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ORGAN DONATION AND TRANSPLANTATION IN CANADA: STATISTICS, TRENDS AND INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

Publication No. 2026-06-E

20 May 2026

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This publication is based on a previous Library of Parliament publication by Sonya Norris.

Library and Research Services

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Organ Donation and Transplantation in Canada: Statistics, Trends and International Comparisons
(HillStudies)

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Ce document est également publié en français.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Efforts to improve Canada's organ donation and transplantation system have increased over the last 20 years. However, despite a significant increase in the number of organ transplants conducted in Canada between 2014 and 2024, the supply of organs does not meet demand, and thousands of individuals are on a waiting list for transplants. Moreover, many Canadians on the waiting list die before appropriate organs become available.

Deceased organ donors can provide up to eight organs for transplant, although the average number of organs used for transplantation in Canada is three to four organs per donor. Living donors provide a single organ – most commonly a kidney or part of a liver. There were 894 deceased organ donors in Canada in 2024, and the deceased organ donor rate increased by 20% between 2015 and 2024. In 2024, there were 590 living donors, and the living donor rate declined by 9% over the same decade. Since 2015, the deceased donor rate has outpaced the living organ donor rate.

Within Canada, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia have the highest deceased organ donor rates, while Ontario has the highest living donor rate. International comparisons reveal that Canada falls within the top 20 countries for both deceased and living donor rates; however, Canada's rates are significantly below the rates of the top-performing countries, including those of the United States.

The pool of potential deceased organ donors is limited by several factors, including cause and location of death, age and the previous health status of potential donors. Efforts have been made in recent years to increase the pool of potential donors by including, for example, cardiac death patients in addition to brain death patients. As well, some individuals who choose to end life support efforts or choose medically assisted death may wish to become organ donors, and Canadian guidelines for these situations were updated in 2025.

ORGAN DONATION AND TRANSPLANTATION IN CANADA: STATISTICS, TRENDS AND INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

1 INTRODUCTION

Although some organ donation indicators have improved in recent years, the living donor rate declined from 2023 to 2024, and many Canadians continue to wait for an organ transplant. This HillStudy provides an overview of organ donation across Canada, discusses organ donor rates and compares them with those of other countries and summarizes organ transplant activity in Canada. Information about the regulation of organ donation in Canada and strategies used to increase organ donor rates in various jurisdictions are discussed in a companion Library of Parliament publication, entitled *Strategies to Optimize Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation*.[1]

2 CONTEXT

The landscape of organ donation and transplantation in Canada has evolved over the past two decades, through efforts by governments, agencies, hospitals and medical professionals to enhance coordination across jurisdictions, standardize practices and improve outcomes for patients.

In 2001, the Government of Canada announced the creation of the Canadian Council for Donation and Transplantation (CCDT), an advisory body to the Conference of Deputy Ministers of Health, in support of efforts by the conference to coordinate federal, provincial and territorial activities relating to organ donation and transplantation. The CCDT established standards and clinical practice guidelines with respect to cardiac death, severe brain injury, immunological risk following transplant and medical management to optimize donor organ potential.

In 2008, the CCDT's functions were transferred to Canadian Blood Services, which assumed responsibility for Canada's organ and tissue donation and transplantation system.[2] In Quebec, the organization mandated to coordinate organ donation is Transplant Québec. Its mission includes both optimizing the availability of organs and coordinating their procurement and allocation.[3]

On 21 June 2021, Bill C-210, An Act to amend the Canada Revenue Agency Act (organ and tissue donors), received Royal Assent.[4] This legislation authorizes the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to collaborate with provinces and territories to collect and disclose taxpayer information specifically for establishing or maintaining organ and tissue donor registries. Under the amended *Canada Revenue Agency Act*, personal tax returns in participating jurisdictions now include a tick-box option,

enabling individuals to indicate their interest in receiving organ donation information from their respective governments. The CRA partnership with provinces and territories began rolling out with the 2024 tax-filing season. In British Columbia, for example, this resulted in about 1 million taxpayers consenting to share contact information, with follow-up outreach from BC Transplant that began in fall 2025.[5]

In April 2024, Health Canada introduced the Pan-Canadian Governance for Organ Donation and Transplantation, a body "made up of the federal government, provinces and territories, stakeholders, Canadian Blood Services and patients working together to improve organ donation and transplantation services across the country."[6] This structure is supported by three committees: the Federal–Provincial–Territorial Assistant Deputy Minister Steering Committee, the System Operators Advisory Committee and the Patient Advocate Advisory Committee.[7]

On 12 March 2025, Health Canada updated the safety regulations regarding human cells, tissues and organs for transplantation in Canada.[8]

3 TRENDS, STATISTICS AND COMPARISONS

When considering trends and statistics in organ donation, and making comparisons of these figures among jurisdictions, it is important to keep several variables in mind. A low donor rate, for example, may be more reflective of lower rates of injury and better health care interventions than it is of a lack of altruism or poor recruitment of donors. Similarly, an ever-growing waiting list for organ transplantation may indicate that patients are surviving longer while waiting than they once did, rather than a worsening supply of organs for transplant. The following analysis discusses Canada's performance in organ donation and transplantation in recent years and how that performance compares with that of other nations.

