Facts About Organ and Tissue Donation in California

The Basics
- There are currently more than 100,000 people on the UNOS National Organ Transplant Waiting List. More than 20,000, or 20% of the national total, are listed at California transplant centers.
- Of those waiting, one in three will die due to a shortage of organs.
- Nationwide, approximately 18 people die each day awaiting life-saving organ transplants, and a new name is added to the national waiting list every 13 minutes.
- One organ donor can save up to eight lives and one tissue donor can heal up to 50 others.
- Nationwide, in approximately 70% of the 13,500 cases each year where patients are pronounced brain dead and are medically suitable to be organ donors, the donor (via registry) or family authorize donation.

Needs in Minority Communities
- Nationwide, minorities represent 54% of organ transplant candidates and more than 60% of those awaiting kidney transplants.
- In California, Latinos make up 35% of those waiting for life-saving transplants, Asians/Pacific Islanders 16%, and African Americans another 14%.
- Nearly 75% of those waiting for kidney transplants are people of color.
- African Americans comprise 12% of the U.S. population but represent 35% of kidney transplant candidates.

Biology
- Organs that may be donated (in order of frequency transplanted) include the kidneys, liver, heart, lungs, pancreas and small intestine.
- Tissues that may be donated include corneas/eyes, heart valves, skin, bone, tendons, cartilage and veins.
- Only about one percent of all deaths occur under circumstances where organ donation is possible. In about 90% of instances, only patients who experience brain death – a medically, legally and morally accepted determination of death resulting from the complete lack of blood flow to the brain – may donate vital organs. Under rare and controlled circumstances involving major neurological trauma, organs may be donated after cardiac death.

Countering Misconceptions
- Many Californians think that a pink dot sticker or a signed donor card placed them on a donor registry. The only way to ensure one’s decision to date is fulfilled is to sign up on the Donate Life California Donor Registry.
- There are no limitations on those who can sign up to be donors, even when past disease or certain chronic conditions may be present. Ultimately, the eligibility to donate organs or tissue for transplantation or research are made by medical specialists at the time of donation.
- Organs are allocated fairly and equitably based on medical criteria. Priority depends on medical factors such as urgency of need, length of time on the waiting list, blood type, and organ size compatibility. Race, gender, age, income and celebrity status are not considered when determining who receives an organ.
- All major religions (with one exception, Shinto) support or permit organ and tissue donation.
- There is no cost to the donor or his/her family for donation.