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# *News Release*

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## **PROVINCE FUNDING FIRST-IN-CANADA ORGAN DONATION PHYSICIAN SPECIALIST TEAM TO INCREASE TRANSPLANTS**

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**Specialists' Services to be Available  
24/7, 365 Days a Year**

The province and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) are launching a new program aimed at increasing the number of organ donations by more than 20 per cent by funding a team of hospital-based organ donation specialists, Health Minister Theresa Oswald announced today.

“This program, a first of its kind in Canada, will see a dedicated group of physicians with medical expertise in organ donation work with hospitals, medical staff and medical students to increase organ donations,” said Oswald. “The goal is to increase overall organ donation by more than 20 per cent and is part of a larger strategy to improve access to life-saving organ donation.”

The \$360,000 project builds on previous investments by both the province and the WRHA totalling \$4.6 million over the past five years. As a result, Manitoba has seen a significant improvement in organ donations including:

- a 68 per cent increase in deceased kidney donor transplants (133 since January 2006 compared with 79 in the previous five years);
- a 78 per cent increase in lung transplants;
- a 21 per cent increase in Manitoba's support of heart transplants (performed outside the province); and
- a 91 per cent increase in Manitoba's support of liver transplants (performed outside the province).

Arlene Wilgosh, president and CEO of the WRHA, said that Transplant Manitoba's Gift of Life Program, administered by the region, recognized that while significant achievements have been made in the last few years, there was more that could be done.

“The leadership of the Gift of Life program reviewed best practices for promoting and managing organ donations in nations with the highest organ donation rates in the world, then took what they learned and crafted a proposal that adopts and integrates what they found,” she said. “Once in place, this new team of physicians will work with partners in the health system as well as patients, families and the public to help further increase organ donation and life-saving transplants.”

Along with providing medical care to patients who wish to have their organs donated and working with the families involved, the new organ donation specialist team will be responsible for:

- organ donor medical assessment and co-ordination;
- leadership for promotion across provincial emergency departments and intensive care units; and
- education for health care students and health care professionals to assist them to recognize all organ donation opportunities while ensuring they approach relatives in a compassionate manner.

Dr. Peter Nickerson, the medical director of the Gift of Life Program, pointed out the approach is in alignment with the national strategy for organ donation currently under development by Canadian Blood Services. He also noted that over the last five years the increase in kidney transplants alone, which can extend the lives of renal patients by as much as 15 to 20 years and improve their quality of life, have saved Manitoba Health \$6 million in dialysis costs.

“Investing in organ-donation specialists is not only a key strategy to achieving our life-saving goals, it also aligns with Manitoba’s objective of ensuring sustainable publicly funded health care by limiting the need for more costly dialysis therapy in Manitoba,” Nickerson said.

Oswald also took the opportunity to encourage people to fill out an organ donation card.

“Every Manitoban should fill out an organ donation card and share their wishes with their family,” she said. “This could be one of the most important conversations one ever has with their loved ones, and it could save many lives.”