3.1 DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this paper, the following definitions apply to different types of donors:[9]

- intended donor – an individual who has indicated a desire to become a donor upon death or, when appropriate, during life;
- potential donor – an individual identified within a health care facility as being appropriate to pursue as a donor; includes those individuals from whom organs may have been procured but not allocated or transplanted;
- actual donor – an individual from whom at least one organ has been procured, allocated and successfully transplanted;

- deceased donor – an individual who becomes a donor following death, either brain death or cardiac death; and
- living/live donor – an individual in good health who donates to a recipient.

Donation rates are expressed as rates per million population (pmp) and are based on Statistics Canada's mid-year population estimates.

The Canadian death determination guidelines describe death as arising after cessation of brain function (also referred to as the neurological determination of death, or NDD, or brain death), circulatory function (also referred to as cardiocirculatory death, or circulatory death), and both circulatory and brain functions.[10]

In large part, donations from deceased donors follow brain death. However, since 2006, donors have been recruited under certain circumstances after cardiac death. Organ donation following cardiac death is referred to by the Canadian Institute for Health Information as "donation after cardiocirculatory death," or DCD.[11] Cardiac death is discussed further in section 3.3 of this paper, "Identifying the Donor Pool."

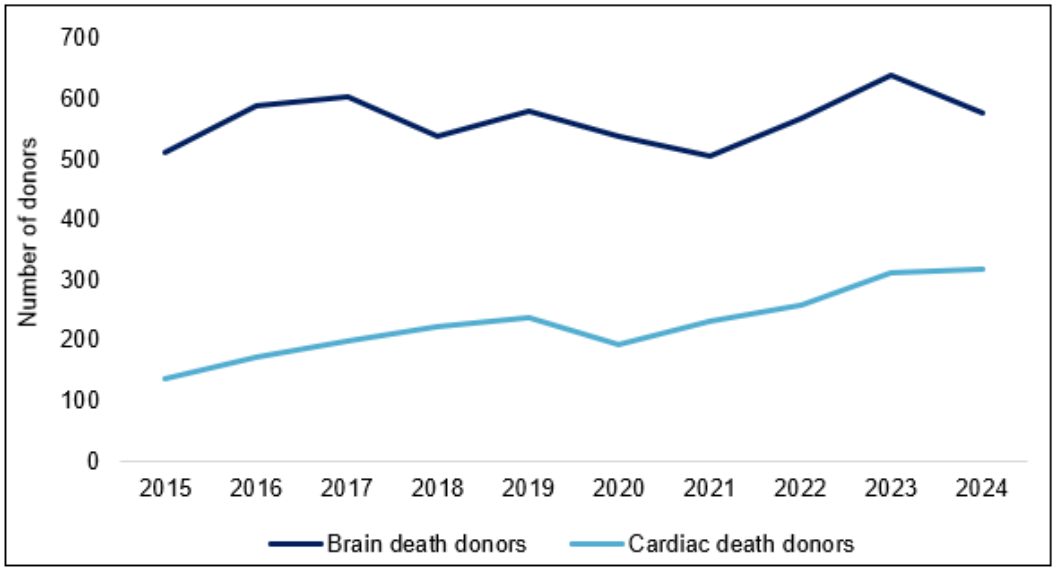
3.2 ORGAN DONATION RATES

3.2.1 Deceased Organ Donors in Canada

According to Canadian Blood Services, the deceased donor rate in Canada increased by approximately 20% between 2015 and 2024, from 18.1 to 21.7 pmp. This translates to 649 deceased donors in 2015 and 894 deceased donors in 2024.[12] Each deceased donor can provide up to eight organs, although the average number of organs used for transplantation in Canada is lower.[13]

Figure 1 illustrates the trends in the number of deceased donors following brain death and cardiac death in Canada between 2015 and 2024. The total number of brain death and cardiac death donors has increased over this period.

