



**Health**  
NSW Organ & Tissue  
Donation Service

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

Part of the  
**DonateLife**  
network



# NSW Tissue Bank Newsletter

August 2020



## Welcome to the August edition of the NSW Tissue Bank Newsletter

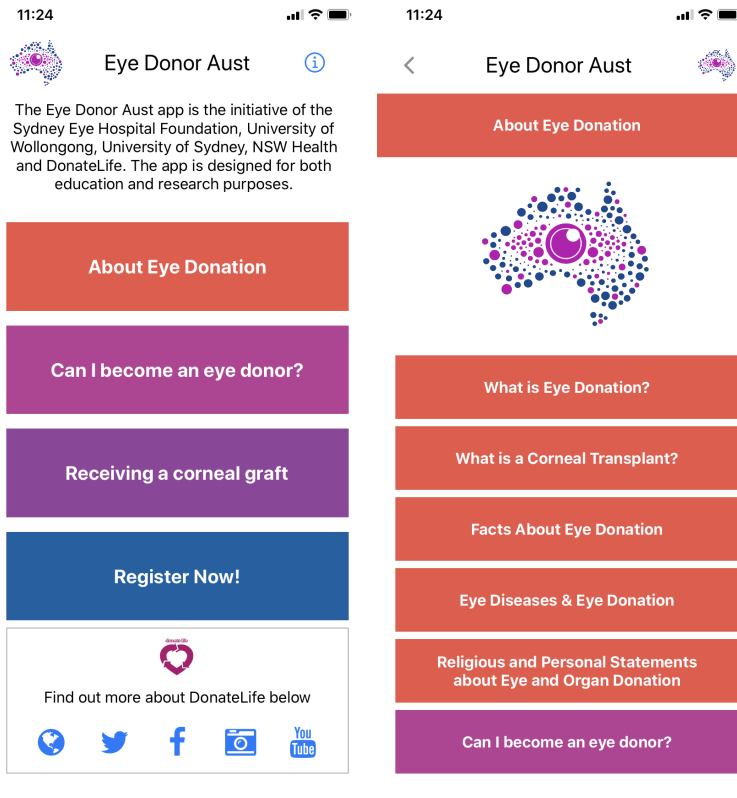
### NEW EYE DONOR APP GOES LIVE

**University of Wollongong PhD nursing student, Amy Chumkasian has developed an app which provides easy to understand information about eye donation, and encourages Australians to register as tissue donors.**

Designed for both education and research purposes, the app is an initiative of the Sydney Eye Hospital Foundation, University of Wollongong, University of Sydney and the NSW Organ & Tissue Donation Service.

The app gives users the opportunity to learn more about eye donation, find out what a corneal graft is, and understand whether or not they are eligible to become an eye donor after they die. The app will be promoted to people receiving treatment for eye conditions as well as the general public.

The app is now available to [download](#) for free on all app stores.



The NSW Tissue Banks incorporating the Lions NSW Eye Bank, NSW Bone Bank and Australian Ocular Biobank, acknowledges the outstanding generosity and long term support of the Lions NSW-ACT Save Sight Foundation.

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## NSW ONCE AGAIN TRANSPORTS DONATED SKIN TO SAVE BURNS VICTIMS

Following a serious coal mining explosion in Moranbah, Queensland in early May 2020, NSW sent urgently needed skin to assist with the treatment of five miners who were seriously burnt in the accident.

The limited number of flights at the time meant that the donated skin had to be transported on dry ice via road courier to Brisbane.

Skin grafts are lifesaving for serious burns victims and only made possible through the generosity of deceased donors and their families.

In December 2019, NSW also sent urgently needed skin to New Zealand to assist the victims of the White Island volcano eruption.

The NSW Tissue Bank is responsible for the retrieval and processing of donated skin tissue in preparation for transplant. After passing a number of stringent assessments, skin is preserved in custom freezers at -80 degrees and can be stored for up to 5 years.

*Pictured: Donated skin being placed into dry ice in order to be delivered for transplant.*





## RECORD NUMBER OF EYE TISSUE DISPATCHED DURING COVID-19 CRISIS

When the announcement was made that all non-urgent elective surgery was to cease on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020, the NSW Tissue Bank coordinated a huge last minute effort to distribute tissue from the deceased tissue donation program.

The NSW Tissue Bank processed and dispatched a record amount of donated tissue to surgeons across Sydney in a matter of days. 21 corneas (which is the clear part of the eye) were transplanted in three days. Only about 14-16 corneas from the NSW Tissue Bank would normally be transplanted in an average week.

Following the announcement, eight corneal transplant surgeons across Sydney worked with the NSW Tissue Bank to ensure that the donor tissue was successfully transplanted to grateful recipients.

Corneal transplant surgery involves replacing a diseased corneal layer of the eye with a layer that has been generously donated from a deceased donor. People with corneal disease have an opaque or 'foggy' cornea, meaning they require a transplant in order to improve or completely restore their sight.

It was a relief that those patients were able to proceed with their eye surgeries, and that the generosity of the tissue donors could still be honoured. The corneal tissue can only be stored up to 3 weeks, which is why it was so important to ensure that the existing tissue was transplanted.

Corneal transplant surgery in NSW has since recommenced as normal.

