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# Province To Harvest Organs From Heart Attack Victims

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If you're one of the 1,800 people in this province in need of an organ transplant, your wait may have just gotten shorter.

Ontario is changing the rules surrounding organ donation, and will soon accept kidneys, lungs and livers from people who have died of a heart attack.

Until now, transplant organs were only taken from patients declared brain dead.

The expanded guidelines, a first in Canada, could help to increase the donor pool by the hundreds.

"We can do this now. Help more people, save more lives, and we're making history," said Janice Beitel of the Trillium Gift for Life Network, the provincial agency in charge of organ and tissue donation.

At Ottawa Hospital, scientists estimate they would have had access to 28 kidneys had they been able to retrieve organs from patients who'd died of heart attack.

That represents a 30 per cent spike over a year and a half.

"Given there's a large gap of patients waiting for transplants, this is going to be a significant increase," admitted Cameron Guest, Chief Medical Officer for Trillium. "(I'm) very excited. It represents the end of a long period of work."

It could also represent more saved lives, Beitel hopes.

"I love working with organ donation because of the ripple effect. That one person that says 'yes' to donate, they will impact the lives of recipients and their families, and the people they work with," she said.

"It's a huge opportunity and it's really exciting to be a part of this."

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## **Here are the Top 10 questions asked about organ donation:**

### **Organ Donor Q&A**

#### **What can be donated?**

There's a lot of need for a lot of different body parts. The heart, liver, kidneys, pancreas, lungs, small bowel, stomach, corneas, heart valves, bone and skin are all quite literally vital organs. You can choose which one or ones you'd prefer to donate.

#### **Do I have a say who gets my organs?**

No. The decision is made on need, matches for a transplant and availability. You can't designate someone to get the specific gifts, unless you're a 'living donor'. That occurs when a healthy person voluntarily gives a specific organ to a family member or a friend in need, like one of your kidneys.

#### **How do I get on the list?**

Sign your organ donor card with your license or talk it over with your family. It's urgent they know your wishes and that you know theirs in case any of you are unable to communicate.

#### **Is there an age limit?**

Not really. It depends on the condition of the organ. Believe it or not, the oldest Canadian donor was 102 years old!

#### **How many are waiting?**

More than 1,800 Ontario residents remain in limbo praying for an organ that will change or save their lives. At least 122 people died in 2004 still waiting.

#### **What about religious concerns?**

You should discuss this with your family and your religious leaders. There may be a way it can be worked out, especially if the donation can save a life. But remember, the ultimate decision is up to you.

**Will they let me die so they can get my organ?**

No, all efforts to keep even the most critically ill patient alive will be taken. The organ won't be harvested until brain death is established.

**Can I change my mind?**

Absolutely. Simply alter your donor card or let your family know.

**O.K., it's morbid - but what about the funeral? Will there still be an open casket?**

It's not morbid and it's a common question. Organ removals are done with surgical skill, just like in an operation. No one will ever notice the organs have been removed. The body of the deceased is generally returned to the funeral home within 24-36 hours after death, so the family can grieve and make funeral preparations.

**Who do I call for more information?**

Contact **Trillium Gift of Life Network** at 1-800-263-2833 or [www.giftoflife.on.ca](http://www.giftoflife.on.ca)

Courtesy: **Trillium Gift of Life**