

# **Victorian Government response to the Parliamentary Inquiry into increasing the number of registered organ and tissue donors**

December 2025

# Acknowledgement

The Victorian Government acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and pays respects to Elders past and present.

We proudly acknowledge the strength and resilience of First Nations peoples as the world's oldest living culture and contribution of generations of Aboriginal leaders who have fought tirelessly for the rights of their people and communities.

## Introduction

On 9 March 2023, the 60th Victorian Parliament's Legislative Assembly agreed to a motion requiring the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider, and report on increasing the number of registered organ and tissue donors, with a report to be tabled no later than 31 March 2024.

The Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee (the Committee) subsequently conducted an *Inquiry into increasing the number of registered organ and tissue donors* (the Inquiry). The Victorian Government acknowledges the substantial work of the Committee and all agencies, organisations and individuals who have contributed to this important work, particularly those with lived experience of organ donation and transplantation.

The Committee received 49 submissions and held seven days of public hearings in Melbourne between 19 June and 11 September 2023. Seventy witnesses appeared, including families with lived experience of donation, and experts in the fields of medicine, nursing, organ and tissue donation, retrieval and transplantation.

The Committee's final report *Register and talk about it: Inquiry into increasing the number of registered organ and tissue donors* was released on 20 March 2024. It included 41 recommendations, of which 17 are supported by the Victorian Government in full, with a further 24 supported either in principle or in part.

Organ and tissue donation has a transformative impact on individuals, families and the broader community. Victoria has been a driving force in the organ donation and transplantation sector, saving and improving the lives of many Australians.

The rate of organ donation in Victoria is higher than the national average, and in 2024 Victoria recorded the highest number of deceased organ donors in the country.

This demonstrates the incredible kindness and generosity of Victorians who have made the decision to donate, and to their families who said yes to donation. It also attests to the efforts of donation specialist staff at Victorian health services in engaging with donor families and facilitating compassionate and meaningful conversations, ultimately driving successful donation outcomes.

However, increasing the number of registered donors has been a challenge since the COVID-19 pandemic, with a downward trend persisting in Victoria and most Australian states and territories over the last three years.

Victoria's registration rate on the Australian Organ Donor Registry (AODR) remains lower than the national average. This matters: we know around 8 in 10 families say yes to donation if their loved one has registered as a donor, and that this drops to 4 in 10 if their family did not know they wanted to be a donor.

Without the gift of organ donation, many Australians would not get a second chance at life. The Victorian Government is committed to improving healthcare and saving lives through increased organ and tissue donation registration.

The Organ and Tissue Authority (OTA), in collaboration with states and territories, leads the national program and sets future direction to optimise organ and tissue donation for transplantation.

On 1 November 2024, the Commonwealth government released the *National Strategy for Organ Donation, Retrieval and Transplantation*. The national strategy sets out the future direction of the Australian organ donation, retrieval and transplantation system, as agreed by all governments.

Victoria's response to this Inquiry is informed by the National Strategy and joint work to be agreed between states and territories as part of the strategy's implementation. The national strategy complements the *Organ and Tissue Authority Strategy 2022-27* (OTA Strategy), which sets out a 5-year plan for the national organ donation program and implementation plan. Several of the Committee's recommendations align to the OTA Strategy and are already in-progress, supported by the Victorian Department of Health.

The Victorian Government seeks to enhance awareness of organ and tissue donation among younger Victorians (15–16-year-olds and above), empowering them to make informed decisions regarding registration and ultimately increasing the potential for life-saving outcomes. Wherever possible, solutions will seek to ensure information is available to all Victorians, including vulnerable and linguistically diverse communities.

Victoria's response seeks to leverage key enablers of donation, including our driver's licence and vehicle registration system, along with our partnership agreements with the Australian Government's Organ and Tissue Authority and National Blood Authority, which underpin our organ and tissue donation (including stem cells) program.

The Victorian Government looks forward to continuing work with our stakeholders and diverse communities to increase the number of registered donors, giving more Victorians the gift of life.

## Recommendation 1

*Given uncertainty around historic Victorian driver licence donor registrations, the Victorian Government advise people aged 42 years or older, who held a driver licence in the early 2000s, to register or check that they registered a donation decision on the Australian Organ Donor Register (AODR) using their MyGov Medicare account or the Medicare app.*

### **Support in principle**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation to encourage licence holders to consider registering for organ and tissue donation.

Rather than target only those who may have nominated for organ and tissue donation in the past, the Department of Transport and Planning has investigated additional mechanisms to raise awareness of the program among the vast majority of driver licence and vehicle registration customers.

In addition to the existing arrangement where donor information and contact details are included in approximately one million driver licence renewal notices mailed to Victorians each year, there is potential to expand this to digital customer channels for both licensing and registration transactions.

Subject to confirmation of scope, funding availability and other priorities, the Victorian Government through the Department of Transport and Planning will consider progressing this initiative. Messaging to remind customers to confirm their donor status will also be considered.

