

The Legislative Council of Western Australia Public Administration Committee:

Inquiry Into Organ and Tissue Donation

The Standing Committee on Public Administration resolved to establish an inquiry into organ and tissue donation in Western Australia. The Committee will inquire into and report on:

- a. the effectiveness of the current model for organ and tissue donation in Western Australia
- b. issues impacting organ and tissue donation rates in Western Australia
- c. opportunities to improve organ and tissue donation rates in Western Australia
- d. any other matters considered relevant by the Committee.

Submission of

Mark Folkard MLA for Burns Beach

To the Committee chair

I make this submission as the Member for Burns Beach and of the West Australian Legislative Assembly. I make this submission from my own personal interest but also as a representative of the views provided by several constituents of the electorate of Burns Beach.

I am happy to testify before the committee in person.

For those that don't know me, prior to being elected to parliament I was a senior police officer with over 27 years' service. During this period I experienced several cases where it was an opportunity for the family and love ones to consider organ donation, but because the system was not conducive to a seamless decision process, it delayed the prospect of the gift which was lost to the distress and loss of the family.

This loss from the families were often built around the futility that comes from the death and of the loss of a loved one. Often, the potential donors, were young with most of their future in front of them. This would amplify the loss for the families. I encountered this with two drownings I dealt with.

Organ donation is an incredibly important and generous act that has the potential to save hundreds of lives every year. Yet, despite this, there still remains an alarming shortage of suitable donors in Australia. According to DonateLife, the peak body for organ and tissue donation in Australia, state only a small percentage of those who die each year are suitable donors. This means that many lives are lost before they can receive a life-saving transplant. Generally, the sources of donors come from three areas. They are: - catastrophic head injury, suffocation and or drowning, and drug overdose.

A catastrophic head injury as defined by the Oxford medical journal as "any brain injury that is expected to result in permanent loss of a brain function above the brainstem level".

Suffocation occurs when the body is deprived of oxygen. Sometimes called Asphyxia, this can result from drowning, asthma, choking, strangulation, seizure, or inhaling chemical substances. Asphyxiation or suffocation can lead to loss of consciousness, brain injury, and or death.

In a healthline article, a drug overdose is defined as taking too much of a substance whether it's prescription, over the counter legal or illegal. Drug overdoses may be accidental or intentional. If you are taking more than one recommended amount of a drug or enough to have a harmful effect on your body's functions you have overdosed, an overdose can lead to serious medical

complications including permanent incapacitation of the brain resulting in brain death.

Unfortunately, it's not just potential donors who are in short supply – there is also a lack of awareness around organ donation. Most Australians are unaware of the option to donate their organs or what criteria must be met in order to be eligible as a donor. Despite the fact that, more than 1,400 Australians are waiting for a transplant at any given time, around 60 per cent of Australians haven't registered as organ donors.

Given this information, it's unsurprising that Australia ranks 54th out of 59 countries when it comes to organ donation rates per capita. When compared with other developed countries such as Spain and France who have opt-out systems for organ donation – meaning citizens automatically become donors unless they actively opt out – Australia's position looks even worse with our opt-in system which relies on people becoming informed about organ donation and registering themselves as a donor.

Not only does Australia rank low in terms of organ donor numbers, but we also struggle with matching organs with those desperately seeking them due to the diversity of ethnic backgrounds among Australian patients and the limited number of diverse donors available from Australia alone. While international donations from countries such as India and China have been increasing over recent years, there is still much work to be done in order to ensure all those seeking transplants can access suitable organs quickly and safely.

In order to increase the number of available organs and improve overall awareness around organ donation within Australia, DonateLife has launched several campaigns aimed at raising public knowledge on the issue and encouraging more people to register as potential donors. Through initiatives like Donor Stories – which tells stories of those affected by donated organs – DonateLife hope to draw attention to how important it really is, that more people sign up as registered donors so that those waiting on transplant lists don't have their hopes dashed by a lack of available organs.

In addition, hospitals across the country have started implementing Donation Support Staff (DSS) roles which provide support for families who may not wish for their loved one's organs to be donated following their passing but also serve as advocates for those families whose members do want their loved one's parts used after death. These DSS staff explain organ donation in detail so families can make informed decisions about whether they'd like their relative's organs used after death if suitable. Whilst this is admirable, it relies on staff being available to explain to families in times of acute stress, when the directive from the potential donor is unclear.

Overall, donating your organs upon death is an incredibly important act that can help save countless lives, yet we still face numerous challenges when it comes to increasing awareness around organ donation

It is clear that we need a more obvious mechanism to easily identifying a person as an organ donor. The most obvious first step is returning organ donation to the driver's licence system. Each individual is given the opportunity to register an opt in or opt out, as part of their driver's licence application/renewal. This also creates a central point of data collection of those who wish to participate in organ donation. I will talk to this further in the submission.

One of the biggest problems facing organ donation in Australia is a lack of funding. While organisations such as DonateLife have worked hard to raise awareness and provide support for those affected by donated organs, the lack of sufficient financial resources has become a major roadblock when it comes to addressing the shortage of organs.

To address this funding shortfall, I suggest that as a part of the driver's licence system, an organ donation levy of one dollar is applied annually. and the funds quarantined for the creation and maintenance of a donors data base, and for further training and education for medical staff and the community at large.

In 2020, the Australian Government announced an additional \$25 million for organ donation initiatives over four years which was welcomed with open arms by those involved in the sector. However, according to figures from DonateLife, this amount is still not enough to cover all the costs associated with organ donation in Australia. This includes funding for donor care, equipment and

infrastructure costs as well as covering travel expenses for those donating organs or tissues from overseas.

Organisation and coordination between hospitals is another key factor that affects successful transplants and this too requires funding. To ensure effective and efficient communication between transplant teams across Australia – something that is critical when sourcing organs – government funding must be provided to ensure adequate operation and maintenance of systems such as the national Organ Donation Register which allows healthcare professionals to view nationwide donations records at a glance.

In addition, improving public knowledge around organ donation within Australia also requires significant investment. Currently there are only two dedicated teams in the country working on raising public awareness and understanding around organ donation yet these teams are funded largely by donations alone while they struggle against other worthy causes competing for similar resources. Without government intervention, it's going to be difficult to make a real impact on educating Australians about what can happen if they choose to donate their organs upon passing away.

Finally, there has been some discussion recently around introducing an opt-out system for organ donations within Australia. This would mean that citizens automatically become donors unless they actively opt out which could potentially increase available donors significantly without direct action on behalf of those individuals themselves; however, implementing such a system would require considerable investment in terms of research and policy making. Currently Spain is the best model but only moderately so with a 40% uptake. .

It's clear that there's still much work to be done in order to really make a difference when it comes to increasing available donated organs within Australia; however, with proper resources allocated towards tackling these issues we should see tangible progress being made at last.

I firmly believe that with increased government assistance, public education and greater coordination between hospitals we will see an upswing in both donor numbers and successful transplant rates across Australia, so no life is ever wasted due to lack of available organs as more Australians register to donate theirs in the hope of saving a life.

Submission of Mark Folkard MLA for Burns Beach

I make this submission without prejudice and given the opportunity I would be happy to present as a witness.

Forwarded for information and consideration.

Mark Folkard MLA