

Organ, Tissue, and Body Donation

Information Sheet

I. Organ and Tissue Donation

Statistics on organ and tissue donation

- In 2016 more than 9,970 deceased donors and nearly 6,000 living donors made possible nearly 33,000 organ transplants in the United States.
- There were also more than 1 million tissue transplants, including 82,994 corneal transplants. Other tissue transplants include bone, skin, tendons and ligaments, cartilage, arteries and veins, and heart valves.
- More than 118,000 people currently await organ transplants. About 18 people die each day due to a lack of available organs.
- Each organ donor can save 8 lives and a tissue donor can help more than 75 people.
- Donors may be of any age, as each case is considered individually. About 35% of deceased organ donors are over 50 years old, as are 60% of organ recipients.

How to Specify Your Wish to Donate Tissues or Organs

Organ and tissue donation uses a centralized statewide database, collection, and distribution system. When someone is close to death or has died, the database is automatically consulted to determine whether that person is a registered donor. Death must occur in a hospital in order for organ and tissue donation to be feasible.

There are three ways in Oklahoma to identify that you want to donate organs and tissue after you die.

1. Check “Yes” on the application and renewal forms for either your Oklahoma driver’s license or state ID card.
2. Sign up directly with LifeShare, the organization designated by US Department of Health and Human Services to coordinate organ donation in Oklahoma.
3. Complete the Anatomical Gifts Section of your Advance Directive. (This does not by itself enter you on the state’s database.)

Donation “for transplant and therapy” or for “research, education, and science”

You or your representative may elect to donate organs and tissue for transplant to another person or therapy for another person. This is what most people think of when they think of organ donation.

However, it is also possible to donate organs and tissue for other purposes, including development of new surgical procedures, training on medical devices and processes, or scientific research. This set of alternative uses is not as well-regulated as transplantation and may include international groups, and both nonprofit and for profit organizations. If you elect to donate for “science, research, and education,” this broader range of purposes is considered as well.

Donation of a body for training of medical students and research at the university is possible through OU and OSU schools of medicine in Oklahoma. If this is your intent, do *not* register as an organ donor, and instead register directly with the university.(See section on Body Donation below.) If you wish to donate an organ for study by a university or disease group studying a specific condition, you need to register with that group directly. An example of this is the group in Boston studying brain injury among athletes in football and other contact sports.

Oklahoma Driver’s License or State ID Card: The application and renewal forms provide a box to check “yes” or “no” for being an organ and tissue donor. By checking the ‘yes’ box, you are automatically entered into the Oklahoma LifeShare database and assumed to be willing to donate for transplantation and other uses and that any or all organs and tissues may be donated.

Your license will have a notation that tells any health care provider that you have elected to be an organ donor. (The little red heart.)

They will attempt to use organs and tissue for transplantation first, and will then consider other uses if transplantation is not an option.

Direct Registration with LifeShare: You may also register directly with LifeShare. In this case, even though your license or ID card does not have the notation, you will be registered as a donor, and when the medical facility calls the registry, you would show as a donor with any restrictions you may have specified.

The LifeShare registration allows you to pick the purpose of donation: “Transplant” or “Both Transplant and Research”. You may also exclude specific tissue or organs that you do *not* want to donate at all. Entries that you make on the LifeShare website or written form will provide additional detail to your initial driver’s license designation. The most recent information you enter, by whatever means, is associated with your record.

LifeShare Website registration link: <https://www.lifeshareregistry.org/register/>

Telephone registration: 800-826-LIFE

Advance Directive: The advance directive also provides an opportunity to designate both the purpose of your donation and the organs and tissue you wish to donate.

The Advance Directive must be available to medical staff at time of death in order to be followed. If you are in an accident or are struck down by something very sudden, your advance directive may not be available to medical staff. Your healthcare proxy may also direct medical staff to follow your wishes as expressed in the Advance Directive.

Advice we have received is that you should not rely on the Advance Directive alone to be effective; registering through the state database is recommended.

The Donation Process

Hospitals and medical personnel are required by law to call the state organ donation registry (LifeShare in Oklahoma), as you approach death or upon your death, to see if you have registered as an organ donor. LifeShare has staff onsite at the major Tulsa hospitals.