Figure 1 – Total Number of Deceased Organ Donors in Canada, By Type and Year of Donation, 2015–2024



Source: Figure prepared by the Library of Parliament using data obtained from Canadian Institute for Health Information, "Table 2: Number of deceased organ donors in Canada by organ, donation type and year of donation, 2015 to 2024," *Deceased Donation, Living Donation and Transplantation in Canada: Summary Volumes — Data Tables*, 2025.

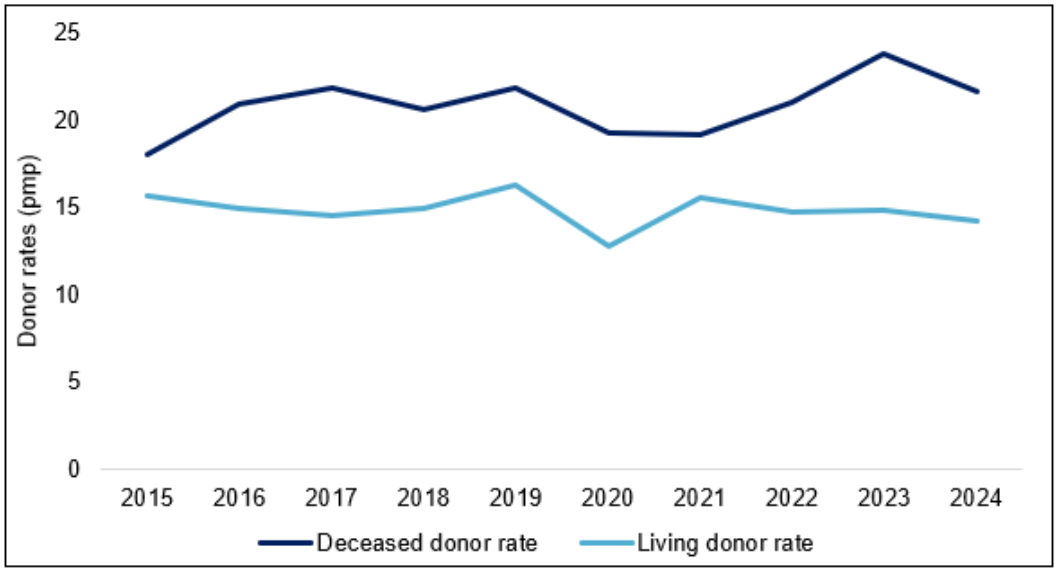
3.2.2 Living Organ Donors in Canada

Some organs can be donated by living donors. Living donors can provide a single kidney, a partial liver (lobe), a single lung, a partial intestine (also called small bowel) or a pancreas (segment or islet cells). Living liver and kidney donations make up almost all living organ donations every year.

Between 2015 and 2024, the number of living donors in Canada fluctuated annually with no consistent trends. It ranged from a high of 614 in 2019 to a low of 487 in 2020, potentially reflecting the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.[14] The number recovered to 590 by 2024 but remained below the 2019 level.[15]

Figure 2 displays the living and deceased donor rates in Canada between 2015 and 2024. The deceased donor rate has consistently remained above the living organ donor rate, having increased by nearly 20% over the period. The living donor rates declined by approximately 9% over the decade, from 15.7 per million pmp in 2015 to 14.3 pmp in 2024.

Figure 2 – Organ Donor Rates in Canada, by Donor Type, 2015–2024
(per million population)

