

Health Minister announces Organ Donor Awareness Week 2023 (20-27 May) message **DON'T LEAVE YOUR LOVED ONES IN DOUBT**

Ireland has made huge strides in organ donation and transplantation since it began here 60 years ago when the first kidney transplant was performed. The official launch of Organ Donor Awareness Week 2023 (20-27 May) by the Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly T.D., was held at the Mansion House, Dublin 2 on Tuesday, 16th May. At the launch some significant milestones in transplantation in Ireland were noted, all of which were made possible by the gift of organ donation and the key campaign message was reinforced, **Don't Leave Your Loved Ones in Doubt, #LeaveNoDoubt**.

Organ Donor Awareness Week 2023 will take place 20 - 27 May and is organised by the Irish Kidney Association (IKA) in association with the HSE's Organ Donation Transplant Ireland (ODTI).

This year's Organ Donor Awareness Week campaign, which coincides with European Public Health Week, is built around the theme '**Don't Leave Your Loved Ones in Doubt! #LeaveNoDoubt**'. The key message is that members of the public can play their part in supporting organ donation for transplantation by ensuring that their families are not left in any doubt about their wishes around organ donation. i.e., they make sure to 'have the conversation'. Sharing your wishes when you are in good health makes it a less stressful decision for your family in the event of them being approached about you being a potential organ donor.

At the campaign launch the Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly T.D. said, "Organ donation is a gift of a second chance of life. Raising awareness about the importance of organ donation is a critical part of the great effort we must make so that more people get this second chance."

"This year has set a record for the number of transplants performed in the first three months of a year with 81 transplants. As Minister for Health, I am committed to increasing organ donation and transplantation rates in Ireland and to make organ donation 'the norm' where possible. Enactment of the Human Tissue Bill will be an important step to achieving this."

Minister Donnelly also said, "This year's theme for Organ Donor Awareness Week of *Don't Leave Your Loved Ones in Doubt, #LeaveNoDoubt*, highlights the importance of talking to your loved ones about organ donation. This is the best way to ensure that your wishes to become an organ donor are realised. I encourage everyone to have these conversations now. While I know talking about such issues can be uncomfortable, it will make it easier for your family to make this decision at what will inevitably be a difficult and tragic time."

Ms. Carol Moore Chief Executive, Irish Kidney Association said, "Organ donation is a great example of active citizenship, and the Irish Kidney Association is calling on everybody to take the opportunity of Organ Donor Awareness Week to share their wishes."

Ms. Moore described how, "Patients on transplant waiting lists live in hope that organs will become available to them and a strong public show of support by requesting organ donor cards builds that hope. The uncertainty associated with waiting for an organ transplant is difficult as the future is unknown and there is the knowledge that in order to be given the Gift of Life another family will be grieving the loss of a loved one".

"The end of year figures for transplantation last year offer encouragement and hope to people on transplant waiting lists as there was an increase in transplant activity with 250 organ transplants taking place in 2022, 44 more transplants than in 2021. The record 81 transplants in the first three months of this year offers further encouragement that we can return to or surpass the 5-year average (2015-2019) of transplant activity experienced pre-pandemic. It's heartening also that as one of the milestones we mark this year is the 10th anniversary of the introduction of Code 115 on drivers licences, that without any promotional activity, more than 1.45 million drivers, almost half of all licence holders, have indicated their willingness to be organ donors."

"We look forward to the Human Tissue Bill being transposed into law. It will allow for altruistic living kidney donation in Ireland, where the donor does not know the recipient. Currently such donors have to travel outside our jurisdiction to Northern Ireland or overseas in order to donate altruistically."

An Post is supporting this year's Organ Donor Awareness Week campaign with 350 of its larger and busiest outlets displaying stocks of organ donor cards and also displaying the campaign poster on its digital screens in 295 of its top post offices. **Lucy Murray, CX & Marketing Director for An Post Retail** said, "We are delighted to support the Irish Kidney Association ahead of Organ Donation Awareness Week 2023. 'Don't leave your loved ones in doubt' is such an important message and we're helping to share this across communities in our network of Post Offices. Thousands of families across Ireland have benefited from the gift of organ donation and we want to play a part to grow this number by encouraging people to sign up and carry an Organ Donor Card."

Dr. Catherine Motherway, Clinical Lead, Organ Donation & Transplant Ireland, HSE also spoke at the national launch of the campaign and said, "Organ Donation saves and transforms the lives of Ireland's transplant recipients. The Gift of Life given by our donors both living and deceased is celebrated and cherished publicly every year during Organ Donation Awareness Week. This year will mark 60 years of Organ Donation and Transplantation in Ireland. Over the intervening years advances in transplant medicine and surgery have allowed us to offer hope to more patients suffering from failure of a vital organ. At this time, we take a moment to reflect on how this would not be possible without the selfless generosity of our organ donors and their families. We remember our deceased donor families who, in the midst of grief and in the face of the sudden loss of a loved one find it in their hearts to think of others in need. Our living donors give of themselves freely to help a loved one. This week I would encourage everyone to let their families know their wishes. Have that conversation please. For bereaved families when the wishes of the Donor are known it is an act of love to respect and honour that wish. It can bring comfort in a very dark and difficult time. For those of us who have the honour of caring for our donors and their families and who work to care for our transplant community we thank and honour all our donors."

