Patient & Family Guide

Organ and Tissue Donation

www.nshealth.ca
Organ and Tissue Donation

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

If you are interested in being a donor you may indicate your wishes to be an organ and tissue donor on your Nova Scotia Health Card. Whether you use your health card or not it’s important that you talk to your family about your wishes. If a person is an eligible donor, their family will be asked to give consent for donation.

Many families may find that donation is a source of comfort through their grieving process. If you are asked to make a decision on behalf of a loved one, health care providers will support you no matter what decision you make.
The recovery of organs and tissue 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 the family in relation to donation.

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

**Transplantation**

Transplantation is the only treatment option for many people.

More than 3,500 Atlantic Canadians have received life-saving organ transplants since 1969. Thousands more have received life-enhancing and life-saving tissue transplants. In Atlantic Canada, many people are waiting for organ and tissue transplants.
Organs that are donated in Atlantic Canada are transplanted into recipients from Atlantic Canada, unless there is a life or death situation somewhere else in the country. In those cases, and when there are no local recipients, organs may be sent to other areas of Canada. Organs are only sent to the United States if there are no Canadian recipients.

Donated tissue is made into life-enhancing and life-saving grafts which may be stored for future use. Tissue grafts donated in Atlantic Canada are used mostly in hospitals throughout Atlantic Canada to improve quality of life for thousands of people.
Can I donate an organ or tissue?

Every person is a potential donor.

Organs and tissues are checked for eligibility at the time of a person’s death. Organ and tissue donation is voluntary. Please make sure your wishes are known. Organ and tissue donation is a generous gift – one organ and tissue donor can help and save up to 80 lives.

The following organs can be donated:

**Kidneys:** They make urine (pee).

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

**Heart:** This muscular organ pumps blood throughout your body.

**Liver:** This organ removes harmful substances from the bloodstream.

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

**Small bowel:** This organ connects the stomach to the large bowel. It absorbs nutrients from the food we eat.

When these organs are transplanted, they can improve and sometimes save the lives of many people whose own organs are not working properly.
The following tissues can be donated:

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

**Sclera:** This tissue 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 wastes 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 our 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.