



## Organ and tissue donation for transplants position statement

### 1. Purpose

This position statement sets out the responsibilities the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) considers health services should meet to optimise opportunities for organ and tissue donation while ensuring their processes are respectful and effective.

### 2. Definitions

**Organ and tissue donation** is when a person (donor) donates their organs or tissue to another person (a recipient) so the recipient can have their damaged organs or tissue replaced through a lifesaving medical procedure called a transplant. Donors can be people who have died (non-beating-heart donors); people who have been clinically declared 'brain dead'; or people who are living (living donors).<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Context

The ANMF supports efforts to increase organ and tissue donation and allow health services to maximise opportunities for lifesaving transplants. As nurses and midwives play a pivotal role in the organ donation and transplantation process, including by identifying and caring for potential donors, it is essential that health services have clear, respectful and effective processes and procedures in place that support nurses and midwives in this role.

### 4. Position

#### Key principles

It is the position of the ANMF that the following principles must always be upheld:

1. Providing nursing or midwifery care to a person should always take precedence over the person's potential to donate organs or tissue.
2. Nurses and midwives must always fulfil their duty of care to the person in their care.
3. Nurses and midwives should follow the ethical guidelines set down by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM).<sup>2,3,4</sup>
4. Access to organ and tissue transplantation must be provided equitably to potential recipients and there should be transparency in the allocation process.

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<sup>1</sup> Donate Life. 2021. Australian Government Organ and Tissue Authority. *What is organ and tissue donation?* Available at <https://www.donatelife.gov.au/about-donation/frequently-asked-questions>.

*National protocol for donation after cardiac death.* Available at: <https://www.donatelife.gov.au/for-healthcare-workers/clinical-guidelines-and-protocols/national-guideline-donation-after-circulatory-death>.

*Understanding living donation.* Available at <https://www.donatelife.gov.au/about-donation/living-donation>.

<sup>2</sup> National Health and Medical Research Council. 2016. *Ethical guidelines for organ transplantation from deceased donors.* Canberra: NHMRC.

<sup>3</sup> International Council of Nurses. 2012. *The ICN code of ethics for nurses.* Geneva: ICN. Available at: [https://www.icn.ch/sites/default/files/2023-06/ICN\\_Code-of-Ethics\\_EN\\_Web.pdf](https://www.icn.ch/sites/default/files/2023-06/ICN_Code-of-Ethics_EN_Web.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> See the ICM Code of ethics available at: <https://www.internationalmidwives.org/our-work/policy-and-practice/international-code-of-ethics-for-midwives.html>.



5. Governments and health services must invest in the education and training of nurses and midwives to ensure they are familiar with government and local health authority policies and procedures regarding organ and tissue donation.<sup>5</sup>
6. A person's decision about donating or not donating must always be respected.
7. Nurses and midwives should continue to raise community awareness and stakeholder engagement across Australia to promote organ and tissue donation.<sup>6</sup>

### Healthcare services' responsibilities

#### Donation

It is the position of the ANMF that healthcare services engaging in organ and tissue donation, including from living donors, must:

8. have appropriate policies in place to protect donors; support donor families; and support hospital staff – these policies and guidelines must reflect the relevant human tissue acts (however titled) and align with the NHMRC ethical guidelines
9. have procedures in place that facilitate timely liaison with other health practitioners, including organ donor coordinators, to ensure all legal obligations are met; appropriate family discussions take place; and the psychological, cultural and spiritual needs of families are recognised and supported
10. provide counselling and other assistance to healthcare staff who experience distress during the process of organ and tissue donation and caring for the donor's family.

#### Transplant

It is the position of the ANMF that healthcare services engaging in transplantation must:

11. have effective liaison procedures in place between transplant recipient coordinators, transplant teams and direct care staff, including nurses and midwives, to support optimal care outcomes for transplant recipients
12. have appropriate policies and guidelines in place to protect recipients
13. employ registered nurse coordinators/consultants to work with transplant recipients and their families to co-ordinate their care along the whole care journey
14. have effective procedures in place to preserve and protect the confidentiality of the donor and the recipient and their families.

## 5. Position statement management

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<sup>4</sup> Smith Z, Woods C, Usher K, Lea, J. 2019. Australian perioperative nurses' attitudes, levels of knowledge, education and support needs related to organ donation and procurement surgery: a national survey. *Journal of Perioperative Nursing*, 32 (2): Article 2. Available at <https://www.journal.acorn.org.au/jpn/vol32/iss2/2/>.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Government Organ and Tissue Authority. 2021. *Best practice guideline for offering organ and tissue donation in Australia* (2nd edition). Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. Available at <https://donatelifelife.gov.au/resources/clinical-guidelines-and-protocols/best-practice-guideline-offering-organ-and-tissue>.