At any one time in Ireland there are between 550 and 600 people active on waiting lists for organ transplants including heart, lung, liver, kidney, and pancreas. 250 organ transplant operations were carried out in Ireland in 2022 (44 more transplants than in 2021). This activity last year, in very challenging times with COVID-19, could not have taken place but for the generosity of the families of 86 deceased donors and 33 living kidney donors. In 2022, 51 liver transplants and 8 pancreas transplants took place at St. Vincent's Hospital, while 10 heart transplants and 18 lung transplants were carried out at the Mater Hospital.

Last year, saw an increase in the number of kidney transplants taking place at Beaumont Hospital - 163 kidney transplants took place of which 33 were from Living Kidney Donors. There are 2,466 people in Ireland in end stage kidney failure undergoing dialysis treatment, but only approximately one fifth of these are on the transplant waiting list.

2023 marks several important milestones in organ donation and transplantation in Ireland:

- **The 60th anniversary of the first transplant to take place in Ireland, a kidney transplant for 21-year-old Ted Tobin, from Dublin, which took place at the old St. Vincent's Hospital on St. Stephen's Green**
- 51st anniversary of Ireland's first live donor kidney transplant at Jervis Street Hospital
- **The 45th anniversary** of the introduction of kidney donor card by the Irish Kidney Association (in the same year the Association was founded 1978), which has evolved into the **multi-organ donor card**.
- 38 years since Ireland's first heart transplant at the Mater University Hospital
- 31 years of pancreas transplantation; the programme began at Beaumont Hospital, founded by transplant surgeon Dr. David Hickey. The programme migrated to St. Vincent's University Hospital in 2016.
- **The 30th anniversary of Ireland's first liver transplant at St. Vincent's Hospital.**
- **The 20th anniversary of the paediatric kidney transplant programme at CHI Temple Street**
- The 18th anniversary of the first lung transplant at the Mater University Hospital
- 15th anniversary of first spousal (non-blood related) live donor kidney transplant at Beaumont Hospital
- **10 years since the introduction of code 115 on Drivers Licence in January 2013 with sign up by 1,485,988 drivers by 9th May 2023, representing 46.3% of all drivers**

The Irish Pharmacy Union is supporting the campaign and several Pharmacy chains are also helping to spread the message about the importance of organ donation by displaying the campaign poster and carrying stocks of organ donor cards. The campaign poster will be displayed on outdoor advertising poster sites in shopping centres, sponsored by Clear Channel. RTÉ's Fair City will also have posters featured on the set in some of its episodes broadcast during Organ Donor Awareness Week.

All campaign posters are available in English, Irish and Polish, and digital copies can be downloaded from the Irish Kidney Association’s website www.ika.ie/donorweek

The public is being asked to mark Organ Donor Awareness Week by getting together to discuss organ donation with their loved ones, and letting them know their wishes about organ donation. The organ donor card is the perfect icebreaker to start this conversation. Whether it’s organising a get together with family and friends, setting up an information stand in your school, college, or place of work, it all makes a difference. You can request Organ Donor Cards via the IKA’s website www.ika.ie/donorweek The Irish Kidney Association also provides their ‘Digital Organ Donor Card’ free to download from the App Store and the Google Playstore.

Social media hashtags for Organ Donor Awareness Week are: #LeaveNoDoubt, #ShareYourWishes and #DonorWeek23. **People can also tag the Irish Kidney Association when doing their own social media posts** (@IrishKidneyAs on Twitter, @IrishKidneyA on Instagram , @IrishKidneyAssociation on Facebook).

Individuals who wish to support organ donation by sharing their wishes with their loved ones and 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 website www.ika.ie/get-a-donor-card (two paragraphs above people are directed to www.ika.ie/donorweek to request their donor cards) or to your phone, phoning the Irish Kidney Association on Tel. 01 6205306 or Free text the word DONOR to 50050

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	2021	2022*	5 year Average 2015-19
Deceased Donors	65	86	85
Kidney	104	130	128
Liver	35	51	61
Lungs	20	18	33
Heart	10	10	16
Pancreas	2	8	2
Total Deceased Donor Transplants	171	217	240
Living Donors	35	33	43
TOTAL TRANSPLANTS	206	250	283

[*excludes 8 UK paired exchange/desensitised transplants](#)

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