

# DailySouthtown

## To Your Health: Organ donation

<http://www.dailysouthtown.com/lifestyles/467853.toyrhealth717.article>

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By Chuck Connolly

One of the pleasures of writing an occasional column is not only the satisfaction that comes from sharing important health information, but also having readers share valuable health information with me.

In a recent column, I made reference to the organ donor program in Illinois. Shortly after that piece ran, David Bosch, communications director of Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network, contacted me. David is president of Donate Life America and chairs Donate Life Illinois, a campaign to encourage 3.5 million Illinoisans to register as organ/tissue donors by April 2008.

He had some very important and timely information regarding organ/tissue donation in Illinois that I told him I would pass along.

Here's what David had to say:

Though organ/tissue donation can be designated in a living will or advance directive document, the reality is that these documents are not always quickly located or available when an individual passes away — particularly in the short time frame necessary for donation to take place.

This is why the state's donor registry exists. It is a central location for donor decisions that is confidential and immediately accessible at the time of a patient's death by our coordinators, who work with family members and the hospital to facilitate the donation.

What many Illinois residents may not realize is that Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White established a new registry more than a year ago. Unlike before, the new registry ensures your decision to donate will be carried out without the need for additional consent from others.

If you're among the millions of Illinoisans who registered as a donor before Jan. 1, 2006: Put down the paper, go to your computer and take 30 seconds to re-register online. Signing the back of your driver's license is no longer adequate to ensure your wishes to be a donor are carried out — you need to re-register.

If you haven't re-registered, your family or another legal authority must give additional consent at the time of your death before you can become a donor.

In other words, your wishes to donate may or may not be honored. In the past, nearly 20 percent of registered donors had their wishes overturned by family members because they didn't know their loved ones' wishes, or they didn't want to make the decision on their loved one's behalf. Most often, they were simply too emotionally exhausted to make the decision.

The result is that approximately 100 more organ life-saving transplants could have taken place each year, but did not.

At the same time, about 250 Illinoisans die each year while waiting for donated organs to become available.

Today, more than 4,700 Illinoisans are waiting for organ transplants.

The sooner that all Illinoisans join the new registry, the sooner more registered donors' decisions are honored — and more lives are saved.

I encourage all Illinoisans to take action and go to [www.iamareyou.org](http://www.iamareyou.org). There, you can take those 30 seconds to re-register in the Illinois Secretary of State's new donor registry and forward a message to others to do the same.

Keep in mind that virtually anyone can become a donor and your medical eligibility is confirmed at the time of your passing. There is no cost associated with donation to you or your family, and all major religions support donation as one of the greatest acts of human compassion.

It's all about giving others a chance to live. The next 30 seconds is your chance to make that difference. Please take it.

Donate Life Illinois is supported by a coalition of organizations including the Illinois chapter of the American Liver Foundation, the Illinois Coalition of Community Blood Centers, the Illinois Secretary of State Organ/Tissue Donor Program, Mid-America Transplant Services, Illinois Eye-Bank, Musculoskeletal Transplant Foundation and the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois.

*Chuck Connolly is executive director of marketing, communications and enrollment services at Governors State University, which is a member of the Southland Health Alliance. For more information on the Alliance, please visit [www.southlandhealth.org](http://www.southlandhealth.org).*