

## **Provincial leadership giving Canada's organ donation rates a boost**

The story of organ donation and transplant, no matter where you sit, is a remarkable one. Unique among health issues, organ donation begins with death and ends with life. As leaders of three Canadian organ donation organizations, we are privileged to see every day the impact organ donation and transplant can have for both sides - the family finding some comfort despite their grief, which comes from creating a life-saving legacy for their loved one, and the recipient who has been given a second chance because of the choice of a perfect stranger.

There is no other option for those who wait for a transplant. They are in end-stage organ failure and without a suitable organ donor, they will die. Every three days someone in Canada dies waiting for an organ that didn't come in time.

Historically, Canada's record on organ and tissue donation and transplant has not been a reason to celebrate, but the picture is changing. Last year was the most successful to date for the country's three biggest provinces: British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec together account for 70% of the organ donation activity in the country. In 2015, 536 deceased organ donors in our three provinces gave the gift of life to 1,778 people.

This progress is encouraging, but it should be expected as well. Our organizations have been applying lessons learned from the most successful organ and tissue donation and transplant programs in the world, and these strategies are bearing fruit. International leaders in organ and tissue donation point to physician leadership and public awareness as the keys to success, Canada's largest provinces are following their lead.

In Ontario, Regional Medical Leads and Hospital Donation Physicians are now working alongside established donation teams and highly-skilled donation coordinators, providing education and expertise to staff and creating influential champions for donation inside hospitals. The launch of online donor registration, along with sustained public awareness programs targeting the public, workplaces, community groups, educators, faith groups and elected officials, has increased the registration rate in the province from 21 to almost 30 percent in the last four years. In partnership with ServiceOntario, Ontarians are routinely asked about registration when they renew their driver's license and health card.

In British Columbia, donation physician champions and hospital based donation coordinators, along with increased support for, and commitment to, the donation and transplant process in the critical care community and among operating room staff has been essential in increasing deceased and living donation rates. Alongside intensive public awareness campaigns, a new partnership between Service BC and BC Transplant launched in 2015, making it easy for people to register at any of the 62 Service BC locations through the province.

In Quebec, over the last three years, the efforts of hospital teams (intensive care units, emergency room and transplant programs) in collaboration with Transplant Québec and other partners involved in the donation process, have made record increases in donation possible.

Through the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec registry and the registry managed by the Chambre des notaires du Québec, more than one in every three Quebecers have formalized their consent to donation. In 2015, Quebec's transplant wait list decreased for the fourth consecutive year. With these positive results, the hope is that the wait time for organ transplants will decrease.

The opportunity for organ donation is rare. Potential for donation exists in only one to three percent of hospital deaths. It takes leadership and accountability within the hospital setting to ensure that all opportunities to save lives are identified and appropriately pursued.

All Canadian organ procurement organizations work in close partnership. Every province works together to ensure that whenever an organ can't be used within a province or territory, it is offered to those most in need in the immediate geographic area.

Nationally, the Canadian Transplant Registry, managed by Canadian Blood Services, includes a National Organ Waiting list for the country's most medically urgent patients; a Highly Sensitized Patient program for those needing a very specific match for kidney donors; and a Kidney Paired Exchange for patients with a willing living donor who is not a match.

On a provincial level, the opportunity to have residents record their consent for donation (by registration or by another means) is significant. By aligning intent to donate with the high volume transactions which provinces oversee, like driver's licenses or health cards, it means virtually all residents can be approached to consider organ and tissue donation.

Until we stop preventable deaths on the transplant waiting list, our collective work is far from done. But Canada is making progress and has momentum. There is no silver bullet or easy solution in organ and tissue donation, but together we can work to save the lives of more Canadians.

Ronnie Gavsie, President and CEO, Trillium Gift of Life Network. In Ontario, register as an organ and tissue donor at [www.BeADonor.ca](http://www.BeADonor.ca).

Colleen Hart, Vice President, Provincial Population Health, Chronic Conditions and Specialized Populations, Provincial Health Authority. In British Columbia, register your decision at [www.transplant.bc.ca](http://www.transplant.bc.ca).

In Quebec, learn more at [www.transplantquebec.ca](http://www.transplantquebec.ca).