

NSW TISSUE BANK NEWSLETTER

December 2024

A NOTE FROM PIERRE

From the Coordination Team Leader



Looking back at my time, some 25 years at the Lions NSW Eye Bank, before the incorporation into the NSW Tissue Bank, NSW Organ & Tissue Donation Service, I have learnt so many things along the way. And I'm amazed that I'm learning still, with everyday bringing something new about humanity, life, the work we do and the people we work with.

My learning experiences in my role over the years have deeply rooted my belief in the cause of organ and tissue donation. One of my earliest and profound experiences involved explaining to a father that donating his blind son's eyes could help two people regain sight.

This story inspired a message I still have use for often; "even blind people can give sight". We have adapted remarkably over the years to meet surgical demand for corneal surgery. I realised early on that no one should wait a day longer than they must, mainly for the simple fact that Australians are the most caring and generous people, always willing to help those in need. With the same lens, we also needed to think of creative solutions to improve our service and meet health demands sooner. The operational evolution of the Eye and Tissue Bank in response to historically long waitlists for corneal transplants is a good example of this. By improving the scheduling system and booking patients in advance based on their specialist's routine surgical dates, and by increasing the flexibility to bank corneal tissue from five days to up to one month with the introduction of normothermic corneal storage, we have been able to

totally shift our service delivery onto the front foot. Activity now targets planned surgeries, we have an expanded donor pool with greater reach across NSW, and with access to electronic medical records, NSW Cancer Registry, private pathology portals, and the Australian Organ Donor Registry our coordination team can consider more potential tissue donors, and expertly assess their suitability with more confidence than ever – Talk about adaptability!

It sounds like a cliché, however with most sincerity I say that none of the above would be possible without a dedicated tissue bank team who believes in the common cause for the better good of humanity. Tenacity and resilience are attributes that I associate with our tissue bank team, more evident in recent years with their dedication to their work and their adaptability to the pandemic and its long-term effects, life as we know it today. Our staff are amazing people who show great respect to donors and their families, the health professionals and the community, dedicated to providing the best service and improving outcomes for the tissue donation sector.

"In recognising the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute" - Thurgood Marshall

From our merry team to everyone-wishing you a very happy holiday season and a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Warm regards,

Pierre
NSW Tissue Bank Coordination Team Leader

HIGHLIGHTS



A Milestone Celebration: 150 Years of Ophthalmology Excellence

In a spectacular event at the University of Sydney's Great Hall, the Save Sight Institute, Lions NSW, and the University celebrated a collective 150 years of remarkable contributions to the field of ophthalmology. This occasion honoured the legacy of ground-breaking research, clinical advancements, and life-changing care.

The evening featured insightful speeches from leading experts and provided a glimpse into the next era of eye health innovation. As part of the celebration, Lions NSW pledged \$500,000 to both the Save Sight Institute and the NSW Tissue Bank to support research and the development of innovative therapies

DONOR STORY



HEATHER HANSEN

A Legacy of Learning, Love, and Generosity

A Life Devoted to Education

Born in Mackay, North Queensland, Heather Hansen grew up in a close-knit community where her love for learning blossomed. She was among the first in her family to attend university, earning a Bachelor of Arts from James Cook University and later a Librarian Degree from Kuring-Gai College of Advanced Education. Her passion for education propelled her into a fulfilling career in libraries and children's literature, including completing a master's degree at Macquarie University in 2008.

Heather's commitment to equitable education extended beyond her professional life. She volunteered at Westmead Children's Hospital, brightening young lives with her love of books and stories. She also reviewed children's literature for national publications and authored several books, though time ran out before she could publish them.



A Life Anchored in Family

In 1978, Heather married Neville Hansen, embarking on a 40-year journey of love and shared adventures. Together, they raised three children — Tim, Stewart, and Amelia — forming the heart of Heather's world. Whether it was relocating to Sydney in 1979 or navigating life's challenges, Heather embraced every moment with her family by her side.





Facing Cancer with Courage

Heather's journey took a challenging turn in 2004 when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Despite enduring rigorous treatments, she faced each step with unshakable courage. Years later, she was diagnosed with stage four cancer, yet her resilience and grace continued to inspire those around her.

Heather passed away peacefully on July 17, 2020, surrounded by her family. Though her life had come to an end, her story was far from over.

A Final Act of Generosity

After Heather's passing, Neville received a call from the NSW Organ & Tissue Donation Service. Despite her years of cancer treatment, Heather's corneas were eligible for donation. Her family was surprised but deeply moved, knowing her final act would transform lives.

Heather's donation restored sight for two individuals, offering them a new beginning. For Neville and his family, this knowledge brought a profound sense of comfort and pride, reinforcing the enduring impact of Heather's life.

A Legacy of Hope

Heather's story reminds us of the transformative power of organ and tissue donation. Her lifelong dedication to helping others extended into her final act, creating a legacy of hope and healing.

As Neville reflected, "Heather placed a strong value on equitable education and giving back to the community. Even in her final act, she found a way to help others." A cherished family photo from Heather's 60th birthday serves as a lasting memory of her vibrant spirit and enduring love.

"We'll hold Heather in our hearts until she can hold us again in heaven," Neville said.

Inspiring Others to Give

Heather's family urges others to consider registering as organ and tissue donors. "We didn't think it was possible after everything Heather went through, but her donation changed lives," Neville shared. "It's a fantastic opportunity to give back and bring meaning to others in their time of need."