## Recommendation 2

*The Victorian Government scope the capability of the State's driver licence system to allow Victorians to register on the Australian Organ Donor Register (AODR) when applying for or renewing a driver licence. This should include a 'yes' registration option only and way to maximise the finding of a unique record match on the AODR.*

### **Support in principle**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

As an immediate action, the Victorian Government, through the Department of Government Services, has built and promoted a dedicated information page on the Service Victoria platform. The information page connects Service Victoria users, including people who may be visiting the Service Victoria Platform to acquire a digital driver's licence, to DonateLife's organ donation registration website.

The Department of Transport and Planning will create a similar link to the AODR on the VicRoads platform.

The Department of Government Services will further consider opportunities to promote the AODR on the Service Victoria website and app, as well as via other channels. The Department of Government Services will also consider further promotion of the AODR in partnership with relevant agencies.

The Victorian Government has undertaken initial scoping of an update to Victoria's driver licence system to allow Victorians to register on the AODR. The 'Yes' only registration option and unique record match which mirrors South Australia's current driver licence donor registration process was also considered.

Noting that the AODR is a national system administered by the Commonwealth, further work is required to better understand the feasibility, and resolve potential challenges, of updating Victoria's registration and licensing system to enable organ and tissue donation registration as part of the licence renewal process.

## Recommendation 3

*The Victorian Government increase its promotion of the AODR through the creation and use of a prominent 'Register online' call to action button on the Service Victoria website and app, as well as multiple other government channels, for example, proof of age card applications, Victorian Electoral Commission enrolments and Ambulance Victoria memberships.*

### Support in principle

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

As an immediate action, the Victorian Government, through the Department of Government Services, has built and promoted a dedicated information page on the Service Victoria platform. The information page connects Service Victoria users, including people who may be visiting the Service Victoria platform to acquire a digital driver's licence, to DonateLife's organ donation registration website.

Service Victoria has also actively promoted organ donation to its 2.4 million mobile app users. Between March 2023 and June 2024, this promotion led to 43,700 individuals clicking on the organ donation link, resulting in an average of 1.8 visits per person.

The Department of Government Services will further consider opportunities to promote the AODR on the Service Victoria website and app, as well as via other channels. The Department of Government Services will consider further promotion of the AODR in partnership with relevant agencies.

## Recommendation 4

*The Government explore the creation of direct links to securely register on the AODR when accessing Victorian Government services, if feasible:*

- *enable registration details to be transferred to the AODR through a data bridge and not link people seeking to register to the federal DonateLife online form.*
- *auto populate fields for personal information held by Victorian Government services to make it quicker and simpler for people to register.*

### Support in principle

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

The Department of Government Services will explore the feasibility of direct links to securely register on the AODR when accessing Victorian Government services, noting engagement with the Commonwealth will be required as the AODR is a national system which is not administered by Victoria.

Consultation with Services Australia and other stakeholders will be critical to assess technical viability and privacy and data security considerations of directly providing customer information.

## Recommendation 5

*The Victorian Department of Health advocate to the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care to remove the distinction between intent and consent registration on the AODR.*

### Support in full

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

Individuals who register as an organ donor are consenting to donation. However, in practice the family of a deceased donor is always asked to confirm the donation decision of a donor and consent to

donation before it can proceed. Removing the distinction between intent and consent registration makes it easier for people to have their intent known.

It must be noted a consent registration is not equivalent to 'informed consent' in the context of healthcare decision making. Donor families play a pivotal role in the organ donation consent process as they are the ones that provide the final consent for donation for their deceased family member or loved one. Health professionals advise that families are more likely to consent to donation if they know their loved one's donation wishes.

The Victorian Government through the Department of Health, together with other states and territories and the Organ and Tissue Authority, will collaborate with Services Australia to:

- remove the distinction between AODR 'intent' and 'consent' registration decisions, and
- define all AODR decisions as a 'registration.'

These changes will be subject to approval through the national Health Minister's meeting under the National Health Governance arrangements.

The Victorian Government will continue to advocate for families to have open conversations about organ and tissue donation wishes to assist those families to provide consent at the end of life.

## Recommendation 6

*The Victorian Department of Health advocate to the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care to improve public reporting of AODR data, including:*

- *using Medicare information to remove deceased people from the register.*
- *the option to record what prompted someone to register regardless of registration method.*

### Support in full

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

The option to record what prompted someone to register as a donor is already captured when a person registers through the DonateLife website. The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, will work with Services Australia and other Commonwealth agencies to explore the possibility of capturing this data when someone registers through other methods, and to have this data readily available to inform the development of future awareness campaigns.

The Department of Health will also advocate to Services Australia to use Medicare information to remove deceased people from the AODR.