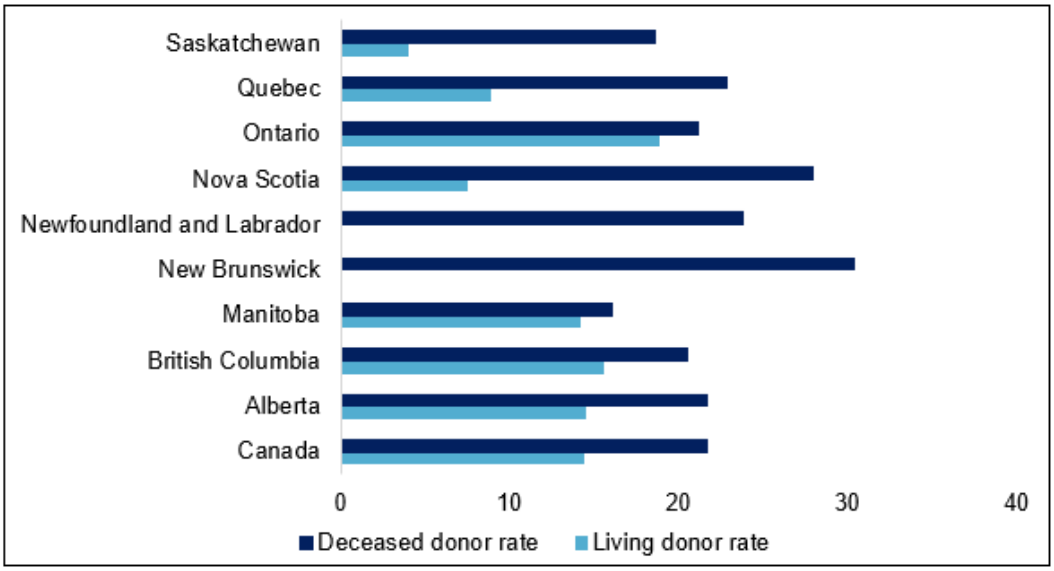


Sources: Figure prepared by the Library of Parliament using data obtained from Canadian Institute for Health Information, "Figure 31: Donor rate per million population, by donor source, Canada, 2009 to 2018," *Treatment of End-Stage Organ Failure in Canada, Canadian Organ Replacement Register, 2009 to 2018: Donors – Data tables*, 2019; and Canadian Blood Services, "2024 System Progress Data Dashboard," *System Progress Data Reporting*.

Figure 3 shows the living and deceased organ donor rates across Canada in 2024. Nationally, the deceased donor rate reached 21.7 pmp, with rates ranging from a low of 16 pmp in Manitoba to a high of 30.4 pmp in New Brunswick. Nova Scotia (27.9 pmp), Newfoundland and Labrador (23.8 pmp) and Quebec (22.8 pmp) also reported a relatively high deceased donor rate, while Saskatchewan (18.6 pmp), British Columbia (20.5 pmp) and Ontario (21.1 pmp) displayed rates below the national level. Alberta's rate was equal to the national rate. Data for Prince Edward Island are not available.

The national living donor rate was 14.3 pmp in 2024. Ontario reported the highest rate, at 18.8 pmp, followed by British Columbia (15.5 pmp) and Alberta (14.5 pmp). Saskatchewan recorded the lowest rate, at 4 pmp, while Manitoba (14.1 pmp), Quebec (8.8 pmp), and Nova Scotia (7.5 pmp, based on Atlantic Canadian population) also reported rates below the national average. The living donor rates for New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador are zero, as all organ transplants from living donors for these provinces take place in Nova Scotia. Data for Prince Edward Island are not available.

**Figure 3 – Organ Donor Rates in Canada by Province and Donor Type, 2024
(per million population)**



Note: The Nova Scotia living donor rate reflects the entire Atlantic Canadian population, as all the region's organ transplants take place in Nova Scotia.

Source Figure prepared by the Library of Parliament using data obtained from Canadian Blood Services, "2024 System Progress Data Dashboard," *System Progress Data Reporting*.

3.2.3 Canada's Donor Rates: International Comparisons

International comparisons of deceased organ donor rates reveal that Canada is not among the highest performers. In 2024, according to the International Registry in Organ Donation and Transplantation (IRODaT), Canada ranked 12th among 70 countries for actual deceased organ donor rate, with a rate of 22.8 pmp.[16] The top five countries in 2024, as listed by IRODaT, are Spain (53.9 pmp), the United States (49.7 pmp), Portugal (36.7 pmp), Czech Republic (34.3 pmp) and Belgium (32.6 pmp).[17]

Regarding living donor rates, IRODaT put Canada in 16th place in 2024, at 15.1 pmp. Turkey ranked first, at 54 pmp. The United States had a higher rate than Canada, at 20.5 pmp, while Spain's living donor rate (8.5 pmp) compared poorly with its actual deceased donor rate.[18]

The disparity among donor rates can be ascribed to several factors. In addition to the specific organ donation and transplantation practices of each country, social, demographic and mortality characteristics can affect the pool of potential organ donors. As well, the calculation of the donor rate can change, depending on which definition of "donor" is used. The World Health Organization provides definitions for "actual donor," "deceased donor," "living donor" and "donor."[19] Canada uses "actual donor" numbers, which include only donors from whom organs have been

retrieved and successfully transplanted into recipients, to calculate its donor rate. Some countries may calculate donor rates using the definitions for "deceased donor" and "living donor," which include those instances where a donor is identified and organs are retrieved, but ultimately no organ is transplanted into a recipient. This method inflates donor rates relative to Canada and other countries that use actual donor numbers.

