



## Declaration of Brain Death

Donor Alliance is the federally-designated, Association of Organ Procurement Organizations (AOPO) and American Association of Tissue Banks (AATB) accredited, non-profit organ procurement organization tissue bank serving Colorado and most of Wyoming. As a recognized leader in facilitating the donation and recovery of transplantable organs and tissues, Donor Alliance's mission is to save lives through organ and tissue donation and transplantation.

Due to HIPPA laws and out of respect for the privacy of the family, Donor Alliance does not discuss the specifics of any case and cannot confirm if the patient is a donor.

### Declaration of Death

According to the Uniform Determination of Death Act, death can occur in one of two ways: cardiac death, when the heart is no longer able to beat on its own, OR brain death, which is the irreversible loss of brain function, including the brain stem.

Donors may be a candidate for organ, eye and tissue donation no matter the manner of death.

### Brain Death

- Brain death is legal death as determined by the [Uniform Determination of Death Act](#).
  - All 50 states have enacted legislation accepting death by the following definition as defined by the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association: *Death is the irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions OR irreversible cessation of all functions of the brain including the brain stem (Brain Death).*
  - For those declared brain dead, legal time of death is upon pronouncement of brain death.
- Brain death is final and finite; it is not in the same thing as a coma or persistent vegetative state. Because of the neurological nature of brain death, a controlled and extensive clinical exam occurs to make that final declaration.
- According to the American Academy of Neurology (AAN):
  - Brain death is defined as the irreversible loss of function of the brain, including the brain stem.
  - The three cardinal findings in brain death are coma or unresponsiveness, absence of brain stem reflexes and apnea.
  - Coma or unresponsiveness means no cerebral motor response to pain in all extremities (nail-bed pressure and supraorbital pressure).
- There has never been a documented case of recovery from brain death under circumstances where all confirmatory and clinical tests, which are legally required, have been performed accurately.
- Death by neurologic assessment and determination by a physician occurs when a patient appears to meet clinical criteria for this diagnosis. It has no relationship to a patient's donor designation status or a family member's support of donation.
- Donor Alliance, the federally designated organ procurement organization serving Colorado and Wyoming, does not pronounce legal declaration of clinical death under any circumstance. Declaration of death is done by the medical community. Donor Alliance adheres fully to the federal and state laws for the determination of death and subsequent organ recovery. All standards are in line with the entire medical community.



## **Autopsy**

- Organ/tissue donation and autopsy are not mutually exclusive. Donor Alliance coordinates with the coroner's office in the county of jurisdiction to ensure donation does not interfere with death investigation.
- Upon declaration of brain death, the hospital will report the death to the coroner's office. Donor Alliance follows up with the coroner's office for release for donation.
- In the event of donation after cardiac death, once family authorization is obtained the coroner is notified of the impending death by the hospital. Donor Alliance then contacts the coroner for release for donation.
- In the case of cardiac death, the hospital or referring agency reports the death to the coroner, and then refers to the OPO. The OPO then contacts the coroner to obtain release for tissue donation.