

Aide-Mémoire

Meeting with Michael Papesch and Dr Paula Martin on increasing deceased organ donation

Date due to MO:	2 December 2025	Date of Meeting:	4 December 2025
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	Reference:	H2025075353
To:	Hon Simeon Brown, Minister of Health		
Consulted:	Health New Zealand: ☒ New Zealand Blood Service: ☒		
Proactive release:	This title is proposed by the Ministry of Health for proactive release: ☐		

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Contact for telephone discussion

Name	Position	Telephone
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Alison Cossar	Manager, System Enablers, Strategy and Policy	

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About the Meeting

Purpose of Meeting: You are meeting with Michael Papesch and Dr Paula Martin to discuss increasing deceased organ donation in New Zealand.

Details of Meeting

Date:	4 December 2025
Time:	3:10pm – 3:30pm
Venue:	Auckland Policy Office

Attendees

Michael Papesch
Dr Paula Martin

Ministry representatives

Allison Bennett, Group Manager, Strategy and Policy (via Teams link)

Comment:

- Profiles of attendees are provided as Appendix one.
- Talking points to support you during the meeting are provided as Appendix two.

Background and context

1. New Zealand has one of the lowest deceased organ donation rates compared to countries with comparable health systems. This means fewer organs are available for transplantation and many patients with organ failure (such as kidney, heart, or liver disease) face long waiting times or may never receive a transplant.
2. In 2019, New Zealand's rate was 13.2 deceased organ donors per million of population (pmp). In comparison, Australia's deceased organ donation rate was 21.6 pmp.
3. In 2024, only 36.9% of potential donors were referred by ICU LINK clinical staff to NZBOS, and organ donation was raised with whānau in just 43.6% of cases. Of those conversations, only 70–90% progressed to a formal discussion, and just 30.7% resulted in organ donation consent in New Zealand – around 70 people. Additionally, not all of these would have resulted in an organ donation due to the requirement to have a matching recipient at the time.
4. In the United Kingdom and Australia, funding over the past two decades has enabled agencies such as NHS Blood and Transplant and DonateLife to embed specialist organ donation staff within hospitals, working alongside intensive care teams nationwide. This approach has driven referral rates as high as 93% in the UK and consent rates of 71%, and 53% in Australia.
5. On 18 September 2025, the Ministry provided our initial advice on improving rates of organ donation [H2025072312] as requested by you.

The 2017 Government strategy

6. In June 2017, the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) published *Increasing Deceased Organ Donation and Transplantation: A National Strategy* (the Strategy). It set the direction for improving deceased organ donation and transplantation rates in New Zealand and was developed through extensive sector consultation, including clinicians, consumer representatives, and international best practice review.
7. The Strategy provides a framework with long-term priorities and actions to ensure organ donation becomes a normal part of end-of-life care. It focuses on building a coordinated system that supports families, clinicians, and hospitals to increase donation rates. The six strategic priorities are:
 - a. One: Improving public awareness and media engagement about organ donation and transplantation
 - b. Two: Improving New Zealand's system of registering and sharing donation intent for individuals, families, and clinicians
 - c. Three: Enhancing capability and consistency through improved training
 - d. Four: Increasing hospital-based capacity for deceased organ donation
 - e. Five: Establishing a national agency to lead deceased organ donation and transplantation
 - f. Six: Measuring progress.

Progress to date on implementation of the Strategy

8. The transfer of Organ Donation New Zealand (ODNZ) to NZBOS in November 2020 addressed the priority five to establish a national agency to lead the deceased organ donation and transplantation.
9. Since 2020, NZBOS have contributed to Strategy priorities one and three by:
 - a. strengthening staffing and rostering to ensure extended hours of coverage;
 - b. expanding its education activities for staff and the public;
 - c. establishing a clinical governance process for organ and tissue donation; and
 - d. working closely with transplant services to implement changes to improve the donation-transplantation clinical pathways.
10. Budget 2022 allocated \$11 million over four years to implement the 2017 Strategy. Health NZ and NZBOS report that current funding levels have enabled NZBOS to stabilise and expand some staffing, to maintain existing services, introduce resources for communications, and clinical governance.
11. As a result, there has been progress through incremental improvements in public awareness, training, and clinical governance rather than the transformative changes envisaged in the Strategy.