Data from the Global Observatory on Donation and Transplantation for 2024 presented a demographic breakdown of donor rates for several countries, although Canada was not included. According to the organization, in 2024, actual deceased donors were 64% male, while 62% of living kidney donors and 53% of living liver donors were female.[20]

3.3 IDENTIFYING THE DONOR POOL

There is a tendency to assume that all members of the general population are potential donors. However, the reality is such that few individuals will ever be in the situation of being considered for organ donation upon their death. Proponents of donor registries (databases containing the names of individuals who wish to donate their organs after death) suggest that such databases better reflect the donor pool. As with the general population, this is not strictly true because the number of individuals who ultimately become available as potential donors is a small fraction of those who may be interested in becoming donors ("intended" donors).

Potential deceased organ donors are in fact identified from within the very limited pool of individuals whose death fulfills specific medical criteria. As mentioned in section 3.1 of this HillStudy, this has traditionally meant that the individual would have succumbed to brain death, or NDD. Brain deaths are often the result of such incidents as trauma from a motor vehicle accident, a gunshot wound or a cerebrovascular accident, such as a stroke. The pool of potential donors has expanded slowly in recent years to include donation after cardiac death, or DCD. However, the cardiac death must occur in a hospital that is equipped to follow the candidate as a potential organ donor. Finally, within this limited pool, the number of candidates may further be reduced because of age. While there is no specific donor age cut-off in Canada, over the years, there has been a tendency to limit eligibility to individuals under a given age. However, the number of older organ donors has increased recently, as candidates are assessed on a case-by-case basis.[21]

In 2005, the CCDT developed national recommendations on DCD, providing a clinical, ethical and legal framework for the development of DCD programs in Canada.[22] Ontario subsequently introduced donation after circulatory determination of death in 2006. A 2017 study of Ontario transplant activity found that the introduction of DCD had a positive effect on both the overall number of deceased donors and transplant activity.[23]

Circumstances that could result in DCD include cardiac arrest in someone already brain-dead, unsuccessful resuscitation of a person in cardiac arrest, and cardiac arrest following withdrawal of treatment of an unconscious or incompetent patient whose death is anticipated. The last situation is referred to as "controlled DCD" because preparations for organ removal and preservation can be initiated before the donor's death, thereby controlling the timing of the withdrawal of treatment.[24]

Developments in recent years have resulted in two new circumstances involving conscious and competent persons that may expand the pool of potential controlled DCD donors. First is the situation in which a person affected by an advanced neurodegenerative disease who is receiving life-sustaining measures chooses to have those measures stopped and to donate their organs. Second is the circumstance of a person who chooses medical assistance in dying (MAID) and to donate their organs. These situations were not contemplated when the DCD guidelines were published in 2006.[25]

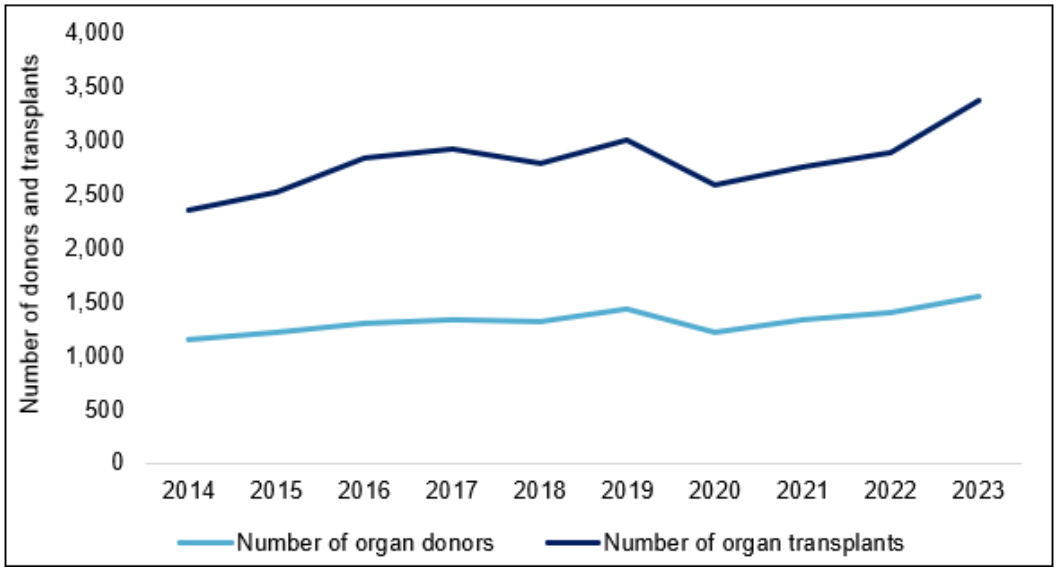
In response to the need for additional guidance when considering recruitment of organ donors from these new categories, Canadian Blood Services, in collaboration with the Canadian Critical Care Society, the Canadian Society of Transplantation and the Canadian Association of Critical Care Nurses, published a guidance policy document in 2019 following consultation with medical, legal and ethics experts. This publication makes several recommendations and provides the clinical pathway to follow for both of the above-mentioned circumstances involving DCD.[26] This guidance policy was updated in 2023.[27] The key recommendations in these two documents address the following issues:

- protecting patients by ensuring that the decision for MAID or withdrawal of life-sustaining measures is made before any discussion of organ donation;
- facilitating patient choice by ensuring that patients choosing end-of-life options are provided with an opportunity to donate organs;
- ensuring donor consent is provided by a conscious and competent patient who understands that they may withdraw that consent at any time;
- requiring that donor testing minimize the amount of disruption to the patient;
- requiring that determination of death criteria be respected and met prior to organ removal; and
- ensuring the right of health care professionals to choose not to participate in MAID due to conscientious objection, although they must strive to support the wishes of their patient to donate.[28]

3.4 TRANSPLANT ACTIVITY

Figure 4 shows the number of organ donors and transplants from living and deceased individuals in Canada between 2014 and 2023. Over this period, Canada experienced an increase in organ donation and transplantation activity. In 2023, a total of 1,545 individuals – both deceased and living – donated organs, marking the highest annual number recorded over that same period. This represents approximately a 35% increase from 2014, when the number of donors stood at 1,144. The number of organ transplant procedures has followed a similar trajectory. In 2023, about 3,369 transplants were performed, an increase of about 43% compared to 2014 (2,359 transplants).

Figure 4 – Number of Organ Donors and Organ Transplants in Canada, Deceased and Living, 2014–2023



Source: Figure prepared by the Library of Parliament using data obtained from Canadian Institute for Health Information, *Annual statistics on organ replacement in Canada, 2014 to 2023*, 18 December 2024.

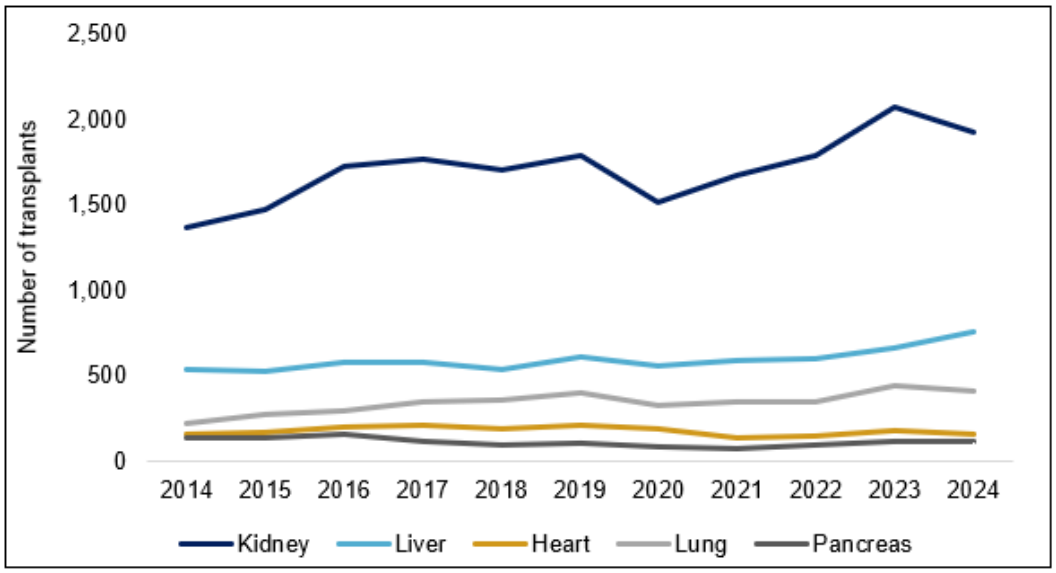
Figure 5 presents the number of organ transplants by type in Canada between 2014 and 2024. Kidney transplants were the most common organ transplant procedure over the period. In 2024, 1,929 kidney transplants were performed, representing about 57% of all organ transplants that year. This was slightly below the 2023 peak of 2,078 kidney transplants, but still marked a 40% increase compared with 2014, when 1,376 kidney transplants were completed. Despite a temporary decrease in 2020, potentially due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of kidney transplants increased by about 27% between 2020 and 2024.