Registering to become an organ donor is a deeply personal decision. People can be influenced by a range of factors and experiences, whether these be through discussions with family, friends and colleagues or exposure to other information. Recording these influences or drivers is helpful for understanding intent in the community and is crucial to targeting efforts to raise awareness of the value of organ and tissue donation. Making information about these personal decisions more public will also potentially demystify why people elect to make this life-saving choice.

## Recommendation 7

*The Victorian Department of Health work with the OTA and DonateLife Victoria to explore ways to:*

- *maximise the usefulness of OTA's wave research reports into family experiences of donation to inform and improve donation-related communications and processes in Victoria.*

- *ensure non-English speaking Victorian families' recent experiences of organ and tissue donation-related communications and processes are being captured in OTA's research.*

### **Support in full**

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

As outlined in the Committee's report findings the OTA's Wave Research refers to a national study of family experiences of donation. As with previous wave research studies, data captured by the OTA will be analysed and will inform future communications and improvements to care and support for families before, during and after donation.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, will continue to collaborate with the OTA to improve donation-related communications and processes in Victoria. The Department of Health will work across departments to leverage existing platforms for sharing experiences amongst diverse communities and will engage with DonateLife to incorporate research findings into community resources and communications materials.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, will continue to work closely with the OTA and DonateLife Victoria to engage with non-English speaking Victorian families and incorporate their experiences of organ and tissue donation-related communications and processes in OTA's research. Sharing insights and experiences is an invaluable mechanism to inform process improvement and identify potential gaps in service delivery, ultimately enhancing cultural sensitivity and accessibility.

## **Recommendation 8**

*The Victorian Department of Health work with the Department of Health and Aged Care and Services Australia to explore opportunities following registration on the AODR to:*

- *automatically contact people, encouraging them to share their donation wishes with family and provide links to steps to help start family discussion about donation.*
- *provide an option to allow people to automatically share their donation decision with family members via an email sent by the AODR.*

### **Support in principle**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

The Victorian Government through the Department of Health will work with other Australian states and territories and the Australian OTA via the Jurisdictional Advisory Group to progress a nationally informed approach to examine the legal, privacy and security requirements to progress this work.

Engagement will occur with stakeholders, registered donors and donor family groups to consider a range of additional options to promote the sharing of organ and tissue donation wishes with families and loved ones.

The DonateLife website and their donation awareness promotional material prominently highlights the importance of family discussion about donation registration.

## **Recommendation 9**

*The Victorian Government build capacity for DonateLife Victoria and the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria to continually improve recruitment and retention strategies for organ and tissue donation specialists, and report annually on the outcomes achieved.*



## Support in principle

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

The multidisciplinary organ and tissue donation workforce is 'small but mighty' in the context of Victoria's broader health workforce. The organ donation workforce operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It is imperative that we support DonateLife Victoria and the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria to maximise their key asset: staff. Both organisations proactively review and refine their recruitment strategies to identify and attract the best possible candidates for open and potential future positions.

DonateLife's donation specialist nursing coordinators and donation specialist nurses, family support coordinators and medical staff are pivotal to engaging families in conversations about organ and tissue donation and demystifying donation.

The Donor Tissue Bank plays a key role in providing access to tissue grafts for transplantation in orthopaedics, cardiothoracic, reconstructive surgery and burns care. These are areas sometimes not considered by some donors and families over more commonly known or considered organ donations.

Improving recruitment and retention strategies for organ and tissue donation specialists is crucial for maintaining expertise, meeting demand and optimising donation outcomes. The Victorian Government through the Department of Health will continue to work closely with DonateLife and the Donor Tissue Bank to identify opportunities to strengthen and expand their workforce and build capability across the health sector, to support the government's strategic priorities associated with tissue donation.

Expansion of the DonateLife and trained hospital workforce where possible would facilitate identification of potential tissue donors from end-of-life patients in all parts of the hospital system and support referral to the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria for tissue donation. Expansion of donation specialists and the trained hospital workforce to support this work will be subject to future budget consideration.

## Recommendation 10

*The Victorian Department of Health support DonateLife Victoria to work with the OTA to improve public reporting on donation specialist training, including by publishing jurisdictional level data about attendance and effectiveness of family donation conversation workshops.*

### Support in full

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

DonateLife Victoria conducts regular training for the organ and tissue donation specialist workforce. This training is guided by the OTA. The Victorian Government in collaboration with the OTA and DonateLife Victoria collects information on attendance and effectiveness of the training which informs the development of future training plans.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, will advocate to the OTA and DonateLife for improved publication of donation specialist training, workshop attendances and key outcomes to promote brand awareness and raise the profile of organ and tissue donation.

Publishing these data and information on recruitment activities helps raise awareness and may encourage young health professionals to consider the organ and tissue donation and transplantation workforce as an engaging career pathway.



