



Anatomical Donation in Texas

A Guide for Donors and Families

This document is intended to help potential donors and their families to make informed decisions about anatomical (whole-body) donation as an end-of-life option. Its goal is to ensure a clear understanding of the donation process and to help you recognize and avoid fraudulent or unethical practices. Before enrolling in any donation program, research the organization carefully and be sure you understand how donated remains may be used for education or research.

Where to get more information

Texas Funeral Service Commission

Phone: (512) 936-2474

Website: www.tfsc.texas.gov

You may also request a copy of the Donor Acknowledgement Form (TFSC Form A-4) from the program you are considering.

1. What is anatomical donation?

Anatomical donation is the gift of a body or parts of the body after death for use in medical education, scientific research, or the training of healthcare professionals. It is different from organ donation for transplant purposes.

Such donations help educate healthcare professionals and forensic professionals, facilitate training in medical procedures, and support research that enhances knowledge of health, disease, injury, and medicine.

2. Types of donation programs

In Texas, there are two main types of programs that accept anatomical donations:

- **Willed Body Programs** — These are run by accredited higher-education institutions in Texas. These programs accept donated bodies or anatomical specimens for medical education and research. Each program has its own policies regarding acceptance, use, and return of remains.
- **Non-Transplant Anatomical Donation Organizations (NADOs)** — accredited organizations registered with the Texas Funeral Service Commission that recover, process, store, and distribute anatomical specimens for purposes other than transplantation into a living person.

Donations may also be made to or distributed to other recipients authorized under Texas law, including **Forensic science programs, Search-and-rescue training organizations, and Eye or tissue banks** that use donations for research or training.

3. Who can make a donation?

An adult of sound mind may authorize their own anatomical donation prior to death by executing a written document, witnessed by two adults.

If a person has not made a donation decision before death, the following individuals may authorize a donation, in this order of priority (per Texas Health & Safety Code §692A.009):

- Person the donor authorizes to make the gift (a signed document that specifically authorizes an anatomical gift).
- Spouse
- Adult children
- Parents
- Adult siblings
- Adult grandchildren
- Grandparents
- Guardian of the person at the time of death
- Hospital Administrator
- Any other person authorized to dispose of the body

4. What happens after a donation?

After death, the donor's body is transported to the receiving organization, where it is treated with respect and used for the educational, research, or training purposes specified in writing by the donor or donor's agent. The duration a donor's body is used varies by program and purpose, ranging from a few weeks to two years.

When the organization has completed its use of the donation, disposition is carried out in accordance with the donor's or agent's instructions. This typically involves cremation. Some programs offer to return cremated remains to the family. The donor's identity is protected throughout the process.

5. Is there a cost?

Anatomical donation is a voluntary gift that helps advance medical education and research. Texas law prohibits the sale or purchase of human bodies or body parts for anatomical use. No one may receive payment for making a donation.

In most cases, the receiving organization covers the cost of transportation, processing, and final disposition (usually cremation). However, families should confirm with the specific program what costs, if any, they may be responsible for.

6. Can a donation be changed or canceled?

Yes. A donor may change or cancel their anatomical donation at any time before death by signing a written statement.

If the donor does not change or cancel the donation before death, a person who is legally authorized to make an anatomical donation may be able to change or cancel it after the donor's death, as allowed by Texas law.

A donor may also choose not to make an anatomical donation. In most cases, this decision prevents anyone else from making a donation on the donor's behalf.

Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 692A, establishes the legal requirements for changing, canceling, or refusing an anatomical donation.

7. Questions to ask before you choose a program

Not all programs are the same. Before you enroll, it helps to ask each program you are considering the same questions and compare the answers. Consider asking:

Program Information

- Is the organization nonprofit or for-profit?
- How long has the organization been operating?
- Is it based and operating in Texas?
- Is it registered with the Texas Funeral Service Commission?
- Has the organization ever been subject to disciplinary or regulatory action?
- Will I receive a written consent agreement that clearly explains the program's policies, terms, and conditions?

Eligibility and Enrollment

- What medical conditions or other circumstances could affect my eligibility?
- Is acceptance guaranteed, or is the final decision made at the time of death?
- Can I change or revoke my consent after enrolling? If so, what is the process?

How Donations Are Used

- What types of education, research, or training does the program support?
- Who may receive my donated body or anatomical specimens?
- May my donation be shared with other organizations, including medical device companies, private organizations, or entities outside Texas?
- Could my donation be used for military, commercial, or product testing purposes?
- How can I place restrictions on how my donation is used?

Costs and Services

- Will my family be responsible for any costs, such as transportation, death certificates, cremation, or other services?
- What transportation services are provided, and are there any geographic limitations?
- Under what circumstances could the donation be declined?

Return of Cremated Remains

- Are cremated remains returned to the family upon request?
- Will all of the donor's remains be returned, or only a portion?
- If only a portion is returned, what should the family expect?
- How long does it typically take for cremated remains to be returned?
- What happens if the remains are not claimed?

Planning for Your Family

- Who should my family contact at the time of my death?
- Is assistance available 24 hours a day?
- What documents or information should my family have available?

How to file a complaint

If you believe a donation has been mishandled or that an organization has engaged in unethical practices, you may file a complaint with the Texas Funeral Service Commission. Find more information at www.tfsc.texas.gov