

News story: Government announces consultation on organ donation opt-out system

The Prime Minister has announced the intention to launch a public consultation on increasing rates of organ donation. The proposals will include a new opt-out system for organ donation for England. The consultation will be launched by the end of the year.

In 2016 to 2018 there were 1,169 deceased organ donors and 3,293 transplants in England. While this was the highest ever rate of organ donation, there are still more people waiting for transplants than there are organs available. It means some people die before a suitable organ becomes available.

There are particularly long waiting times for those in black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. Consent rates for organ donation are also low in these communities, at around 35% compared to 66% in the white population.

Under the current system, anyone wishing to donate their organs has to opt in via the registration and organ donor card scheme run by NHS Blood and Transplant. A family member can also agree to the donation of organs if the person had not made their wishes known.

The consultation will outline ways to increase rates of organ donation and propose a new approach where every person would be deemed to have given consent to unless they choose to opt out. It will run for 12 weeks.

The Department of Health will seek views on:

- how government can increase rates of organ donation, particularly from BAME communities
- how the issue of consent should be managed within the NHS
- what role technology could play in helping people to discuss their preferences with family
- how opt-out could work in practice, what safeguards would be necessary, and how families could be supported

There is currently a severe shortage of suitable organs, with around 6,500 people currently on transplant waiting lists. Every day up to 3 people die while waiting for an organ to become available.

Last year just over 6% of deceased donors were from black and Asian communities, with people waiting on average 6 months longer for a kidney transplant than a white patient. Work is already underway to address the fact that consent rates for organ donation in these communities are lower than in the white population. This will continue alongside the consultation.

The government will carefully consult, listen and take account of the views of people from a diverse range of ethnic, religious and cultural communities

when considering any changes to the law.

A model of 'presumed consent' was introduced in Wales in 2015 and the Scottish government announced its intention to introduce similar legislation earlier this year.

Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt said:

Too many people still wait too long for an urgent transplant and we must urgently address this. Just as most people would be willing to accept an organ if their life was at risk, most people would be willing to donate one to help save somebody else.

All these issues will be looked at in the consultation and we welcome all those with views to come forward with their contributions.

Full details of the consultation will be released later in the year. The government is seeking a wide range of opinions and asks anyone with a view to take part.

If you would like to receive updates on this issue please sign up to our [organ donation mailing list](#).