## Recommendation 11

*The Victorian Government discuss at a national level the opportunity for all jurisdictions to seek to amend respective Human Tissue Acts to allow consenting, adult transplant recipients and donor families to choose to meet.*

### **Support in principle**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

The Australian Government has announced the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) is conducting an inquiry into human tissue laws in Australia to determine whether legislative reform is required to harmonise laws across the country. The findings of this review will inform Victoria's future policy position.

We note this is an extremely sensitive issue for families, and consideration must be given to people's wishes. As part of the ALRC review, we will be consulting health services, advocacy groups and other relevant stakeholders to understand and address barriers and limitations. If relevant amendments were to be made, privacy requirements and concerns would need to be fully explored and addressed to ensure any meeting is mutually consensual, without prejudice and within the arrangements agreed by all parties.

## Recommendation 12

*The Victorian Government seek to amend the Human Tissue Act 1982 (Vic) to allow health professionals and hospital staff to disclose information identifying a deceased donor for the purposes of including this information in the death register and on a death certificate with the consent of a donor's next of kin or authorised family member.*

### **Support in principle**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

The Victorian Government acknowledges the significance of recognising the altruistic act of organ donation and emphasising the incredible generosity of donors in giving the gift of life to others. The Committee heard from families who indicated inclusion of their loved one's donation on the death certificate would commemorate their selfless contribution on an official document associated with their passing.

Victoria is supportive of the legislation change in principle and will explore further what changes are appropriate following outcomes of the ALRC review.

If the *Human Tissue Act 1982 (Vic)* were to be amended as recommended, the Victorian Government would also need to consider the impact on the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996 (Vic)*. The Victorian Government, through the Department of Government Services, can work with relevant departments to examine the technical, information and security requirements associated with this recommendation, including those associated with privacy legislation and other legislative requirements.

## Recommendation 13

*The Victorian Government seek to amend the Births, Deaths, Marriages Registration Act 1996 (Vic) to provide a clear process to recognise a deceased donor (including a past donor) in the death register and on a death certificate*

### **Support in principle**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Government Services and the Department of Justice and Community Safety, will evaluate the legislative requirements and assess the necessary IT system changes and associated costs to deliver this change. The Government will also explore any potential alternative approaches that may more effectively achieve the intended outcomes of this recommendation.

## Recommendation 14

*The Victorian Department of Health review the current support arrangements for end-of-life care services for First Nations patients and families to ensure Victorian Aboriginal Liaison Officers are involved to help donation specialists lead culturally appropriate donation conversations and to assist families with decision making.*

### Support in full

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

The majority of Victorian public hospitals have Aboriginal Liaison Officers who are involved in providing care for First Nations patients. These officers also help First Nations patients and families with end-of-life care decision making, in collaboration with donation specialists. In addition, Victorian health services have mandatory training for staff to increase their cultural safety awareness.

This positions Victoria well to support implementation of a culturally safe approach to donation conversations informed by First Nations patients and families, as well as findings from the Australian Government's previous reviews<sup>1</sup> into supporting equity and access to organ and tissue donation and transplantation services across Victoria.

The Department of Health will strengthen engagement with Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, health services and DonateLife Victoria to develop key messaging and strategies to improve awareness of organ and tissue donor registration for First Nations people and to assist with family decision making.

## Recommendation 15

*The Victorian Department of Health build capacity for DonateLife Victoria to ensure recruitment strategies will grow the cultural and ethnic diversity of the donations specialist workforce to reflect the State's multicultural population, and further the ability of donation specialists to lead culturally appropriate donation conversations and assist with family decision making.*

### Support in full

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

Victoria is proud to be the centre of many cultures, languages and traditions. The Victorian Government embraces diversity and multiculturalism and is dedicated to reflecting this in all its policies, programs and services. As our community becomes more diverse, so too does our health workforce.

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<sup>1</sup> Review of the Australian organ donation, retrieval and transplantation system, report from the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care, 2018 (Ernst Young consultancy)

The Victorian Government is committed to strengthening engagement with diverse communities and First Nations people, educational institutes and other relevant stakeholders to explore new ways of attracting candidates from diverse cultural backgrounds to the organ and tissue donor workforce. Donation specialist workforce recruitment processes are open to candidates from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, will continue to collaborate with DonateLife Victoria to explore innovative recruitment approaches and better understand barriers to attracting donation specialists from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

## Recommendation 16

*The Victorian Government seek to amend the Human Tissue Act 1982 (Vic) to remove the requirement for DonateLife Victoria (DLV) to obtain the Minister for Health's approval for awareness activities or narrow the definition of advertising to exclude certain DLV awareness activities.*

### Support in principle

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

As indicated in response to Recommendations 11 and 12, the Australian Government has announced the ALRC is conducting an inquiry into human tissue laws in Australia to determine whether legislative reform is required to harmonise laws across the country. The findings of this review will inform Victoria's future policy position. This review is expected to take a minimum of 18 months.

In the interim, the Victorian Government will explore policy and potential regulatory actions to assist DonateLife Victoria to increase awareness within the current legislative framework.

