

**ADDRESS BY DAVID O'LEARY, PRESIDENT, GIFT OF LIFE INC.
AT THE ACT CHIEF MINISTER'S AWARDS
FRIDAY 25 FEBRUARY 2011**

Chief Minister, Members of the ACT Legislative Assembly, the Federal Member for Canberra Gai Brodtmann, distinguished guests, members of the transplant community, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls.

It is a great pleasure to address you today as we near the conclusion of DonateLife Week. It has been a busy week with a range of events including the national launch last Friday at which the Governor-General launched the *DonateLife Book of Life*, the early morning DonateLife Walk around the lake on Wednesday which attracted over 1800 participants, and a host of other events both here in Canberra and throughout Australia. The focus has been on raising community awareness of the importance of people finding out the facts about organ donation, reaching a decision, and discussing it with their families so their wishes are clearly known. They are then encouraged to sign on to the Australian Organ Donor Register. We are confident that, as a result of this week's events, many more Australians will decide to donate.

Last year, there were 309 multi-organ donations in Australia which benefited 931 recipients - a national record. And in the ACT and surrounding districts, there were 10 multi-organ donors benefiting 32 recipients - again a record. A number of factors have contributed to these improved results including the Australian Government's reforms, the work of the Organ and Tissue Authority and its committed team of staff, the establishment of a network of DonateLife agencies in each state and territory, increased funding and transplant staff within hospitals, and closer cooperation with community groups in promoting more effective nationally-consistent policies whilst also gradually raising community awareness.

I wish to congratulate all those who have contributed to what are now early positive steps in the right direction. At the same time, there are around 1,700 people in Australia on transplant waiting lists. So it remains vital that donation rates continue to increase so that the gap is eventually bridged, allowing many more Australians to survive.

However, organ and tissue donation is about much more than just strategy and statistics. It is about providing hope and continued life to many people whose

future would otherwise be in serious jeopardy. It is about changing peoples lives - and those of their families - immeasurably for the better. The Chief Minister's Awards enable us to celebrate the lives of those who have been lucky enough to survive as a result of receiving the most generous of all gifts. Just as importantly, they allow us to pay tribute to the enormous contributions to our society of those families who - despite their deep grief resulting from the sad loss of their loved ones - make the altruistic decision to donate.

I have been personally affected by this as, following acute hepatitis, I became one of Australia's earliest liver transplant recipients over 20 years ago. My life expectancy then, with luck, was thought to be about five years but, as I now joke, I have become a long liver !! My family and I have been very fortunate indeed and we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my donor family. Others around this room have similar stories to tell. Many more are in the *DonateLife Book of Life* which is here for you to look through today. They demonstrate the huge human benefits derived from organ and tissue donation .

The Chief Minister's Awards which we celebrate today recognise people who have made major contributions towards awareness-raising of the importance of organ and tissue donation in the ACT community . They also pay special tribute to donor families and, in particular, to donors such as Annette Taylor, Ben Wiseman, Mathew Reynolds, Jenny Deck and Angus Fairbairn-Cody after whom the awards are named - and we thank them sincerely for their extraordinary generosity of spirit in enabling many other Australians to survive.

We also express appreciation to our hospital clinical staff and for the continuing hard work and dedication of the DonateLife ACT team led by Dr Imogen Mitchell. Their untiring and compassionate efforts in caring for their patients and for the families involved are vital in ensuring that the donation process takes place as smoothly as possible and remains sensitive to the concerns of all those involved.

Finally, Chief Minister, we thank you for your continuing close interest as our Patron. We greatly appreciate the support which you and the Deputy Chief Minister and Health Minister Katy Gallagher continue to show towards Gift of Life and to the important cause of organ and tissue donation.