

# DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH

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## ORGAN DONATION

Every Australian must make a choice about whether to opt into organ donation to help save the lives of others. In 2020 alone, 4,000 Australians benefited from organ donation.

One person signing up for organ donation can help up to 50 other people. And it is not only the organ recipient who benefits, but also their family and loved ones.

However, throughout Australia there is a lack of organ donors to meet demand. At the end of 2020, there were 12,000 people on dialysis and 1,650 people waiting for an organ donation. Hundreds of people each year die of curable illness because they can't get the medical treatment they need, due to a lack of donated organs.

In the ACT only 25% of people are registered organ donors, as opposed to the national average of 34%. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that not everybody *can* donate, even among those who are registered. An organ must be in good condition before it can be donated.

Recently, I reached out through my Facebook page to ask people about their feelings surrounding organ donation. I heard from many people who supported organ donation, and none who did not. Some encouraged an opt-out system, which is used in other countries - such as Spain - to increase donation rates.

The advantage of an opt-out system is that it means people who have never thought about organ donation are automatically registered. However, opt-out systems can be seen as infringing on the person's right as it does not rely on active consent for donation to occur.

And this is a one of the most distressing moments of a family's life where they already have such little agency and control, so to remove more agency and control may exacerbate their suffering and distress.

Currently, in order to become an organ donor, a person in the ACT must register through the National Organ Donation Register *and* discuss their decision with their family. It's absolutely critical to talk to family members about organ and tissue donation because the family of registered donors will be asked for their consent to donation, regardless of whether the person is registered, before it can proceed.

The form is easy to fill in and I encourage all Canberrans register, and to make sure you have the discussion with your family.

The low numbers of organ donation in the ACT are likely attributable to organ donation simply not being a priority for many people, and – as such – unlikely to cross their mind unprompted.

Before 2012, Canberrans could register as organ donors while renewing their driver's licence. However, this process was phased out between 2005 and 2012 and replaced with the national organ donation registry.

However, when Canberrans renew their licence online now, there is a message reminding people to sign up to the register.

It's very important to me that Canberrans are aware of the need to opt-in, and of how they can become organ donors.

Organ donation registry in the ACT is too low and leaves many people waiting, suffering or – worse still – passing away, from conditions that are curable through organ donation.

I understand that some members of the community have reasons not to register to donate their organs. I respect this decision.

However, for those Canberrans who are not opposed to donating their organs, but who simply might not be aware of the need to opt-in by registering online, and having the conversation with their family, please register today.

Less than a minute of your time to register could save lives.

The website is: <https://donatelife.gov.au/register-donor-today>

Ends