## Recommendation 17

*The Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government for additional OTA funding to increase awareness campaigns about organ and tissue donation that use postcode data to target localities with low registration rates and tailor messaging based on demographic data.*

### Support in full

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

The *National Strategy for Organ Donation, Retrieval and Transplantation* was released on 1 November 2024. The Strategy aims to save and improve the lives of more Australians through a world's best practice, future-focussed and equitable organ donation, retrieval and transplantation system.

Enhancing national community awareness and messaging is one of the priority areas of the National Strategy drawing from demographic data and lived experience of recipients and families.

The Victorian Government is collaborating with the Commonwealth, states and territories and the OTA to address this priority and will actively participate in projects identified by the OTA for this purpose.

In addition, the Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, is working with DonateLife Victoria to raise community awareness of organ and tissue donation via multiple campaigns informed by demographic data and donor and family experiences.

## Recommendation 18

*The Victorian Government consult with and support DonateLife Victoria to undertake targeted awareness campaigns about organ and tissue donation using Victorian registration and demographic data and publicly report on the effectiveness of the activities undertaken.*

### **Support in full**

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

As indicated in response to Recommendation 17, the Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, will explore with DonateLife Victoria how best to raise community awareness of organ and tissue donation via campaigns informed by demographic data and donor and family experiences.

DonateLife has a wealth of data on donor registrations, consent conversion rates and barriers to family consent. This data is shared with health services as part of education and training programs to raise awareness of the importance of family conversations about organ and tissue donation wishes. It informs DonateLife's mainstream and social media campaigns targeted at demographic groups.

The Department of Health is engaging with DonateLife to support them to report on the effectiveness of their campaigns and share these findings with Safer Care Victoria, Victorian Government departments and other relevant stakeholders.

## Recommendation 19

*The Victorian Government ensure that all avenues it uses to promote organ and tissue donor registration include, where possible, personal stories from donor recipients and donor families, as well as content to dispel myths and misconceptions about donation and encourage people to discuss donation with their family.*

### **Support in full**

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

Media plays a vital role in raising awareness of the value of organ and tissue donation, demystifying registration and promoting the overwhelmingly positive impact that organ and tissue donation has in saving lives and improving people's quality of life.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, will continue to work with DonateLife Victoria and public health services to share stories highlighting the breadth of opportunities given to people through organ and tissue donation.

We all have a role to play in dispelling myths and misconceptions about donation and presenting information in a way that is factual, respectful and articulate and meets the needs of our diverse community.

Sharing personal stories from donor recipients and families increases the likelihood of conversations occurring amongst peer groups and within families when they are relaxed and open to considering the opportunity, rather than at a time of great stress and sadness.

## Recommendation 20

*The Victorian Government consult with and support DonateLife Victoria to:*

- *include information about tissue donation and its importance in all donation awareness and campaign materials.*

- *advocate to the OTA to increase its focus on tissue donation awareness, including by scoping the potential to add tissue to the name of the AODR.*

### **Support in part**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

The Victorian Government continues to work closely with DonateLife Victoria and the OTA to raise awareness of and promote organ and tissue donor registration.

Victorian Government funding directed to DonateLife actively supports the development of donation awareness and campaign materials to raise awareness about organ and tissue donation. There is existing collaboration between the experts from the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria and DonateLife with the aim of designing awareness campaign material, which is more effective, efficient, and impactful in increasing community understanding of donation and increasing registration rates. The Department of Health will work with both parties to focus on tissue donation awareness in future campaign materials.

The Victorian Government through the Department of Health in collaboration with other Australian states and territories and the Australian OTA via the Jurisdictional Advisory Group is exploring options with Services Australia for inclusion of tissue donation in public messaging.

## **Recommendation 21**

*The Victorian Government consult with community leaders, Elders and organisations to co-design and tailor engagement projects to provide opportunities to share information and talk about organ and tissue donation, including:*

- *the production of resources to engage with digitally disadvantaged Victorians through mail drops, as well as easy-read and translated resources.*
- *the provision of translated resources in different formats to promote registration and family discussion when Victorians engage with government touchpoints, including through driver licence applications and renewals.*
- *programs to support intergenerational discussion in families from multicultural and faith-based communities.*
- *a First Nations organ and tissue donation ambassador program.*

### **Support in principle**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

DonateLife Victoria conducts donation awareness mailbox drop campaigns in postcodes with identified lower English literacy. The promotional materials have been designed in plain language to promote broad comprehension and mitigate language barriers. Online resources are translated in multiple languages and can be accessed from DonateLife's community resource online library.

Work has already commenced at a national level to develop a framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organ and tissue donation excellence. The Department of Health intends to work closely with key stakeholders to inform this framework and support implementation.