By sharing Heather's story, the NSW Tissue Bank hopes to inspire others to consider the impact they can have. Heather's legacy lives on through the lives she touched, the sight she restored, and the hope she continues to inspire.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT



Monira's Voice in CALD Donation Perspectives

We are thrilled to announce that Monira Hoque, one of our dedicated Research & Development Tissue Bankers, will feature in an upcoming film project exploring culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) perspectives on organ and tissue donation. This groundbreaking series, produced by a Perth-based filmmaker, will provide powerful insights into the emotions, beliefs, and cultural considerations surrounding donation.

These films, set for release in early 2025, aim to foster greater understanding and inclusivity in donation advocacy. Monira's involvement exemplifies the NSW Tissue Bank's commitment to representing diverse communities and supporting engagement with organ and tissue donation services.

Leadership News: Pierre Appointed Co-Chair of EBAANZ



We are delighted to share that Pierre Georges has been appointed Co-Chair of the Eye Bank Association of Australia and New Zealand (EBAANZ). This well-deserved appointment, was carried in recognition of Pierre's eye banking acumen and expertise and the need to reinforce capability within the Peak Professional Body as the sector prepares for a range of national reforms over the coming year.

We're proud to congratulate Pierre on this significant achievement, and know that EBAANZ will be stronger for his contribution.

Learn more about EBAANZ [here](#).



Philanthropy: A Lifeline for Eye Banking

Aine O'Connor

The Australian eye banking sector stands as a testament to the power of philanthropy in transforming lives. Vision disorders cost Australia an estimated \$9.85 billion annually, and more than 2,000 Australians require corneal transplants each year to restore their sight. Eye banks, operating as non-profit organisations, rely heavily on philanthropic contributions to fill funding gaps and enable advancements in research, infrastructure, and public accessibility.

This year's \$500,000 pledge to the NSW Tissue Bank is a shining example of the impact of philanthropic generosity. These funds will support cutting-edge research and the development of innovative therapies, ensuring equitable access to corneal transplants and furthering the sector's ability to meet growing needs.

Over decades, Lions' steadfast support has been instrumental in driving advancements across Australia. The Lions NSW Eye Bank, for instance, benefits from an annual \$110,000 contribution, which directly funds state-of-the-art laboratory equipment and groundbreaking research projects. This funding enables the creation and implementation of technologies that improve transplantation outcomes and push the boundaries of vision science.

Philanthropy has also empowered the sector to address inequities in vision care. Initiatives like Lions Outback Vision and early glaucoma detection

services exemplify efforts to close the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, who are three times more likely to experience vision impairment. These programs extend the reach of vision care into underserved communities, demonstrating a holistic approach to public health.

Lions' impact stretches beyond Australia. Globally, they support 44 Lions Eye Banks across eight countries, fostering collaboration and shared objectives to tackle disparities in eye health. This international network serves as a platform for innovation, allowing Australia to remain at the forefront of corneal transplantation research.

Notable breakthroughs supported by philanthropic contributions include gene therapy for inherited retinal conditions, early glaucoma detection now covered by Medicare, and the pioneering development of bioengineered corneal tissue. These advancements underscore how consistent philanthropic engagement catalyses progress in translational research, directly benefiting patients and shaping the future of vision health.

The Australian eye banking sector's success is rooted in partnerships like these. Lions' enduring commitment not only ensures the sector's sustainability but also fuels innovation, turning the shared vision of restoring sight into a reality for thousands of Australians each year.

Caroline Curtin Returns to Lead NSW Organ and Tissue Donation in 2024

We are delighted to welcome Caroline Curtin back full-time to the NSW Organ & Tissue Donation Service (OTDS) in the new year as General Manager. Since joining OTDS in 2024, Caroline has been acting in a strategic role with the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District Executive Team, where she focused on innovation and improvement.

With extensive experience across state, Commonwealth, and non-government health agencies, Caroline brings a wealth of expertise in strategy, policy, and managing complex health system changes. We look forward to her leadership in advancing organ and tissue donation in NSW.



CALENDAR


Eye and Tissue Spotlight Week: 2 – 6 September

Eye and Tissue Spotlight Week took place this September, featuring twice as many posts on DonateLife's social media channels compared to 2023.

In case you missed it, here's the link to the social tiles you can share:


www.donatelife.gov.au/get-involved/eye-and-tissue-donation-awareness


Mark your calendars for next year's event, scheduled for **8 – 12 September 2025**.




LET'S TALK EYE AND TISSUE DONATION

Each year, thousands of Australian lives are changed through the gift of eye and tissue donation.

 In 2023, more than 2480 Australians received the gift of sight through a corneal transplant.

 Plus, another 9,904 people received tissue transplants including skin, heart valves, bones, tendons and ligaments.

SCAN TO REGISTER



ONE EYE AND TISSUE DONOR CAN CHANGE MANY LIVES. REGISTER TODAY AT DONATELIFE.GOV.AU

As we wrap up 2024, we celebrate our successes and prepare for an exciting year ahead. Thank you for being part of our journey to transform lives through tissue donation.

Warm wishes for the holiday season,

The NSW Tissue Bank Team



NSW Organ & Tissue
Donation Service

Incorporating:
NSW Bone Bank
Lions NSW Eye Bank
Australian Ocular Biobank

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