If you have not registered with LifeShare, but your advance directive is available, the instructions in your directive will be followed. If you have not made your wishes known, your health care proxy may make decisions on anatomical gifts before and after your death. If you have not appointed a proxy, the law allows your family to make these decisions.

As soon as possible, either when your death is imminent or immediately after your death, the LifeShare team will evaluate your medical status to determine which organs and tissues are suitable for transplant purposes. With permission, steps will be taken as necessary to keep these organs viable. If transplant is not possible, they will evaluate suitability for research purposes. LifeShare is also responsible for removing tissues and organs, for identifying transplant recipients of donations, and for arranging for transport. After organs and tissue have been removed, the body is returned to the custody of the family for burial or cremation.

LifeShare Transplant Donor Services of Oklahoma pays for all procedures, tests or evaluations needed for donation. Funeral arrangements and costs remain the responsibility of the family.

There is another organization active in Tulsa, which handles donation of bodies, tissue, and organs for research, science and education. This organization, United Tissue Network, works with LifeShare and the hospitals when donation for transplant and therapy is not feasible. UTN operates in Oklahoma, Arizona, and Florida, and accepts donations for a wide range of non-transplant usages throughout the world and for both non-profit and for-profit clients. The UTN program cremates any unused remains, and returns them to the family after six months or two years.

Questions and Answers about organ and tissue donation,
from LifeShare Publication

Today, a severe shortage of organs for transplantation exists in our country. Despite continuing efforts at public education, misconceptions and inaccuracies about donation persist. Deciding against donation based on inaccurate information is a tragedy.

Q. If emergency room doctors know you're an organ donor, will they work as hard to save you?

A. If you are sick or injured and admitted to the hospital, the number one priority is to save your life. Organ and tissue recovery takes place only after all efforts to save your life have been exhausted and death has been legally declared. The medical team treating you is completely separate from the organ recovery team.

Q. Does certain history of medical illness mean your organs or tissues are unfit for donation?

A. At the time of death, the appropriate medical professionals will review your medical and social history to determine whether you will be a candidate for donation. Each potential donor is evaluated on a case by case basis. With recent advances in transplantation, more people have the opportunity to become donors.

Q. When do you become too old to be a donor?

A. People of all ages and medical histories will be considered as potential donors. Your medical condition at the time of death will determine which organs and tissue can be donated.

Q. Does my family have to pay for organ and tissue donation?

A. No. The donor family is never billed for expenses related to donation. LifeShare Transplant Donor Services of Oklahoma pays for all procedures, tests or evaluations needed following legal death for the donation process. Funeral costs remain the responsibility of the family.

II. Donation of Body to Medical School

The medical schools of both Oklahoma University and Oklahoma State University have programs to accept bodies for medical education and research, operated under the oversight of the State Anatomical Board.

If you wish to donate your body, you should apply directly to the medical school and be accepted into their program prior to your death. They usually issue an identification card, which you should carry with your identification, because your participation in their programs is not recorded in the state donor database.

You should *not* also register as an organ and tissue donor, because the university programs cannot accept bodies if they have been used for organ or tissue donation.

At time of death, the medical school will need to be notified immediately, by a doctor, family member, or other person who knows your wishes. You may include information about this in the anatomical gifts section of the Advance Directive, although it is not set up to handle this well, or attach the acceptance letter from the program you have selected to your Advance Directive. OSU and OU also provide an identification card to carry in your wallet. You are encouraged to make sure that your family and doctors know of your wishes.

Once notified of your death, the institution will determine whether it can accept the body donation, dependent on their current needs, medical circumstances, and other criteria. Both OU and OSU can accept bodies within about 100 miles of Tulsa or Oklahoma City. There is no cost associated with body donation.

They will also cremate the body after it has been used, and will return the cremains to the family or arrange for other disposition if agreed to. It may be a year or two before the cremains are returned.

Finally, you need to have a backup plan for burial or cremation, in case the institution declines to accept the body donation at time of death.

For further information:

OU Willed Body Program: 405-271-2424 Ext 0

[https://www.oumedicine.com/college-of-medicine/information-about/office-of-medical-education-\(ome\)/willed-body-program](https://www.oumedicine.com/college-of-medicine/information-about/office-of-medical-education-(ome)/willed-body-program)

OSU Body Donation Program: 918-561- 1250

For information write to OSU Body Donor Program, 1111 W. 17th St., Tulsa, OK 74107