The Department of Health will strengthen engagement with Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, health services and DonateLife to develop key messaging and strategies to improve awareness of organ and tissue donor registration for First Nations people, and to assist with family decision making. Victoria's extensive Aboriginal Liaison Officer network throughout hospitals

will enable us to identify champions and potential First Nations organ and tissue donation ambassadors.

## Recommendation 22

*The Victorian Government develop and deliver a program in conjunction with DonateLife Victoria and the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria targeted at 15- and 16-year-olds to increase knowledge about organ and tissue donation to enable informed decision making and promote effective family discussions ahead of becoming eligible for driver licences, and publicly report on the outcomes achieved by the program.*

### **Support in principle**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

Students in Years 9 and 10 are potential future organ and tissue donors. Engaging with them early in a familiar peer group environment may foster curiosity and interest in prompting discussions at home about organ and tissue donation.

To this end, DonateLife Victoria has released online education resources aimed at students in Years 9 and 10. The 9 lessons about organ and tissue donation are aligned with the Australian Curriculum. Each has its own unique format, including a range of activities and information presented through video, media clips and other forms of engaging content.

The Victorian Government's lead portfolio departments will support the promotion of these resources in education and health settings and collaborate with DonateLife Victoria and Donor Tissue Bank to assess their impact and efficacy.

## Recommendation 23

*The Victorian Government include information about organ and tissue donation in the primary and secondary school curriculum.*

### **Support in part**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

The Victorian Curriculum Version 2.0 includes information about organ and tissue donation in Levels 7-10 as part of the Biological Sciences Strand in the Science learning area. Students are provided the opportunity to discuss how organs function, what happens when they fail and how organ transplantation can save lives.

Organ donation is not explicitly included in the primary school curriculum as learning about the structure and function of organs does not commence until early secondary school.

## Recommendation 24

*The Victorian Department of Education promote awareness and family discussion about organ and tissue donation to Victorian schools during DonateLife Week, as well as consider how schools can use other touchpoints to share information about donation, such as via social media.*

### **Support in full**

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

The Department of Education will support the promotion of family awareness about organ and tissue donation through its communication channels to schools during DonateLife Week. This can include disseminating Department of Health and DonateLife Victoria campaign materials to support conversation starters for family discussion.

## Recommendation 25

*The Victorian Government enhance collaboration with DonateLife Victoria to increase the presence of promotional and educational material about organ and tissue donation through television, radio, social media, and online platforms, as well as posters, billboards, and pamphlets in public spaces, and publicly report on initiatives and their effectiveness.*

### **Support in part**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

As indicated in response to Recommendation 19, media plays a vital role in raising awareness of the value of organ and tissue donation, demystifying registration and promoting the overwhelmingly positive impact that organ and tissue donation has in saving lives and improving quality of life.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, will actively work with DonateLife Victoria and public health services to increase the presence of promotional and educational material about organ and tissue donation across mainstream and social media platforms. This will include engagement with multicultural and ethnically diverse communities.

The Victorian Government will collaborate with DonateLife Victoria to investigate and develop robust methodologies for assessing the impact and efficacy of marketing campaigns at increasing donor registration and report on their effectiveness following evaluation.

Victoria has been a major force in the organ donation and transplantation sector and has saved and improved the lives of many Australians. Introducing organ and tissue donor registration in social contexts will hopefully engage more Victorians to consider registering their intent to donate.

## Recommendation 26

*The Victorian Government assist DonateLife Victoria to collaborate and form partnerships to encourage people to register on the AODR with Victorian businesses, including farming and health insurers, charities, not-for-profits, professional and sporting associations, and unions.*

### **Support in full**

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

Currently there is a state-funded dedicated community engagement coordinator employed at DonateLife Victoria who engages with different parts of the community to promote organ donation registration. This position is supported by local volunteers who help to increase awareness at different social and sporting events.

The Victorian Government, in partnership with DonateLife, will investigate new opportunities to increase collaboration and improve engagement with Victorian businesses, including farming and health insurers, charities, not-for-profits, professional and sporting associations and unions, to increase awareness and donor registration.



## Recommendation 27

*The Victorian Department of Health support and encourage DonateLife Victoria and Lifeblood to work together to increase the promotion of organ and tissue donation through Lifeblood's network, and publicly report on the outcomes achieved through these initiatives.*

### **Support in full**

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, is actively involved with DonateLife Victoria, Lifeblood and the OTA in the promotion of organ and tissue donation, meeting regularly to explore options to increase promotion. Sharing stories of donor families, transplant recipients and workforce scenarios through training helps raise awareness and foster discussion in the community about organ and tissue donation.

Public reporting on the outcomes of promotion campaigns may also assist in raising awareness of the value and benefit of organ and tissue donation, and over time increase the number of registered donors. The Department of Health will continue to explore options to further advance the sharing of information and stories, data and outcomes.

