



## Foreword

Organ donation and transplant rates have not progressed as we had hoped. In the years following the pandemic, we saw stepwise improvements in both the number of organ donors and life-saving transplants, however, this trend did not continue last year. Instead, the number of deceased donors fell by 7%, and the number of patients receiving a transplant declined by 2%. As a result, more people than ever are waiting for an organ transplant. At the end of March 2025, 8,096 patients were waiting for a transplant, the highest number on record.

With less than one per cent of people in the UK dying in the circumstances which allow for organ donation, it is vital we maximise every opportunity for donation. We also need to achieve a societal shift in support for organ donation, with more people agreeing to donate their organs after death.

Overall consent/authorisation has remained static at 59% across the UK, halting the post-COVID decline. Deemed consent/authorisation last year fell to 48%, with more than half of families declining support for donation. Expressed consent/authorisation dropped to 87%, with 173 families overruling their loved one's decision to be a donor (30 donors after brain death, 143 donors after circulatory death).

We know that families are much more likely to support donation when the individual's positive decision is known beforehand. Declaring your decision by signing the NHS Organ Donor Register and discussing your end-of-life decision with those closest to you will ease the burden families face and make it more likely that they will support your decision to be a donor. It is essential they know and support your choice. That's why we need to actively simplify how we talk about organ donation. People need to think about it, talk to their families, and sign up. Most importantly, they need to understand the process and feel confident saying yes when the time comes.

Since the change in organ donation legislation, opt-in registrations on the NHS Organ Donation Register have steadily increased to more than 28 million people in the UK (42% of the population), which is encouraging and shows that the organ donation message is clearly making its way into people's conscious. However, there has also been a slight increase in the number of people choosing to opt out, but that percentage remains small in comparison, at just 2.7 million people (4% of the population). Deemed consent was not introduced as a replacement for expressed consent. Many people still want to record their donation decision on the NHS Organ Donor Register and families value this confirmation allowing them to more readily support donation and making the process a lot easier at an already very difficult time.

Within UK intensive care units and emergency departments the referral of potential donors remains strong, with a 94% referral rate and Specialist Nurses in Organ Donation continue to play a vital role, being present in 92% of approaches made to donor families. There has also been a decrease of 12% in donors after brain death and a decrease of 2% in donors after circulatory death compared with last year. We understand the potential donor pool has changed massively over the years and is increasingly more challenging in terms of the type and quality of organs that are donated. The reasons for this range from the increased number of donors with existing co-morbidities to the reduction in the number of deaths in intensive care who are potential donors.

Kidneys are the most needed organ for transplant, with those waiting for a kidney transplant making up more than two-thirds of the waiting list. Last year, transplants from living kidney donors increased by 6% to 964, representing 29% of the total kidney transplant programme. However, kidney transplants from deceased donors fell by 5%. Lung transplants increased by 8% to 151, nearing pre-pandemic levels and representing the highest number of lung transplants performed in the UK since 2019-2020. This reflects sustained efforts by the lung transplant community.



Following the implementation of the organ utilisation report recommendations (Honouring the gift of life) organ utilisation is at an all-time high, but having said that, sadly, 436 patients died waiting for an organ transplant last year, while a further 911 patients were removed from the transplant list - mostly because of deteriorating health and ineligibility for transplant. Many of these patients are likely to have died shortly afterwards.

Despite a 3% decrease in the number of people donating to NHSBT Eye Banks, the number of cornea transplants increased by 11% offering the gift of sight to thousands of people in the UK.

We've already laid out our plans to help shape the NHS 10-Year Health Plan for England, and we're determined to return organ donation and transplantation right across the UK to pre-pandemic levels and then increase from there. We recognise that to truly reduce the transplant waiting list, we need to take action across the donation and transplantation pathway in all corners of the UK. These actions won't just save lives and reduce health inequalities; they could also deliver up to £2.6 billion in economic benefits over the next decade by lowering the long-term cost of care for patients on the waiting list.

There's no doubt that organ donation and transplantation are at a critical point, but our commitment is unwavering: to work with the wider NHS to provide exceptional care for every potential donor and their family, and ensure every donated organ has the best possible chance to save a life now and in the future.



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