Liver transplants followed with 757 procedures in 2024; a 41% increase compared to 2014. This was also slightly higher than in 2023, when 669 liver transplants were performed. Lung transplants showed the most significant proportional growth among non-renal transplants. In 2024, 416 lung transplants were performed, compared with 226 in 2014, representing an increase of approximately 84%. However, the 2024 level was below the 2023 peak of 450 lung transplants.

Heart transplant numbers fluctuated over the period. In 2024, 166 heart transplants were performed, slightly above the 161 recorded in 2014, but below the peaks observed in 2017 and 2019, when 215 heart transplants were completed. Heart transplants decreased in 2021, reaching 142 procedures, before recovering in subsequent years.

Pancreas transplants represented a smaller proportion of total transplant activity. In 2024, 119 pancreas transplants were conducted, up from 115 in 2023 and 86 in 2020, but still below the 2016 peak of 159 transplants.

Figure 5 – Number of Transplants by Organ in Canada, 2014–2024

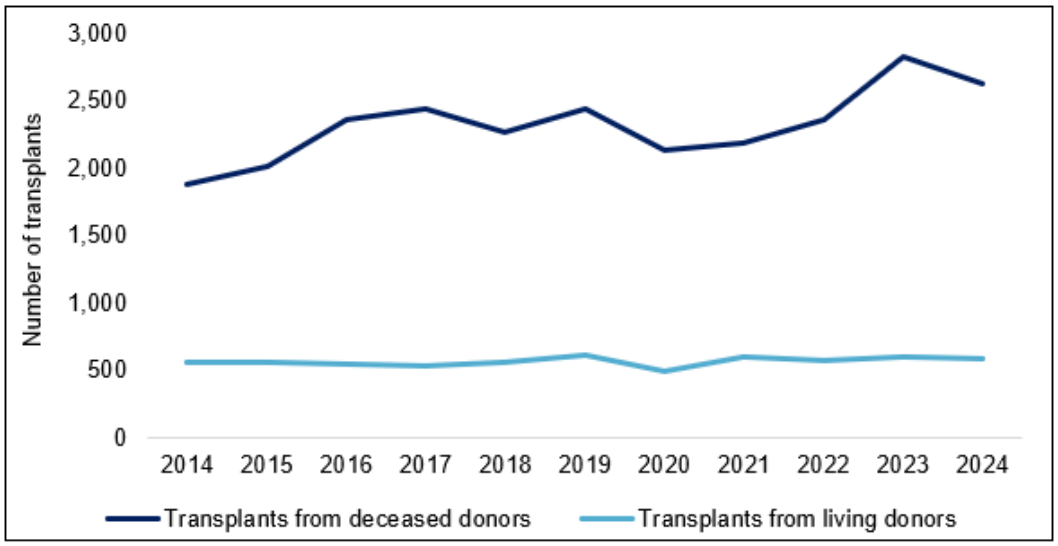


Sources: Figure prepared by the Library of Parliament using data obtained from Canadian Blood Services, "2024 System Progress Data Dashboard," *System Progress Data Reporting*; and Canadian Blood Services, "2023 System Progress Data Dashboard," *System Progress Data Reporting*.

Between 2014 and 2024, most organ transplants in Canada were from deceased donors (Figure 6). In 2024, 2,622 transplants were performed using organs from deceased donors, accounting for almost 82% of all transplant procedures that year. This represented an increase of nearly 40% compared to 2014, when 1,874 transplants were conducted from deceased donors. However, the number of transplants from deceased donors decreased in 2024 compared to 2023, when 2,829 such transplants were performed.

In contrast, transplants from living donors remained relatively stable over the same period, ranging from a low of 487 in 2020 to a high of 614 in 2019. In 2024, a total of 590 organ transplants were performed using organs from living donors, slightly below the 597 recorded in 2023. Overall, living-donor transplants accounted for approximately 18% of all transplant procedures in 2024.

Figure 6 – Number of Transplants by Donor Source in Canada, 2014–2024



Source: Figure prepared by the Library of Parliament using data obtained from Canadian Blood Services, "2024 System Progress Data Dashboard," *System Progress Data Reporting*.

