



THE BRIEF

DONOR FAMILIES AUSTRALIA

Member Update — 2025 Ethical Guidelines for Cell, Tissue and Organ Donation and Transplantation in Australia

Hello members,

Late last year the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) published its revised ethical guidelines for cell, tissue and organ donation and transplantation in Australia. This document has been all of ten years in the making. Donor Families Australia (DFA) is proud to say we were able to submit our thoughts on behalf of DFA members. We are pleased to say much of what is included in the Ethical Guidelines was as a result of our submission.

Included with this Brief is a summary of areas of interest in the ethical guidelines to Donor Families and Recipients. I would still recommend downloading the complete document for your own interest to help clarify any areas of doubt or confusion you may have with your own donation experience.

<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/ethical-guidelines-cell-tissue-and-organ-donation-and-transplantation#block-views-block-file-attachments-content-block-1>

If any members wish to make comment about these guidelines to DFA send to admin@donorfamiliesaustralia.org. We always encourage member insight to any topics within organ and tissue donation. Also, we like to hear from members who would like to become involved with the work we do. Again, feel free to make contact via return email.

Future Brief's will look at the work the Australian Law Reform Commission is doing by way of reviewing Tissue Legislation around the country. We will also keep members up to date with this year's Donor Hero Night and introduce a more interactive facebook page.

Bruce McDowell
Chairman
Donor Families Australia

***Donor Families Australia
Honouring Donors. Supporting Families. Strengthening Ethical
Donation in Australia.***



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New National Ethical Guidelines (2025)

In 2025, updated Ethical Guidelines for Cell, Tissue and Organ Donation and Transplantation in Australia were released, strengthening national standards for ethical, safe and respectful donation practices.

These Guidelines recognise donation as a profound act of generosity that involves not only the donor, but also families who must navigate grief while making complex decisions. The framework aims to ensure that all interactions with families are compassionate, transparent and free from pressure. For members of Donor Families Australia, the Guidelines are particularly important because they clarify how families should be supported before, during and after donation.

Why These Guidelines Matter to Donor Families

For donor families, the 2025 Ethical Guidelines affirm that:

- Your loved one must be treated with dignity
- Your consent must be informed and voluntary
- Privacy protections are strong
- Contact with recipients is optional and carefully managed
- Donation must remain altruistic and non-commercial
- Support should continue beyond the hospital setting

Consent — A Central Ethical Principle

Consent is the foundation of ethical donation. The 2025 Guidelines reinforce that consent must be:

- Fully informed
- Voluntary
- Given by the appropriate decision-maker
- Free from coercion or undue influence
- Based on clear, understandable information

Families must be supported to make decisions

without feeling rushed, and they retain the right to decline donation.

Information Families Should Receive During Consent

During the consent process, healthcare professionals are expected to explain key aspects of donation, including:

- Which organs and tissues may be donated
- How donation surgery is performed, who will perform the surgery and where
- The expected timeframe
- Any impact on funeral arrangements
- Options for viewing and saying goodbye
- Confidentiality arrangements
- Whether information about transplant outcomes may be shared, for example can donor families share their loved ones donation information without contravening legislation?

Families should feel able to ask questions and request clarification at any time.

Contact Between Donor Families and Recipients

The Guidelines maintain strict protections around privacy for both donor families and recipients.

Key points include:

- Direct contact does not occur automatically
 - Identifying information is not shared without consent from all parties
 - Anonymous correspondence may be facilitated through official channels
 - Any move toward direct contact or meeting requires voluntary agreement from both sides and careful preparation
 - Participation is entirely optional
- Contact between donor families and recipients may occur where donor families and recipients are consenting adults and both parties request contact, subject to appropriate safeguards and support.

Families are not obligated to engage in contact, and choosing not to participate is respected.



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Commercialisation and Use of Donated Tissue

Australian law prohibits the buying or selling of human organs and tissues. Donation must remain voluntary and altruistic.

However, the Guidelines acknowledge that donated tissue may undergo processing, storage and distribution by authorised organisations. These activities can involve costs, and in some cases tissue products may be supplied within regulated healthcare systems.

Families are generally informed that donated tissue may be used for transplantation, therapy, education or research, depending on what is consented to. Importantly:

- Donors and families do not receive payment for donation
- Use of tissue must occur within strict ethical and regulatory frameworks
- Commercial trading of human body parts is prohibited
- Processing organisations must operate under government oversight

Families may wish to ask specifically how donated tissue could be used and whether it may be transformed into medical products.

Transparency During Consent

The Guidelines emphasise that information provided during consent should be clear, honest and sufficient for families to understand the potential uses of donated organs and tissues.

Families may ask about:

- How donated materials will be used
- Whether tissue may be stored for future use
- Use in research or education
- Duration of storage
- Possibility of international transfer (if applicable)
- Governance and oversight arrangements

Healthcare teams should answer these questions openly or direct families to appropriate sources of information.

Ongoing Support for Families

Ethical responsibility continues after donation. Families should have access to:

- Follow-up communication
- Bereavement support
- Opportunities for remembrance
- Information about the donation process
- Referral to peer support organisations such as Donor Families Australia

Acknowledging the donor's legacy is recognised as an important part of healing.

Relationship between legislation and ethics

The Ethical Guidelines makes a clear distinction between legal requirements and ethical obligations, while emphasising that both must be followed.

What the Guidelines say

Across the introductory and foundational chapters (especially Chapters 1–3), the document states that ethical practice requires:

Compliance with applicable laws

Including laws relating to:

- Consent for donation after death
- Determination of death
- Privacy and health information
- Use of human tissue
- Prohibition of commercial trade in organs

Donor Families Australia — Supporting You

Donor Families Australia continues to advocate for donor families nationwide and to ensure family perspectives remain central to ethical policy and practice.

If you have questions, concerns or would like support, please reach out.

Contact Us

Website: www.donorfamiliesaustralia.org

Email: admin@donorfamiliesaustralia.org