

Search

How do I find it?

Most popular on site | [Subscribe to paper](#)



[Home](#) [News](#) [Travel](#) [Money](#) [Sports](#) [Life](#) [Tech](#) [Weather](#)

Editorial/Opinion

[Shopping](#) [Buy a Car](#) [Job Search](#) [Online Dating](#) [Real Estate](#)

## Organ donations fall short; financial incentives can help

Updated 6/25/2006 9:09 PM ET

E-mail | Save | Print | [Subscribe to stories like this](#) **RSS**

"Please help! My daddy needs a liver." A billboard with that stirring message greeted thousands of motorists recently on a busy Chicago expressway. It's one of many pleas from desperate families seeking organs for transplantation. Classified ads shout their need. So do Web pages.

In the more than 50 years since the first successful organ transplant, hundreds of thousands of patients have had their lives extended because of organ donations. Despite decades of campaigns to persuade Americans to donate organs after they die, however, the demand increasingly exceeds the supply. The waiting list for organs, mostly kidneys, has doubled over the past decade to more than 92,000 patients. Eighteen die daily before getting one.

### OPPOSING VIEW: [Organs aren't commodities](#)

The sad fact is that patients needing a transplant are more likely to die waiting than to receive organs. The wait in many locations is five years, and it could double by 2010.

It is a quiet crisis that argues for new approaches. Most options, though, are controversial.

Foremost among those are financial incentives for people to donate. The idea is an ethical minefield, conjuring visions of live donors who are young, healthy and poor serving as organ farms for those who are old, dying and rich, which is why people are barred from purchasing organs. But in a measure of how severe the shortage has become, the American Medical Association, which had long opposed payments to donors, now favors limited experimentation.

Several ideas are under consideration or already underway. Among them:

- Under a "futures" contract, the estate or family of an adult who agrees to donate organs might receive some financial remuneration, typically less than \$10,000, for funeral and other expenses. Organs would go into the donor system, not be sold to individuals.
- LifeSharers is an existing network of 4,500 donors. Members agree to specify that when they die, priority in getting their organs should go to other members, also registered as donors.
- More controversial, Arkansas, Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Dakota, Utah and Wisconsin allow tax deductions of up to \$10,000 to compensate living donors for travel, expenses or lost income. This is legal because the money comes from the state. It also requires screening for psychological fitness.

Certainly, everything possible should be done to spur voluntary contributions, but limited financial incentives are worth trying. They should be confined for now to post-mortem donations, and organs should be distributed as they are, based on medical need and time on the waiting list — not on ability to pay. (Transplant priority is decided by the United Network for Organ Sharing, a non-profit group that works with hospitals to coordinate transplants. Directed donations are allowed within certain limits.)

More than 6,000 patients die each year while on waiting lists. Demanding patience, when the price of delay is death, is no answer. It's time to try new ideas.

Posted 6/25/2006 8:19 PM ET

Updated 6/25/2006 9:09 PM ET

E-mail | Save | Print | [Subscribe to stories like this](#) **RSS**

### Newspaper Home Delivery - [Subscribe Today](#)

[Home](#) • [News](#) • [Travel](#) • [Money](#) • [Sports](#) • [Life](#) • [Tech](#) • [Weather](#)

**About USA TODAY.com:** [Site Map](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Jobs with Us](#)  
[Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy/Your California Privacy Right](#) | [Media Kit](#) | [Press Room](#)

**News Your Way:** [Mobile News](#) | [Email News](#) | [Add USA TODAY.com RSS feeds](#)

**Partners:** [USA Weekend](#) | [Sports Weekly](#) | [Education](#) | [Space.com](#)

Copyright 2006 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Co. Inc.