living Kidney Donor Program**

- › Phone: 902-473-5501

### **The Multi-Organ Transplant Program**

- › Phone: 902-473-6193
- › [www.cdha.nshealth.ca/multi-organ-transplant-program/contact](http://www.cdha.nshealth.ca/multi-organ-transplant-program/contact)



### **Looking for more health information?**

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Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.