



Closing the Donation Gap

Racial and ethnic disparities plague our healthcare system and organ donation and transplantation are not immune. Nationally, Blacks comprise a larger than proportional 29% of the national transplant waiting list, with Latinx patients accounting for 20% and Asians accounting for 9%.¹ Likewise, in New York, fully one-third of individuals on the organ waiting list are Black, who comprise only 18% of New Yorkers, and over one in five waiting list patients are Latinx, also larger than their share of the State's population.

Overall, two out of every three New Yorkers waiting for a life-saving organ transplant are people of color, largely because Black, Asian and Latinx individuals are three times more likely than Whites to suffer from end-stage kidney disease. Ensuring equitable access to organ transplantation for all New Yorkers and addressing persistent racial and ethnic disparities are of the highest priority.

Although organs are not matched according to race or ethnicity, and people of different races frequently donate to one another, all individuals waiting for an organ transplant will have a better chance of receiving one if there are large numbers of donors from their racial/ethnic background. Compatible blood types and tissue markers—critical qualities for donor/recipient matching—are more likely to be found among members of the same ethnicity. A greater diversity of donors will increase access to transplantation for everyone.

According to a national survey conducted in 2019, the rate of organ and tissue donor registry participation among people of color is lower than that of whites (37.9 percent of Blacks, 38.2 percent of Asians, and 46.6 percent of Hispanics responded they had signed up as an organ donor versus 53.2 percent of whites).² A host of reasons have been cited explaining why people of color may be hesitant to enroll in an organ donor registry --including lack of transplantation awareness, religious beliefs and misperceptions, distrust of the medical community, and insufficient outreach to communities of color³-- Donate Life New York State (NYS) believes these differentials in donor registration present both a challenge and an opportunity: about 85% of Blacks and Hispanics actually support organ donation according to recent national surveys,⁴ which suggests that better designed donor registry recruitment efforts could generate substantial increases in participation. Indeed, over 15% of all actual deceased donors in the US were Black, a rate that exceeds their share of the population, reflecting a strong commitment to organ donation when it matters most.

¹ U.S Department of Health & Human Services, Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network [website], <https://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/data/view-data-reports>, (accessed 27 July 2021).

²HHS Health Resources and Services Administration, 2019 National Survey of Organ Donation Attitudes and Practices: Report of Findings, p. 25.

³ Callender CO, Miles PV. Minority organ donation: the power of an educated community. *J Am Coll Surg* 2010; 210:708–715; 715–717; see also, E. Russel, et al., "Distrust in the Healthcare System and Organ Donation Intentions Among African Americans," *J. Community Health* (2012) 37:40-47.

⁴ Id. at 22.

The New York statistics are as follows:

Race/Ethnicity	NY Population	NY Organ Waitlist (07/19/2021)	NY Organ Transplants (2020)	NY Organ Donors (2020)
White, non-hispanic/latinx	55%	2,887 (33%)	1,172 (47%)	537 (63%)
African American/Black	18%	2,846 (33%)	589 (24%)	116 (14%)
Hispanic/Latinx*	19%	1,753 (21%)	485 (19%)	157 (18%)
Asian	9%	979 (11%)	220 (9%)	40 (5%)
American Indian/Alaska Native	1%	24 (<1%)	7 (<1%)	3 (<1%)
Pacific Islander	<1%	8 (<1%)	2 (<1%)	0 (<1%)
Multiracial	3%	61 (<1%)	14 (<1%)	6 (<1%)

*Hispanics may be of any race, so are also included in applicable race categories

Donate Life NYS recognizes the importance of addressing racial and ethnic disparities in donation and transplantation and to enhancing community engagement with underrepresented communities in New York through evidence-based strategies to promote enrollment in the state's Donate Life Registry. — with the ultimate goal of saving and healing the lives of all those in need of a transplant.

For further information, please contact [Donate Life New York State](#) at info@dlnys.org or 518-326-3237