



# Organ donation - it's the greatest gift of all

**Kate Ellis**



**L**ET'S be honest, there aren't many positives that come from death. But perhaps organ donation brings with it the only bit of light from an otherwise sombre circumstance.

There's no doubt that David Hookes was a great cricketer, but the legacy he has left is equally impressive.

In keeping with David's wishes, his family donated his organs - and by doing so, sparked a tide of overwhelming public support for an issue which is too often overlooked.

The success of the David Hookes Foundation - set up by his family to increase public awareness and the number of organ donors - is testament to the man himself.

The Foundation has been pivotal in bringing this issue to the attention of South Australians. We are now much more acutely aware that, at any given time, around 1800 Australians are waiting for the call telling them an organ has become available.

And we now know the sad reality for too many Australians is that the call may never come.

That's why this week the Prime Minister announced that the Rudd Government is providing the national leadership that Australia needs to lift organ donation rates and to make it possible to save more lives and return many people to good health.

He explained that the move to establish the Australian Organ Donation and Transplantation Authority was due in large part to the call for action emerging from the 2020 Summit earlier this year. And the Government realises that the establishment of a national organ donation scheme and the necessary investment of \$151.1 million is also long overdue.

For far too long, organ donation rates in Australia have lagged behind many other nations, despite high levels of community support. And for too long, Australians have been left desperately waiting, month after month, for a transplant that could mean the difference between a normal, healthy life and debilitating chronic illness - or even life and death.

Take last year, for example, there were just 198 deceased donors, which resulted in 657 transplants - not even coming close to the number of Australians in need. With the injection of significant new funds to employ trained specialist staff and assist hospitals, raise community awareness and provide counselling support for donor families, the Government is committed to establishing Australia as a world leader in organ donation and transplantation.

Measures are being put in place at the heart of the problem where our organ donor system is currently falling down - in the emergency wards and intensive care units of our hospitals.

At the moment, we don't have enough trained staff who are expert in helping families when they are faced with this, often seen as confronting, situation.

It is a very fine line these staff tread as they navigate families through this difficult time - a skill requiring great sensitivity and empathy.

But the pressures placed on our hospitals can mean that this interaction can get lost in the mix.

What adds to this problem is a lack of dedicated hospital resources to manage the clinical procedures necessary which explains why, despite an increase of one million in the number of organ donor registrations since 2002 to

a total of six million registrations, there has been no increase in the number of lives being saved through transplants.

Despite the significant new investment that we are making through this scheme, the Government recognises that we can't do it alone. In his speech to the House when introducing the legislation to establish the Authority, the Prime Minister acknowledged that the media plays a key role in lifting organ donation rates in Australia too.

When the media reports on successful transplants, effective donation rates go up. The media reminds us that we too are an important part of the story. And when the media gets behind an organisation, such as the David Hookes Foundation, there's often a surge in public interest and support.

As Australians, we love to rally around a good cause and this, the chance to change and even save lives, is one of the greatest.

Organ donation is something that as a nation we need to consider. Lifting organ donor rates will help build a more efficient health system and help sick Australians back to full participation in work and the community. But on a personal note, it must also be considered.

It's natural that no one really wants to think about our inevitable death. But it really is worthwhile to think about the legacy we can all leave through organ donation - and you don't have to be a great cricketer to do that.

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**GIFT OF LIFE:** David Hookes at Adelaide Oval in 2002