The Honourable Jason Copping

Minister of Health

Office of the Minister of Health

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Dear Minister Jason Copping,

**RE: More Transplants**

I am writing you today on behalf of the hundreds of Albertans waiting for an organ transplant, for those waiting for a life altering tissue donation, in honour of the thousands who have died while in need of an organ transplant, and in recognition of the hundreds of thousands of Albertans who have selflessly registered as organ donors.

Every day, thousands of Albertans are needlessly suffering, and many are dying because of Alberta's inaction in organ donation. I am proud I belong to a donor family. During the heartbreaking experience of losing a loved one, we were approached by a health care professional about donating their organs. Amid the stress we were all experiencing, we knew our loved one had registered to be an organ donor. We had previously had the 'kitchen table talk,' and we honoured their wishes. Their selfless act saved a life because we respected their wishes. However, I know this isn't always the case. If a person has decided to donate their organs, we must ensure there are no missed donor opportunities.

Minister Copping, former Minister of Health Tyler Shandro took steps forward on this file. However, more work is needed and we know the following changes align with our shared goal for MoreTransplants.

**OUR IMMEDIATE ASK:**

* Establishment of a pan-Alberta system with dedicated full-time leadership, ensuring accountability within the current structure.
* Legislation Amendment (replace Mandatory Consideration with Mandatory Referral) and implementation of provisions of the Human Tissue & Organ Donation Amendment Act.
* Create a Culture of Organ & Tissue Donation – improve public awareness of the need and benefits of organ donation (i.e. one donor can save up to 8 lives through organ donation & improve quality of life for 75 others through tissue donation).

**OUR SINCERE THANKS FOR ADDRESSING THE FOLLOWING CRITICAL STEPS ACHIEVED IN 2021:**

* Establish specifically trained Donation Teams (specialized in donor identification, donor referral and donor management).
* Implement continuous and Real-Time Audits, as an essential best practice in urban and large rural centres.
* Provide dedicated donation and transplant facilities (prioritized OR access) consistent with best-performing jurisdictions.
* Ensure a User-Friendly Donor Registration System.

Minister Copping, these are the steps needed to embrace innovative, sustainable, comprehensive, and lifesaving change to Alberta’s organ & tissue procurement system. These policy choices are attainable, evidence-based, and can be implemented in Alberta. Anything less is a band-aid solution that will provide minimal improvement to a system that is already overstretched. You can be the leader who does not accept mediocrity, but rather, has the vision to strive for a greater future for all Albertans.

**These policy changes can be achieved by re-allocating ~$15 million over the next 3-5 years. To be clear, this is a reallocation of existing funds. At a time when fiscal responsibility is imperative, the ~$15 million will pay for itself within 3-5 years.[[1]](#footnote-2)**

**The lives impacted are as follows:**

* A decrease of 140 dialysis patients at the end of year 5 (and a reduction of 600 dialysis patients at the end of year 10)
* 400 additional lives saved at the end of year 5 (and 1800 additional lives saved at the end of year 10)

**The economic benefits are as follows:**

* At the end of year 5, an expected macro-economic benefit of ~$100 million!
* At the end of year 10, an expected macro-economic benefit of ~$1 billion, including cash savings of $175 million.

**Currently, Alberta's deceased organ donation rate lags other provinces, the Canadian average, and is well below many other developed countries**. **With no change in the system over the next ten years, Alberta's combined kidney dialysis and all organ transplantation budget is forecast to be $3.5-$4 Billion (in constant $ terms). Over the same 10 years, Alberta's Health budget is expected to be approximately $220 billion (in constant $ terms).**

The time to act is now, especially in light the former Minister of Health’s comment on January 28, 2021 informing Albertans that *“Ultimately, our goal is to improve donations rates and save every life possible."*

Your colleague, MLA R.J. Sigurdson, has committed to using this evidence-based strategy as the framework for his upcoming Private Members' Bill (205). Given that many Private Members' Bills do not pass due to time constraints within the legislative process, I urge you to show leadership and convert Bill 205 into a government bill. There is precedent. On May 13, 2013, Government House Leader Dave Hancock moved that Bill 207, The Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013, be moved to be a Government Bill.

**Donation is a non-partisan issue, and I urge you to make Bill 205 into a Government Bill.**

Minister Copping, thank you for taking the time to read my letter. It is time Alberta becomes a leader in deceased organ and tissue donation and transplantation, and that the wishes of all Albertans to donate are respected and honoured. Anything less will be a stop-gap that will continue the endless suffering and needless deaths of those waiting for a transplant.

Sincerely,

CC: Jason Kenney, Premier of Alberta

R.J. Sigurdson, MLA for Highwood

Rachel Notley, Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition & MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona

David Shepherd, MLA for Edmonton-City Centre & Opposition Health Critic

The Kidney Foundation, Northern Alberta & The Territories Branch.

1. Reference AOG’s Deceased Organ Donation and Transplantation in Alberta: Patient Outcomes & Economic Case Document. June 2020. (Working Document) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)