

Press Release

NATIONAL LAUNCH OF ORGAN DONOR AWARENESS WEEK 2022

The national launch of **Organ Donor Awareness Week**, which is organised by the Irish Kidney Association (IKA) in association with Organ Donation Transplant Ireland (ODTI), was held at the Mansion House, Dublin 2, (today) on Tuesday 19th April (11.30am-1pm). The key message to the public for the **campaign** which will take place from **Saturday, 23rd until Saturday 30th April**, from the IKA, the ODTI and the Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly, is to **'Share Your Wishes'** as organ donation saves and transforms lives. *#ShareYourWishes*

At the launch **Ms. Carol Moore, Chief Executive of the Irish Kidney Association** described how, "The ripple effect of active citizenship in your decision to say YES to organ donation is an amazing legacy to gift to the recipients, their families, your own family, and society at large. This was evident at today's launch when we listened to presentations by the daughter of a deceased donor whose family gain comfort in their grief that their mother gave the gift of life to others. We heard from four grateful transplant recipients whose lives were saved by the donation of a heart, lung, liver and combined kidney pancreas respectively. We also listened to a young man who is currently on kidney dialysis and hoping for a transplant which will vastly improve his quality of life."

In his speech delivered via video to officially launch the 2022 campaign, the **Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly** announced that additional funding of over €1 million has been allocated to transplant services this year which he said would further develop infrastructure and equipment needed to meet demands following the introduction of the opt out system for organ donation as part of the Human Tissue Bill. He said the enactment of the Bill has been a priority for him and the government. Minister Donnelly also said, "I am grateful to the donors, their families, and all the staff who help make this life-saving gift to others possible. I am committed to further developing our organ donation and transplantation system and building on the progress we have achieved so far. It is important that we take this opportunity during Organ Donor Awareness Week to raise awareness of the life-saving role of organ donation, and the improvements in the quality of life it brings to recipients and their families."

Speaking on behalf of Organ Donation Transplant Ireland (**ODTI**) was its **Clinical Lead, Dr. Catherine Motherway**, who is a Consultant in Intensive Care & Anaesthesia at Limerick University Hospital. She said, "Organ Donor Awareness Week is a time when we honour and thank all donors both, living and deceased, who, by their actions have given the gift of life to others. Every year those of us who work in intensive care and transplantation are humbled by the generosity of our donors and their families. To our deceased donors and their families, in the midst of great sorrow, you find it in yourselves to think of others. Thank you! The generosity of organ donors is the bedrock of our transplant programs. Organ donation saves and transforms the lives of our transplant recipients. This week in particular we encourage our community to speak to each other about their wishes around organ donation."

In explaining the theme for the annual campaign this year IKA Chief Executive **Ms Carol Moore**, said, "The key message of the campaign is to Share Your Wishes. The traditional Organ Donor Card and the digital organ donor card app are there as an 'icebreaker' to get the organ donation conversation started. The card, or app, is a symbol of your wish to donate but is not a legal document nor are personal details recorded. Downloading the digital donor card App or requesting a donor card through the IKA website (www.ika.ie/get-a-donor-card), or having Code 115 on your driver's licence, is a prompt to assist the approach to family members to discuss organ donation wishes."

Ms. Moore outlined the key factors that influence improvements in organ donation and transplantation levels. "The success of organ donation relies on many factors. A culture of organ donation within the

health service that is underpinned by suitably trained and resourced healthcare professionals is needed. Specialist organ retrieval and transplant professionals are also required as well as access to theatre space and all the necessary infrastructure to carry out the life saving and life transforming procedures. Promotion of organ donation for transplantation is obviously important but all these other elements need to be in place to ensure a successful service. The effective deployment of existing resources and planning for future developments of the organ donation and transplantation service needs to be underpinned by data, e.g., there needs to be an understanding of the number of potential organ donors every year and what barriers, if any, are impacting on the conversion to successful transplantation. In that way, resources can be targeted to have the greatest impact. As the recent NOCA (National Office of Clinical Audit) Feasibility Study Report, announced on 1st March 2022, *"If you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it."*

In describing the impact of COVID-19 Ms. Moore said, "Despite the unprecedented challenges which the pandemic has presented, organ transplants continued which is thanks to organ donors and their families and also to the dedicated teams who facilitated transplant operations at Beaumont, Temple Street, St. Vincent's and the Mater Hospitals. There are just under six hundred people active on waiting lists for organ transplants including heart, lung, liver, kidney and pancreas. There was a decline in the number of transplants over the past two years during COVID-19 across all the national transplant programmes. A total of 206 transplant operations were carried out in Ireland in 2021 which was 16 more than in 2020. This activity in challenging times could not have taken place but for the generosity of the families of 65 deceased donors and 35 living kidney donors."

A table of figures for donation and transplantation is shown below.

Green is the internationally recognised colour associated with organ donation for transplantation. Many city and county councils are supporting the campaign by lighting public sites and building in green from dusk to dawn during Organ Donor Awareness Week. Sites are listed on the IKA website www.ika.ie/donorweek2022

Also invested in the lifesaving campaign are the hundreds of people currently on waiting lists and their families waiting and hoping to be called for a transplant, as well as more than 5,000 people in Ireland who are enjoying extended life thanks to successful organ transplants.

The Organ Donor Awareness Week poster is available in the English, Irish, and Polish languages and a digital copy is available to download from the IKA website. Featuring on the poster are photos of 32 people from all walks of life and all ages, who between them are enjoying over 410 years of extra life because families of deceased organ donors gifted their loved ones' organs including heart, lung, liver kidney and pancreas.

The campaign poster will be displayed on outdoor advertising sites in 30 shopping centres around the country for 12 days and this activity is sponsored by Clear Channel. The poster will also make a cameo appearance on some episodes of RTÉ Faircity broadcast during Awareness Week.

Many independent pharmacies and pharmacy chains will be showing their support for the campaign by displaying the poster in-store and on their window digital screens. They will also have countertop boxes of organ donor cards and will leverage their social media presence to get the message across about having the family conversation about organ donation #ShareYourWishes

Social media hashtags for Organ Donor Awareness Week are: #ShareYourWishes, #DonorWeek22. People can also tag the Irish Kidney Association when doing their own posts on various platforms: Twitter @IrishKidneyAs, Instagram @IrishKidneyA and Facebook @IrishKidneyAssociation

Individuals who wish to support organ donation are encouraged to keep the reminders of their decision available by carrying the organ donor card, permitting Code 115 to be included on their driver's licence or having the 'digital organ donor card' App on their smartphone. Organ Donor Cards can be requested by visiting the IKA website www.ika.ie/get-a-donor-card or to your phone, phoning the Irish Kidney Association on 01 6205306 or Free text the word DONOR to 50050

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For further information contact

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Appendix One Donations and Transplant Operations

	2020	2021	5 year Average 2015-19
Deceased Donors	63	65	85
Kidney	95	104	128
Liver	37	35	61
Lungs	16	20	33
Heart	9	10	16
Pancreas	5	2	2
Total Deceased Donor Transplants	162	171	240
Living Donors	28	35	43
TOTAL TRANSPLANTS	190	206	283