

New Campaign Urges Kiwis to “Have the Conversation” About Kidney Donation

Embargoed until 5am Thursday March 10th

Kidney Health New Zealand (KHNZ) is using World Kidney Day today to launch its new campaign, asking Kiwis if they’ve “Had the Conversation?” with whanau yet about potentially donating a kidney to save a life.

“Whether it be the usual Kiwi reticence for discussing touchy subjects around health or death, or not knowing what’s involved, many of us simply don’t know how our loved ones truly feel about donating a kidney, either as a living donor to a loved one or friend in need, or as a deceased donor” says KHNZ General Manager Michael Campbell.

“We want our new campaign to help spark those conversations around the nation’s dinner tables, to get whanau talking about it and learning each other’s views and wishes. Many of us tick ‘yes’ to being an organ donor when applying for our driver’s license as teenagers but never discuss that spur of the moment decision in any detail with whanau again. However we really need to have this discussion, both as a society and closer to home. We need to be confident we can respect a loved one’s last wishes to donate an organ, if the opportunity ever arises, or whether we’d donate one as a living donor.”

KHNZ says there are currently 462 New Zealanders on the national kidney waitlist, languishing on dialysis, in constant poor health, with an average life expectancy of five years, desperate for a donor kidney to save their lives.

KHNZ says not only is removing a patient off dialysis by giving them a transplant saving their life, a recent report the organisation commissioned shows it saves many millions in precious health dollars too.

“The NZEIR report we commissioned is very clear that keeping a single patient on dialysis for six years costs \$626,000 and more than a million dollars after twenty years” says Campbell. “But if that same patient was given a transplant tomorrow at a cost of round \$75,000, the bill six years on would be a far cheaper \$250,000 for both their procedure and post-transplant care, a saving of nearly \$400,000 dollars.”

In 2019 New Zealand carried out 221 kidney transplants. The NZIER report predicts if 50 more were performed annually it would save the health system \$70 million dollars over next six years and help arrest the “tsunami of demand” for not just transplants but dialysis too – the data shows 3,700 Kiwis received dialysis treatment in 2020 with patient numbers growing 24 percent in the past six years, a reflection of exploding rates of Type 2 diabetes, particularly among Māori and Pasifika patients

“The findings from this watershed report are a shock and reinforce the urgent need for the government to implement its own *2017 National Deceased Organ Donation Strategy*, overturning decades of underinvestment, treatment inequities and fragmented service delivery”, says Campbell.

“These figures have finally exposed the disappointing track record of successive governments in failing to adopt basic and easily-achievable measures to increase transplant rates. We are calling for the government to immediately fund the New Zealand Blood and Organ Service so it can support raising the number of transplants.”

KHNZ says asking New Zealanders whether they’ve sat down and “Had the Conversation” about kidney donation will hopefully raise awareness, spark debate and also educate Kiwis about the various ways they can donate – not just as a deceased donor, but as a living donor, and even as an altruistic donor – giving one of their healthy kidney’s to a total stranger.

“Kidney Health New Zealand thanks every single person who donates a kidney in which ever circumstance, for their selflessness, incredible generosity, gift to society and act of aroha. We owe a debt to not only those who decide to donate but to their whanau too, for respecting their loved ones’ wishes. We salute you all.

But now we have a question we’d like all Kiwis to ask each other ...have YOU had the conversation?”.

ENDS

For more information and interviews please contact:

Michael Campbell, General Manager, Kidney Health NZ 021 618 615
michael.campbell@kidney.health.nz

Lorelei Mason, Lorelei Mason Health Communications 021 555024
lorelei@loreleimasonhealth.co.nz