

The Rock River Times™

CHICAGO—A recent statewide poll shows that nearly 90 percent of Illinois adults say “registering to be an organ donor is the right thing to do.”

Yet, 40 percent say they have not registered. In addition, of adults who identify themselves as registered donors, nearly half are unaware of a new Illinois donor registry established a year ago. Nearly two-thirds are unaware of the need to re-register.

Acting on the poll results and the growing waiting list for transplants—now up to nearly 4,700 patients in Illinois—a coalition of agencies involved with organ, tissue and eye donation recently announced the launch of “Donate Life Illinois.” The initiative is an 18-month campaign to register 3.5 million people in the state’s new donor registry managed by the office of Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White. Currently, nearly 1.5 million Illinoisans have joined.

Donate Life Illinois is part of a national campaign through Donate Life America to increase the number of Americans who have taken action to be donors in their states to 100 million. Currently, an estimated 60 million Americans have done so, according to David Bosch, Donate Life America president and communications director for Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network.

“The poll reinforced what we’ve observed for years in educating the public about donation, that most people procrastinate in documenting a decision,” said Bosch, who leads the Illinois campaign. “In addition, it suggests that a lot of people are willing to donate life provided we can tell them about the new registry, explain it takes just 20 seconds to register, and make it easy to register now—you don’t have to wait until the next time you go to the DMV.”

The poll of 800 Illinois adults, conducted by Fako & Associates on behalf of Gift of Hope, found that 87 percent of Illinois adults believe donation is the right thing to do. The percentage is consistent with national research by Donate Life America, Gallup and other organizations over the last 15 years.

The most likely demographic to register as donors are women younger than 50. Of non-registered residents asked why they haven’t registered, top reasons recorded were that they assumed they were too old or ill to donate (22 percent), or they just hadn’t thought about it (19 percent).

In addition, while 52 percent of registered donors are aware of Illinois’ new donor registry launched Jan. 1, 2006, only 32 percent of donors are aware it requires them to re-register to ensure their donation wishes are honored.

Under Illinois' previous "donor intent" registry, an individual could register intent to donate, but family members or another legal authority were required to give additional consent for donation to take place.

The state's new "donor consent" registry was established to ensure donors' end-of-life wishes are honored and to help save the lives of more patients on the transplant waiting list. Virtually anyone can become a donor; medical eligibility is determined at the time of an individual's death.

Donate Life Illinois launches this month with online communities through a campaign Web site at IAmAreYou.org, a Donate Life Illinois blog, and nearly 1,000 friends and advocates on MySpace.

In February and March, the campaign's partner agencies will train volunteers throughout the state on how to coordinate donor registration stations within their communities in time for National Donate Life Month in April.

Six Illinois colleges and universities are coordinating donor registration outreach on their campuses as part of a special "I M R U?" college campaign. Through Students for Organ Donation chapters or their Public Relations Student Society of America chapters, participating colleges signed on include: Loyola University, Northwestern University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Bradley University, Eastern Illinois University and Northern Illinois University.

Meanwhile, over the next three months, major employers throughout the state will be approached to take part by providing information to employees and hosting "virtual" or on-site donor drives similar to blood drives and other internal workplace campaigns.

Illinoisans can join the new donor registry by visiting the campaign site at www.IAmAreYou.org; visiting any Illinois state driver's license facility; or by calling the Illinois Secretary of State Organ/Tissue Donor Program at (800) 210-2106.

To learn more about organ, tissue, eye and blood donation, visit www.IAmAreYou.org and click on "Partners" or contact Donate Life Illinois at (888) 307-DON8 (3668).

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