The Honourable Tyler Shandro

Minister of Health

Office of the Minister of Health

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Dear Minister Tyler Shandro,

**RE: SAVING LIVES THROUGH NO MISSED DONOR OPPORTUNITIES.**

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 die because of Alberta’s inaction on organ donation. This is unacceptable. As a member of Alberta’s transplant community, I’ve seen how organ failure and organ donation impacts the lives of our loved ones. Organ donation is the ultimate gift of life, but more is needed to ensure there are no missed donor opportunities. Why? Because one donor can save the lives of up to eight people and improve the quality of life of another 75. Our current system has failed too many. Frankly, I need the government to implement an organ donation and transplant system that successfully and purposefully makes organ donation a priority, so the lives of those on a transplant waitlist can be saved.

Minister Shandro, I am asking you to implement the following changes to ensure there are no missed donor opportunities. These changes will save lives and will save money.

**OUR IMMEDIATE ASK:**

* 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.
* 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)
* Establishment of a pan-Alberta system with dedicated full-time leadership, efficient structure, and dedicated infrastructure with accountability
* Provide dedicated donation and transplant facilities (prioritized OR access) consistent with best-performing jurisdictions
* Ensure a User-Friendly Donor Registration System. **Achieved, 2021.** We are pleased to see this was addressed, thank you!

Minister Shandro, 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.

**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).**

Since the passing of Bill 207, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act in 2013, the Government of Alberta has yet to implement all the legislative changes outlined in the Bill. The time to act is now, especially in light of your comment on January 28, 2021 informing Albertans that *“Ultimately, our goal is to improve donations rates and save every life possible."*

In our present system, my registered intention to become an organ & tissue donor is not being respected and honoured.

Currently, Alberta's deceased organ donation rate lags other provinces, the Canadian average, and is well below many other developed countries. The fact is many Albertan's lives are at stake. We urge you, indeed we beg you, to take the issue of deceased organ donation seriously and act by urging the Government of Alberta to implement the policy changes outlined above.

Anything less will be a stop-gap that will continue the endless suffering and needless deaths of those waiting for a transplant.

Minister Shandro, thank you for taking the time to read my letter. It is time Alberta becomes a leader in deceased organ & tissue donation and transplantation, and that the wishes of all Albertans to donate are respected and honoured.

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)