*Pictured: Donated corneas in storage at the eye lab.*



## DONATELIFE WEEK GOES DIGITAL FOR 2020

**DonateLife Week is a national awareness campaign aimed at encouraging Australians to register as organ and tissue donors and took place in late July 2020.**

In normal circumstances, community events are held across the nation to highlight how organ and tissue donation saves lives. Typically, it relies heavily on the incredible work of volunteers, advocates, community and sporting partners and those working in the donation and transplantation sectors to coordinate events at a grassroots level, getting out in their local communities and driving awareness for organ and tissue donation.

The impact of the global pandemic and social distancing meant that these community events could no longer take place. However, cancelling the week-long campaign was not an option.

This year, the campaign instead took a comprehensive digital approach, getting the important message out there with a combination of traditional media, social media and targeted online marketing through the telling of compelling real-life stories, clinical innovations and myth-busting.

Despite health news predominately saturated with COVID-19 information, hundreds of inspiring stories and interviews ran across major and independent TV, radio, podcasts, online, print, magazines and social media throughout the state and country.

Early tracking insights showed that digital impressions for the DonateLife website are up by 44%, and clicks up by 71% from 2019.

*Pictured: Research Scientist, Monira Hoque featured as part of the DonateLife Week multimedia campaign.*



**DonateLife**  
26 July – 2 August 2020 **Week**

## NSW TISSUE BANK CONTINUES TO PAVE THE WAY THROUGH CLINICAL RESEARCH

Although the team's primary laboratory work stations were under lockdown for three months and have only recently reopened under strict social distancing rules, the Research and Development team have managed to continue research activities across a range of areas, preparing a number of clinical based research papers for publication by working from home.

### External clinical research:

The Keratoconus International Consortium project has continued to develop and will provide the basis for research into keratoconus for many years to come.

The contributors now represent the major university and research institutions across Australia, New Zealand and Asia with recent sites incorporated across USA and Europe. The NSW Tissue Bank continues to provide leadership within NSW.

### Internal clinical research with papers either published or accepted for publication:

- Human platelets and derived products in treating ocular surface diseases – a systematic review
- Donation of discarded ocular tissue in patients undergoing SMILE laser refractive surgery: developing appropriate guidelines
- Twenty-year review of donor characteristics in a single eye bank
- Ophthalmic use of amnion membrane tissue in Australia: Introduction and initial use of a service
- Factors affecting Corneal Organ Culture Contamination: A 6-year Study at the NSW Tissue Bank
- Human material for research: Eye banking, bio-banking and ethical access
- Organ and tissue donation: A review of Google trends

### Current research projects:

- Primary corneal transplantation failure: 5 year review of NSW Tissue Bank
- The impact of cataract surgery in corneal transplantation

The Research and Development team have also submitted an application to the Ophthalmic Research Institute of Australia 2021 Grant Proposal for a research project to develop an injection formulation of corneal endothelial cells.

## NSW TISSUE BANK JOINS LIONS INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP

The NSW Tissue Bank is one of three Australian eye banks to join a working group featuring Lions eye banks from the USA and Europe.

The purpose of the group is to help Lions eye banks to thrive; to bring visibility to the Lions brand, and to provide a vital service to their communities.

Bringing together the experienced Lions eye banking professionals will strengthen and expand the Lions Eye Bank Program through group participation in active discussion, identification of critical challenges and recommendations for proposed solutions and best practices.



## ST GEORGE HOSPITAL UNVEILS ONE-OF-A-KIND DONOR MEMORIAL

On Monday 27<sup>th</sup> July, the NSW Organ & Tissue Donation Service unveiled a very special memorial at St George Hospital to commemorate deceased organ and tissue donors and to kick-start DonateLife Week in NSW.

The memorial is in the form of a beautiful large window decal, located within the hospital near the Intensive Care Unit.

It is hoped that the tribute will create a contemplative space within the hospital to recognise the generosity of all organ and tissue donors - past, present and future.

The artwork was commissioned by the NSW Organ & Tissue Donation Service and was selected through an application process, whereby local artists were invited to submit an expression of interest.

The creative brief asked artists to convey a sense of nature, growth and new life through their depiction of the native landscape and flora from the local area.

A submission by Sydney-based Indigenous artist, Susan Grant was chosen for the memorial. Her painting is titled *Through Essence of Life, We'll Find the Key*, and reflects and celebrates new life.

Central to Susan's artwork is her depiction of Mother Earth's spirit, symbolic of the strength and compassion for others in giving the gift of life.

*Pictured anti-clockwise over the page: Artist Susan Grant, donor family member, Leah Barthel, double transplant recipient, Patricia Scheetz and the donor memorial decal.*







## WEAR YOUR FAVOURITE SPORTING JERSEY THIS JERSEY DAY

On Friday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2020, schools and workplaces across Australia are asked to allow students and employees to wear their favourite sporting jersey to show their support for DonateLife and begin the conversation with their friends and families about organ donation.

[Jersey Day](#) is inspired by the story of Nathan Gremmo, who was tragically lost in an accident in 2015. Nathan's family chose to give the gift of life to others to honour the legacy of Nathan's generous personality.

With many employees still working from home, the Gremmo family encourage people to take a photo of themselves in their favourite jersey and share it on social media with the hashtags *#jerseydayau* and *#donatelife*

# JERSEY DAY

