

# THE JEWISH LINK

Bronx, Westchester & Connecticut

## LiveOnNY Launches Major Initiative to Advance Organ Donation in NY Jewish Community

By JLBWC Staff | October 31, 2019



Rabbi Ari Perl

(Courtesy of LiveOnNY) LiveOnNY announced it has hired Rabbi Ari Perl as Vice President for Jewish Community Engagement & Multicultural Education.

LiveOnNY is the federally designated organ procurement organization (OPO) which coordinates all organ donation and transplantation in New York City, Long Island, Westchester, Rockland County and the lower Hudson Valley.

Rabbi Perl, 44, is the former senior rabbi of The Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach on Long Island, and currently resides in Woodmere, NY. He is leading LiveOnNY's ongoing efforts to engage and educate the broader Jewish community about organ and tissue donation against the backdrop of Jewish law, ethics and values.

A dynamic adult educator and accomplished community leader, Rabbi Perl has served on the faculty of the Melton Adult Mini-School, UJA/Federation of Greater Dallas' board of directors, as Vice President of the Rabbinical Council of America, and President of the Rabbinical Council of Greater Dallas, where he was recognized by Jewish Family Services for outstanding service to the broader Jewish community. In addition to lecturing and teaching classes at New York synagogues, JCCs, Jewish day schools and student groups at local colleges, Rabbi Perl will be a critical part of LiveOnNY's pastoral team that directly services Jewish families involved in the organ donation process.

"I'm thrilled to be joining LiveOnNY's new initiative to educate New York's Jewish community about saving lives through organ donation," said Rabbi Perl.

For 3,000 years, Jewish tradition has emphasized the value of human life to its very last moment and has insisted on the dignified return of an intact human body to the earth. The fact that some segments of the Orthodox community have a principled halakhic objection to brain death adds another layer of complexity. As a result, it's

understandable that Jews have hesitations and concerns when it comes to donating organs.

“At the same time, because all denominations of Judaism affirm the supreme importance of saving human life (pikuah nefesh), organ donation needs to be integral part of the Jewish end-of-life conversation.”

Although there are presently more than 5.5 million New Yorkers registered as organ donors, New York state is still last in the country with just 35% of eligible New Yorkers registered, compared to 56% nationally. Moreover, New York’s melting pot - with 200 different cultures and languages spoken - makes it a challenging task to dispel the many myths and beliefs surrounding organ donation and transplantation with a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach.

“One of New York’s great challenges is improving low organ donation rates among our many ethnic and religious communities, one of which is the NYC-area’s 1.8 million and growing Jewish community,” said Lee H. Perlman, chairman of LiveOnNY and senior vice president of the Greater New York Hospital Association. “While the Jewish community’s low donation rate is influenced by certain cultural and religious factors, there is excellent reason to believe it can be significantly improved.

“I believe that a significant number of people can be added to the NY State donor registry and more Jewish families will choose to give their fellow New Yorkers the ultimate gift – the gift of life.” Perlman added.

Because of his training and certification as a Family Services Coordinator, Rabbi Perl is involved in every aspect of a Jewish patient’s donation process. Whether providing pastoral support to the patient’s family in the hospital, helping them consider the donation opportunity, and even accompanying the donor to the operating room during the organ recovery surgery, Rabbi Perl’s goal is to understand the family’s religious and emotional needs, and then to work with the care team to make sure that those needs are met throughout the process.

“While organ donation continues to save lives each day, every 18 hours a New Yorker in need of a transplant dies waiting for a life-saving organ that is not available,” said Rabbi Perl. “Our own family members and friends are among those who are needlessly dying, but also among the few whose lives have been saved by the generosity of organ donors from other communities. For both these reasons, we have a sacred communal responsibility to pay that generosity forward through our own ‘gifts of life.’”

In addition to the hiring of Rabbi Perl, LiveOnNY Foundation, which is the philanthropic arm of LiveOnNY, has given a \$70,000 grant to HODS – the Halachic Organ Donor Society – to expand its ongoing educational efforts and collaborate with Rabbi Perl on new initiatives to engage the New York Jewish community.

LiveOnNY was created 40 years ago, in 1978, when the first transplants began. Since 1978, the organization and its staff of 200 health care professionals have helped give the

gift of life to more than 22,000 New Yorkers, be it with a new heart, liver, lung, pancreas, or kidney.

In addition, through the gift of eye and tissue donation, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers have benefitted from a better quality of life over four decades.

“We are thrilled to have someone of Rabbi Perl’s intelligence, compassion and experience leading our new initiative to better engage the Jewish community,” said Helen Irving, LiveOnNY’s President & CEO.

For more information, contact Ali McSherry at [amcsherry@liveonny.org](mailto:amcsherry@liveonny.org).

<https://www.jewishlinkbwc.com/index.php/monthly-sections/health-link/11711-liveonny-launches-major-initiative-to-advance-organ-donation-in-ny-jewish-community>