

## More than 11,000 Latinos have donated their organs

**Contexto Latino** - Three months after donating her 19-year-old daughter's organs, María Aguilar received a letter that made her cry tears of joy. "In this letter they told me that after my daughter's death, six people's lives had been saved, including a 5-year-old girl and a mother of ten. Each of them received half of her liver. I was so pleased... we took life from death," remembers Aguilar, whose daughter Elizabeth died in Lancaster (California) from preeclampsia during her first pregnancy.

Like Elizabeth Aguilar, more than 11,000 Latinos have donated their organs during the past two decades, a love and solidarity message that has saved the life of several thousand people. However, there are still many more people waiting for an organ. In the United States there are 96,000 people on the organ transplant waiting list; more than 16,000 of them are Latinos, most waiting for a kidney. During April—designated National Organ and Tissue Donation Month by the Federal Government—campaigns are intensified to shorten this long list.

María Aguilar did not know that her daughter wanted to be a donor, but her daughter's personality made her suspect as much. Several weeks after Elizabeth's death, María found her daughter's driver's license bearing the pink spot that, in California, serves to identify those who want to be organ donors. "I was pleased to make her wish come true," explained Mrs. Aguilar, who has received letters full of gratitude from her daughter's organ receivers. However, contrary to what happened in the case of María and Elizabeth Aguilar, many Latinos still are afraid of registering as organ receivers or donors. These are the most common myths or misconceptions that foster such an attitude:

**Myth #1:** "If I am involved in a car crash and the hospital staff knows that I want to be a donor, they will not make proper efforts to save my life."

The donation shall only be considered once any and all life-saving resources have been used to attempt to save the patient's life. Indeed, from the medical point of view, patients should receive very intensive care to save their life in order to be considered potential donors. In addition, emergency room paramedics and doctors neither participate in the donation process nor do they receive any economic compensation.

**Myth #2:** "I am worried that they may take my organs before I am dead."

Organ and tissue donation is only allowed after a doctor unrelated to the transplant process determines that brain death has occurred. In California, a brain death diagnosis by two doctors is required. A series of tests is carried out to be completely sure that the patient has actually passed away.

Back

**Myth #3:** “Only the rich and famous benefit from organ transplants.”

UNOS (United Network for Organ Sharing) and national transplant centers have created a waiting list that contains each patient’s information according to his/her weight, height, and blood type. The priority level depends on medical and scientific factors, including how urgent the need is, how long the person has been on the waiting list, blood type, and organ compatibility based on size. Factors such as race, gender, age, income, or popularity are never taken into account in determining who shall receive an organ.

**Myth #4:** “My religion does not allow me to donate organs.”

Most religions, including Christian ones, support organ donation as an act of human benevolence. His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI is a registered donor and, in regard to organ donation, has stated: “It is a gesture of utmost love towards those in need to help a brother in difficulties.”

**Myth #5:** “I cannot be a donor because I want a traditional funeral with my body present.” The organ recovery surgery is carried out in an operating theater. The body is treated with respect and reverence. Organ and/or tissue donation neither disfigures the body nor interferes with a traditional funeral, if that is the express wish of the deceased. Tissue donation is carried out in a manner that is not visibly noticeable, whether by recovering skin from less visible areas or using prostheses in the case of bones or corneas.

**Myth #6:** “The donation will cost my family money.”

Any and all costs related to the donation are paid by the organ recovery agency. Neither you nor your family will have to pay any donation process expenses. However, the family will still bear the costs of the funeral.

To register as a donor in California, go to [www.doneVIDAcalifornia.org](http://www.doneVIDAcalifornia.org) or call 1-866-797-2366. In the rest of the country, go to [www.donevida.org](http://www.donevida.org) or call 1-800-485-8432.