

News story: New system of consent for organ and tissue donation announced

The government has outlined plans to implement a new system of consent for organ and tissue donation in order to tackle a shortage of donors. This will mean everyone is considered an organ donor unless they have explicitly recorded a wish not to be or they are from one of these excluded groups:

- children under 18
- individuals who lack the mental capacity to understand the changes
- people who have not lived in England for at least 12 months before their death

The donor register will include an option for individuals to state important religious and cultural beliefs to ensure these are respected. There will also be strict safeguards in place and specialist nurses will always discuss donation with families so an individual's wishes are respected.

The proposed new system is expected to come into effect in England in spring 2020 as part of a drive to help people waiting for a life-saving transplant. There will be a 12-month transition period to allow time for discussion with friends and family about organ donation preferences.

The legislation was introduced in Parliament last July and is expected to return to the House of Commons in the autumn.

While the new system shifts the balance of presumption in favour of organ donation, those who do not wish to donate their organs will still be able to record their decision on the NHS Organ Donor Register, either via NHS Blood and Transplant's website or by calling their helpline. The NHS app, launching at the end of this year, will make it even easier for people to record their decision.

Jackie Doyle-Price, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Mental Health and Inequalities, said:

Organ donation saves lives. We believe that by making these changes, we can save as many as 700 more lives every year.

But organ donation remains a gift. I want to encourage people who wish to give life in the event of their death to take the time to record their wishes and discuss it with their family.

However, we know this new system alone is not a magic bullet. We need to address myths and misconceptions around donation, and we will only do this by having informed debate and dialogue, which I hope will be fostered by these proposals.