Key areas requiring more work

12. Mr Michael Papesch and Dr Paula Martin have been strong advocates for full implementation of the 2017 Strategy. They have previously raised concerns that progress on implementing the Strategy to increase deceased organ donation has stalled, despite strong cross-party support and enabling legislation passed in 2019.
13. Mr Papesch and Dr Martin highlight systemic issues such as unclear mandates for NZBOS, limited governance oversight, and lack of transparent reporting. They note that these gaps have real consequences: patients continue to die waiting for transplants, and many are never offered the chance to join the waiting list.
14. To address this, they recommend that the Minister issue Letters of Expectation to NZBOS, MOH, and HNZ with clear objectives and targets for full implementation of the Strategy, alongside sustainable funding and stronger accountability measures.
15. They have requested a joint agency hearing from the Ministry of Health, Health New Zealand (Health NZ), and NZBOS, which is scheduled for Wednesday, 17 December 2025.
16. NZBOS advises that two priority areas of the Strategy remain and are critical to increasing deceased organ donation rates. These following strategic priorities:
 - a. two: Improving New Zealand's system for registering and sharing donation intent for individuals, whānau, and clinicians;
 - b. four: Increasing hospital-based capacity for organ donation by improving access to organ donation clinical expertise across the health sector.
17. Both Health NZ and NZBOS consider that increasing hospital-based capacity (priority four) would have a greater impact on the donation than only improving the current

system, noting the current system is inaccessible and outdated. Addressing these would also achieve the outcomes that Mr Papesch and Dr Martin seek.

s 9(2)(f)(iv)

Next steps

22. The HSC will hear from the Ministry, Health NZ, and NZBOS on 17 December 2025, providing an opportunity to demonstrate progress and accountability. The Ministry is currently working with Health NZ and NZBOS to prepare for this appearance.

23. s 9(2)(f)(iv)

24.



Allison Bennett

Group Manager, Health System Settings

Strategy and Policy

Appendix 1: Profiles of attendees

Michael Papesch



Michael Papesch is a live donor kidney transplant recipient who, since his transplant in 2006, has worked in a variety of kidney patient advocacy positions to make transplantation accessible to more people. This includes membership of renal clinical networks, membership of the then National Renal Advisory Board, Board, Chair of the Wellington Region Kidney Society, and Board member and then Chair of Kidney Health New Zealand. He is currently the Secretary of the Wellington Kidney Support Society, and a consumer representative on a trans-Tasman committee of the Australia and New Zealand Society of Nephrologists.

He was the lead author of the Kidney Health NZ publication Transforming Lives and Saving Money: An Integrated Strategy to Address Kidney Transplant Equity and Increase Kidney Transplantation in New Zealand (November 2021). Professionally, he worked as a public servant for 37 years, including over 20 years at the NZ Treasury. He was most recently the Deputy Secretary Policy, Legal and Strategy at the NZ Customs Service, before retiring in May 2021.

Dr Paula Martin



Dr Paula Martin has a background in policy and research relating to deceased and living donor kidney transplantation. She has a PhD in Public Policy that looked at barriers to living donor kidney transplantation in NZ and options for improvement. In 2016 she was Group Manager of the Ministry of Health team that carried out a review of deceased organ donation and developed policy options for increasing NZ's rates. The 2017 Strategy was completed after she left the Ministry but was based on this earlier work. From 2018-2021, she was a member of the Board of the NZ Blood and Organ Service. She donated a kidney to her husband, Michael Papesch, in 2006.

s 9(2)(g)(i)

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