



Foreword

Organ and tissue donation remains one of the most profound acts of generosity in our healthcare system. Each year, thousands of people depend on the courage of donors, the compassion of families, and the dedication of clinical teams to give them a second chance at life. This year's *Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation Activity Report* describes the progress we have made and the challenges we must urgently address if we are to meet the needs of patients across the UK.

The data shows a system under increasing pressure. Family support for organ donation has fallen steadily over the last five years - from 69% in 2020/21 to 57% in 2025/26 - at a time when more people than ever are waiting for a life-saving transplant. Despite strong public support for donation in principle, this decline in family support is resulting in lost opportunities for transplant and, tragically, lost lives. Last year alone, more than 2,000 potential transplant opportunities could not proceed because families did not support donation.

The reasons are complex, arising at a time of immense family grief, and cannot be reduced to a single cause or simple solution. However, the report also highlights reasons for optimism. Almost 29 million people in the UK have now recorded their decision to donate on the NHS Organ Donor Register. We know most people, when asked, agree that organ donation is a positive thing – yet not all have registered their decision on the NHS Organ Donor Register. We hope to increase the number of people on the register to 30 million by 2027. When someone has registered their decision to be a donor, families support donation going ahead in nearly 90% of cases - a powerful reminder of the importance of clarity, conversation, and personal decision-making.

The report also reflects the dedication of clinical teams across the UK. Over the past year, we have seen modest but meaningful increases in deceased donation, as well as a rise in corneal transplants, offering the gift of sight to thousands. Living donation has reached its highest level since before the pandemic. The total number of patients whose lives were potentially saved or improved by an organ transplant increased by 2%.

New technologies continue to drive improvements in lung and heart transplants, including the highest number ever of paediatric heart transplants following donation after circulatory death. Similarly, the use of normothermic regional perfusion has contributed to a record number of adult liver transplants following donation after circulatory death.

However, with 8,296 patients - including 241 children - waiting for an organ transplant, the need for continued improvement is clear.

Looking ahead, we are committed to modernising systems. The Organ Donation Joint Working Group published its findings in January 2026 and set out a bold agenda for change, calling for greater societal action, a stronger clinical donation culture, and improved performance monitoring and ethical guidance. These actions will strengthen clinical practice, and better support families through compassionate, skilled conversations at the most difficult of times.

In 2026 the UK opened its first Assessment and Recovery Centres (ARCs), which use machine perfusion on donated organs to provide extra time for organ testing and assessment, enabling more organs to be safely accepted for transplant. This coming together of NHSBT, government, universities and researchers, and transplant hospitals represents a seminal moment and a breakthrough in the UK's organ donation and transplantation network.



Behind every statistic in this report is a person - someone waiting, someone hoping, someone whose life could be transformed. Their stories remind us why this work matters and why we must continue to strive for a system where every potential donor is honoured, every family is supported, and every patient has the best possible chance of receiving the transplant they need.

Together, with renewed ambition and collective commitment, we will save more lives.

A blue ink signature of Anthony Clarkson, written in a cursive style.

Anthony Clarkson
Director - Organ and Tissue
Donation and Transplantation

A black ink signature of Prof Derek Manas, written in a cursive style.

Prof Derek Manas
Medical Director - Organ and
Tissue Donation and
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A black ink signature of Dr Dale Gardiner, written in a cursive style.

Dr Dale Gardiner
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