## Recommendation 28

*The Victorian Government advocate to the OTA for increased transparency and accountability about OTA-funded donation awareness activities, especially those that aim to increase registrations and encourage family discussion.*

### **Support in full**

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

We acknowledge the importance of monitoring and evaluating donation awareness activities to inform future direction and allocation of resources. The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, will advocate to the OTA through jurisdictional advisory group meetings for increased transparency and accountability about OTA-funded donation awareness activities.

## Recommendation 29

*The Victorian Department of Health advocate through the national Health Ministers' meeting for increased Australian Government funding for the Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR).*

### **Support in part**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

Victoria actively participates in intergovernmental discussions relating to funding and resources that underpin the national haemopoietic progenitor cell arrangements. The ABMDR plays a key role in the coordination of haemopoietic progenitor (stem) cell donations, including donor recruitment and registration, and the coordination of donation and retrieval activities.

The Victorian Minister for Health has endorsed the *National Haemopoietic Progenitor Cell Framework*, which aims to ensure continued and improved access to life-extending and lifesaving haemopoietic progenitor cell transplants for Australian patients.

In February 2023, Victoria joined other Health Ministers in approving the release of \$1 million from the Cord Blood Export Revenue (CBER) fund to support ABMDR and the Australian Red Cross Lifeblood to increase Haemopoietic Progenitor Cell donor recruitment via cheek swabs and blood testing.

## Recommendation 30

*The Victorian Government routinely use multiple government channels to promote awareness of stem cell donations and registration on the ABMDR through the Strength to Give cheek swab campaign and blood donation.*

### **Support in full**

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, is actively working with state and territory colleagues to understand the impact of campaigns in their jurisdictions. This will inform how Victoria can best promote meaningful campaigns that target distinct cohorts through the Strength to Give cheek swab campaign as needed to support Victoria's diverse population.

## Recommendation 31

*The Victorian Government support Lifeblood, the ABMDR and stem cell donor recruitment organisations to extend the reach of stem cell donor awareness and recruitment campaigns, including support to facilitate cheek swab collection at community events.*

### **Support in full**

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, is working with Commonwealth, State and Territory colleagues to support cheek swab collection at community events via implementation of the National Haemopoietic Progenitor Cell Framework. The Victorian Government is exploring all options available to raise awareness of stem cell donor registration.

## Recommendation 32

*The Victorian Government review the current arrangements for stem cell donor recruitment in Victoria and make changes to allow for the larger scale recruitment of stem cell donors.*

### **Support in full**

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, is working with state and territory colleagues to consider a national approach to the recruitment of stem cell donors. In March 2024, the Commonwealth Government, together with state and territory Health Ministers, announced the release of \$4.2 million of funds to help boost the supply of local bone marrow donations. This was in addition to the release of \$1 million in February 2023 to increase bone marrow donor recruitment.

## Recommendation 33

*The Victorian Government support Lifeblood and the ABMDR to ensure stem cell donor recruitment activities in Victoria target the recruitment of younger Victorians and those from ethnically diverse backgrounds through initiatives like education campaigns in schools or higher education institution.*

### **Support in full**

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, is working with state and territory colleagues to support stem cell donor recruitment activities with Lifeblood and the ABMDR. This

includes targeted recruitment of donors from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Further options involving schools and education facilities will be explored with clinical and education experts.

## Recommendation 34

*The Victorian Department of Health advocate through the national Health Minister's meeting for:*

- a. immediate funding to expand Strength to Give and stem cell donor recruitment.*
- b. the immediate release of the \$1 million in stem cell donor recruitment funds agreed in 2023.*
- c. a commitment to establish a permanent and ongoing funding mechanism for stem cell donor recruitment.*

### **Support in part**

The Victorian Government supports components (a) and (b) of this recommendation in full and supports the intent of part (c).

As noted in the response to Recommendation 32, at the 24 February 2023 Health Ministers meeting, the Victorian Government endorsed the release of \$1.0 million in stem cell donor funds. The funds were released as planned in 2023. In March 2024, the Commonwealth Government, together with state and territory Health Ministers, announced the release of \$4.2 million of funds to increase the number and diversity of bone marrow donors on the ABMDR.

The Victorian Government will continue to work in partnership with state and territory colleagues to strengthen stem cell donor recruitment.

## Recommendation 35

*The Victorian Department of Health consider methods to provide greater support for living donors and advocate to the Australian Government for the Supporting Living Organ Donors Program to be expanded.*

### **Support in principle**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

The Victorian Government notes that there is a financial burden on live donors that could deter potential donors from the altruistic act of donation.

The Supporting Living Organ Donors Program is a national program that provides financial support to eligible living donors of a kidney or partial liver. The Victorian Government recognises that the program might not fully cover a donor's various expenses during donation and recovery, such as medical expenses, medications, childcare and eldercare expenses, meals and other supplies, follow-up care and testing.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, will continue to raise this matter with the Commonwealth through the Organ and Tissue Donation specialist working groups and jurisdictional forums. The Department of Health will advocate for investigation of methods to provide better care and financial support for live donors that leverage national and international best practices, noting that new initiatives will be subject to available resourcing.

