

# Organ donation 'opt-out' petition led by teenager who received two kidney transplants

By JAMES HANCOCK, August 3, 2017

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-03/louie-hehir-campaigns-for-organ-donation-opt-out-rules/8767980>

Louie Hehir once missed out on simple things most children take for granted like sleepovers and swimming.

The 17-year-old from Geelong was born with kidney problems and received his first transplant at the age of five – but a few years later his body rejected the organ.

That meant he had to spend four years undergoing dialysis treatment, where a machine performs the role of the kidneys in cleaning his blood, before successfully receiving a second transplant.

Louie could not easily go on sleepovers because he needed to be hooked up to a dialysis machine at night.

Swimming would get the tubing in his stomach wet.

"I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy, I felt alone during that time," he said.

"I can now go to school, go to sleepovers and that's meant I have this freedom that I didn't have before."

His friend Ryan Lambley, 14, was also born with renal failure and is connected to a dialysis machine three times a week for four hours.

The Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne said it always had between 15 and 20 patients undergoing dialysis and a shortage of organ donors meant they faced a long wait for a transplant.

But Louie is passionate about speeding up the process and is heading to Canberra next week armed with a petition in support of an "opt-out" system for organ donation.

He has so far collected more than 1,200 signatures in support of the change and will present it to Minister for Aged Care and Indigenous Health Ken Wyatt.

Countries including Spain, France and Singapore have already made the switch to a presumed consent model, where citizens are automatically donors unless they officially record an objection.



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Currently, Australians wishing to donate their organs and tissue after death need to include their name on the national register and donations do not go ahead if families strongly object.

Louie said the views of a donor’s family would still be respected under an opt-out scheme. “If the opt-out policy were to go ahead the Government and hospitals would always ask the next of kin’s permission if they are willing to go ahead with the decision of the loved one,” he said.

## ‘Opt-out may not boost donor rate’

Dr Cathy Quinlan from the Royal Children’s Hospital backed the opt-out model, saying it would make the organ donation process even easier. But the Federal Government is not convinced that scrapping the opt-in system would boost organ donation rates.

Dr Helen Opdam from the Organ and Tissue Authority believed more effective measures were available to encourage people to become organ donors.

“Greece for example has opt-out and has a very low donation and consent rate, so it’s not a simple solution,” she said.

“I would encourage Louie to continue with his initiatives, I wish him the very best [but] the strategies to date have led to more Australians than ever receiving lifesaving transplants.”

Far from wanting to put the whole hospital experience behind him, Louie plans to become a nurse after graduating high school to support others undergoing dialysis treatment.

“My aim is to come back to the Royal Children’s as a fully qualified nurse, I can empathise with the patients on a greater level,” he said.

