

The Registration, Donation & Transplant Process



How does one register to be a donor?

There are two simple ways to sign up to become a registered organ, eye and tissue donor: via the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and online at [donateLIFecalifornia.org](https://www.donateLIFecalifornia.org) or [doneVIDAcalifornia.org](https://www.doneVIDAcalifornia.org). At the DMV, applications and renewals for driver licenses and identification (ID) cards ask the question, “Do you wish to register to be an organ and tissue donor?” By checking “YES!” every time, the applicant is added to, or remains on, the Donate Life California Organ & Tissue Donor Registry. The forms also advise applicants that this decision is legally binding and does not require the consent of any other person.

The Registry allows Californians who are 18 years of age to register their personal authorization to donate specific or all organs and tissues upon their death. Minors may register to express their wish to become donors, but their parents/legal guardians are responsible for granting consent for donation until they are 18 years of age.

How does the donation process work?

When a patient in a hospital has suffered a severe, non-survivable brain injury, the hospital contacts the local organ procurement organization (OPO). Only after the family has been informed of the patient’s death or imminent death is the opportunity for donation discussed with the family. The family is presented with the documentation of the patient’s donor designation, which legally grants authorization to recover organs and/or tissues. In cases where the patient was not a registered organ, eye and tissue donor, the family is asked for authorization. With authorization, and after the patient’s medical team has declared death, the recovery process moves forward, which includes establishing medical suitability of the donor and finding appropriate recipients.

How do you determine who receives the organs?

Organs are allocated based on a complex medical formula that is established by transplant doctors, public representatives, ethicists and organ recovery agencies. UNOS (the United Network for Organ Sharing) maintains a national list of patients waiting for organ transplants. A donor’s blood type, tissue type, body weight and size are matched against patients on the list. If there are multiple matches, priority is given to the sickest patients or, in the case of kidneys, those who have been on the waiting list the longest. Factors such as race, gender, age, income or celebrity status are never considered when determining who receives an organ.