## Recommendation 36

*The Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety and Victorian Department of Health better support DonateLife Victoria and the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria to increase understanding about tissue donation in the medical community and publicly report on progress.*

### **Support in principle**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, will continue to work closely with DonateLife Victoria and the Donor Tissue Bank to identify opportunities and build capability across the health sector.

Training, awareness and expertise on organ donation within the Victorian medical workforce is exceptional – including through programs run by medical colleges such as the Australian College for Emergency Medicine, the College of Intensive Care Medicine of Australia and the New Zealand and Australian College of Critical Care Nurses.

DonateLife has recently commenced a simulation training exercise for their donation workforce that in future may help demonstrate the value of organ and tissue donation as a module for other specialist staff simulation training programs. The Department of Health will work with DonateLife and Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria on opportunities to expand the current education and training program for donation specialist staff to increase understanding of tissue donation.

## Recommendation 37

*The Victorian Government explore options and consult with other states with similar initiatives to:*

- *notify DonateLife Victoria, Melbourne Lions Eye Donation Service and the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria (DTBV) about deaths that potentially involve organ and tissue and tissue-only donations in real time.*
- *facilitate better sharing of hospital medical records and patient information with DTBV, which may involve seeking better working relationships between agencies in the Victorian Department of Health and Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS).*
- *consider the appropriateness of DTBV being situated within DJCS.*

### **Support in principle**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

The Victorian Government, through relevant portfolio departments, is working collaboratively with other states and territories to investigate notification of the relevant stakeholders of deaths that may involve organ and tissue donor opportunities in real-time.

Considerable scoping work and exploration of numerous data definitions, nomenclature and interoperability of systems will need to be considered in detail to inform a workable solution. These will be explored further by Victoria as advancements in the utilisation of medical records in Victoria progress and resourcing is available.

## Recommendation 38

*The Victorian Department of Health monitor the capacity of the Melbourne Lions Eye Donation Service (LEDS) facility at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital and consider the potential for*

*expansion, relocation of a purpose-built facility to ensure LEDS has the capacity to meet future demand.*

### **Support in principle**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

Monitoring the capacity of the Melbourne Lions Eye Donation Services facility forms part of the Victorian Government's strategic service planning agenda. Further consideration is required in the context of the Victorian Government's August 2024 announcement of the formation of Local Health Service Networks following release of the Health Services Plan. This work is currently underway across the Department of Health, and the department will engage with key stakeholders as the plan develops.

## **Recommendation 39**

*The Victorian Department of Health in consultation with DonateLife Victoria explore the potential for rural and regional hospitals to employ donation specialists part-time or in a dual role to better embed an organ and tissue donation culture and improve donation knowledge for broader hospital staff.*

### **Support in part**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

Organ and tissue donation registration rates have always been higher in rural Victoria than in metropolitan Melbourne. However, the donation rate is low in rural Victoria, likely due to factors such as geographical isolation which limits access to specialised medical facilities, expertise and resources available to support the donation process.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, will work directly with DonateLife Victoria to explore effective engagement strategies aimed at increasing knowledge and expertise in organ and tissue donation with regional and rural health services, and scope a recruitment strategy focussing on regional and rural services.

## **Recommendation 40**

*The Victorian Government support the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria to determine feasibility of employing mobile tissue retrieval teams to travel to different sites, including in rural and regional locations, to retrieve and transport tissue donations.*

### **Support in principle**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

There is already tremendous collaboration between Victorian regional and metropolitan services in support of organ and tissue donation, retrieval and transplantation. The Donor Tissue Bank has a network of service providers to facilitate regional transfers for tissue donation within the necessary timeframe.

As outlined in response to Recommendation 38, the Victorian Government will address this recommendation in the context of the Victorian Government's August 2024 announcement of the formation of Local Health Service Networks following release of the Health Services Plan.

## Recommendation 41

*The Victorian Government explore ways to improve how organ and tissue donation is considered in government templates for advance care planning, wills, and powers of attorney, including linking Victorians to register on the AODR and sharing links to help them talk to their family about donation.*

### **Support in principle**

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

*The Medical Treatment Planning and Decisions Act 2016 (Vic)* sets out a legislative framework to enable Victorians with decision making capacity to document their future health preferences.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Health, will include information in advance care planning information resources and include links to the AODR where possible. The Department of Health will also insert links to the OTA and DonateLife Victoria information resources, particularly videos and vignettes that outline case studies and family stories of organ and tissue donors and transplant recipients, to raise awareness of how individuals can support the cause.

In addition, the Department of Health will work with Government Services to map opportunities for linking web-based information resources on organ and tissue donor registration and resources for wills and estate planning. An existing example of this is Legal Aid's guidance material which prompts people to consider organ donation when making their will.