3.5 SURVIVAL RATES FOR TRANSPLANT RECIPIENTS

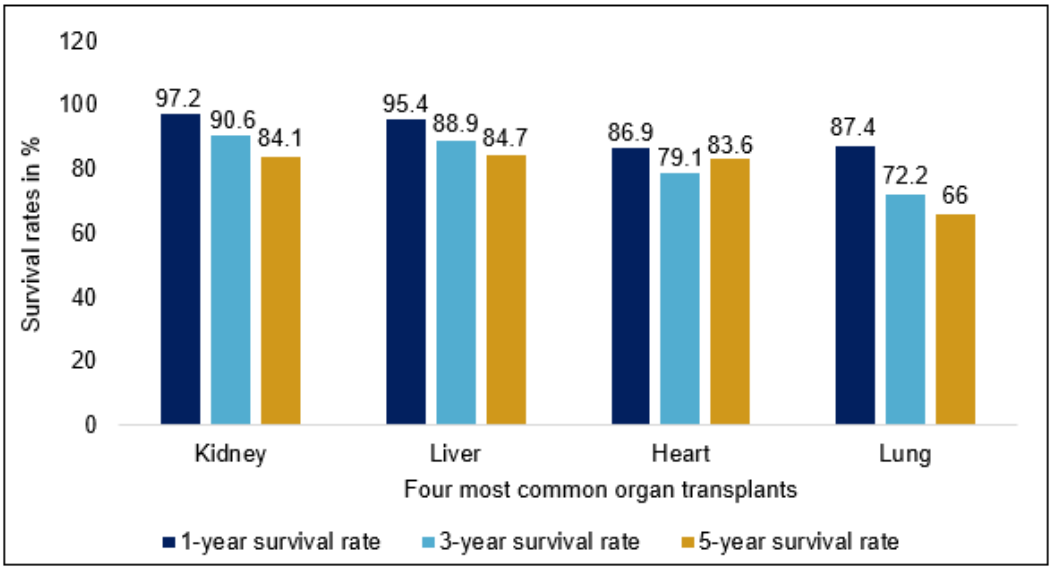
The success of organ transplantation is assessed through survival rates at multiple intervals: three months, one year, three years, five years and 10 years post-transplantation. Figure 7 displays one-year, three-year, and five-year survival rates for recipients in Canada (excluding Quebec) from deceased donors, from 2019 to 2023. Data on 10-year survival rates exist only until 2013 and are excluded from this analysis.

Kidney transplants showed the highest survival rates among the organ types presented. The one-year survival rate was 97.2%, declining to 90.6% at three years and 84.1% at five years. In contrast, survival rates for living donor kidney transplants were reported at 98%, 94% and 90%, respectively, over the same periods.

Liver transplants showed a similar pattern, with a one-year survival rate of 95.4%, a three-year survival rate of 88.9%, and a five-year survival rate of 84.7%.

Heart transplants had a one-year survival rate of 86.9% and a three-year survival rate of 79.1% and a five-year survival rate of 83.6%. Lung transplants presented a one-year survival rate of 87.4%, decreasing to 72.2% at three years and 66% at five years.

Figure 7 – Survival Rates for Transplant Recipients in Canada (excluding Quebec), Deceased Donors, 2019–2023



Note: Kidney survival rates are for adult recipients. For each organ type, data for one-year survival rates are presented for 2023; data for three-year survival rates are presented for 2021; and data for five-year survival rates are presented for 2019.

Source: Figure prepared by the Library of Parliament using data obtained from Canadian Institute for Health Information, "Patient Survival Following Organ Transplant," Database, accessed 28 April 2026.

3.6 CANDIDATES AWAITING TRANSPLANTS

In 2024, a total of 4,044 Canadians were waiting for an organ transplant, with 217 individuals who died while awaiting a suitable donor.[29]

As long as there is a gap between the number of organs available for transplantation and the number of organs needed, it will be necessary to explore options for increasing both the deceased and living donor rates. Potential strategies to increase the number of organs available for transplant are discussed in a companion Library of Parliament publication entitled *Strategies to Optimize Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation*.[30]

4 CONCLUSION

Canada's deceased organ donor rate has increased by about 20% between 2015 and 2024, while the rate of live organ donors has declined by approximately 9% in the same period. Canada does not rank among the top-performing countries of those surveyed by the IRODaT with respect to organ donor rates. Despite the increase in the number of organs available for transplant in Canada in recent years and the resultant increase in the number of transplants performed annually, there are still thousands of Canadians on the waiting list for an organ transplant, and hundreds die every year while waiting for an organ to become available.

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16. International Registry in Organ Donation and Transplantation (IRODaT), *International Registry in Organ Donation and Transplantation: Final Statistics 2024*, Newsletter, December 2025. Please note that Canada's deceased donor rate for 2024 is now 21.7 donors per million population (pmp) instead of 22.8 pmp as reported in the IRODaT report. This figure could affect Canada's ranking in this report if the data for other countries remain unchanged for the same year.
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