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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **National Minority Donor Awareness Day to Be Observed August 1**

### ***Minorities Account for 56% of Those Awaiting Organ Transplants in Illinois***

**Elmhurst, Ill. (Aug. 1, 2008)** - In observance of National Minority Donor Awareness Day, Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network calls attention to the more than 2,600 minority individuals awaiting lifesaving organ transplants in Illinois. This number reflects 56 percent of those waiting in Illinois.

The high percentage stems from the increased frequency among minority populations of diabetes, hypertension and other conditions leading to the need for a transplant. Kidneys top the list as the most needed transplant, with more than 3,700 individuals waiting in Illinois. African-Americans top the list of minorities in need of organ transplants, followed by Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, people of multiracial descent and Pacific Islanders.

Jack Lynch, Gift of Hope Director of Community Affairs, says communities should not confine themselves to a one-day discussion about donation. "We urge everyone to join us in year-round efforts to educate others in their neighborhoods, churches, schools and workplaces about how lifesaving organ donation can turn around this critical public health crisis," he says.

Of the more than 4,700 patients waiting for transplants in Illinois:

- African-Americans make up 37 percent of individuals on the waiting list and 46 percent of those waiting for kidneys.
- Hispanics make up 14 percent of individuals on the waiting list and 14 percent of those waiting for kidneys.

#### ***Why is increasing donation among minorities so important?***

Donated organs can be transplanted across racial and ethnic groups. However, in kidney transplantation, genetic makeup plays a significant role in the degree to which a match exists between the organ donor and the transplant recipient. For these patients, the lack of available organs means longer waiting periods on transplant lists, more time spent on dialysis, and sometimes death.

National Minority Donor Awareness Day, observed every August 1, was established in 1996 as an intensive awareness campaign reaching out to all ethnic groups. It focuses on donation misconceptions and issues specific to minorities. The objective is to promote healthy living and to increase the number of people who sign up in a donor consent registry, have family discussions and become life-giving donors. Additionally, the national observance increases awareness of the conditions leading to the need for a transplant that occur with greater frequency in minority populations.

While minorities make up 34 percent of the U.S. population and 27 percent of donors, they make up 53 percent of the national transplant waiting list—which has climbed to nearly 100,000 men, women and children waiting.

(MORE)

To help reduce the growing waiting list for organ transplants, Donate Life Illinois, a coalition of agencies involved with organ, tissue and eye donation, launched the “I Am. Are You?” campaign in January 2007. The campaign’s current goal is to register 5 million people in the state’s new donor registry by April 30, 2009. To date, more than 3.5 million Illinoisans have registered their decisions to donate life.

Illinoisans can join the new donor registry by visiting the campaign site at [www.donatelifellinois.org](http://www.donatelifellinois.org); visiting any Illinois state driver’s license facility; or by calling the Illinois Secretary of State Organ/Tissue Donor Program at 800/210-2106.

**Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network** is proud to serve as the federally designated not-for-profit organ procurement organization (OPO) that coordinates organ and tissue donation and services to families of donors in the northern three-quarters of Illinois and northwest Indiana. Since its inception in 1986, Gift of Hope has coordinated donations that have saved the lives of more than 14,000 organ transplant recipients, and improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of tissue transplant recipients. As one of 58 OPOs that make up the nation’s organ donation system, Gift of Hope works with 183 hospitals and serves 11.7 million residents in its donation service area.

For more information, contact Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network at 888/307-DON8 (3668) or visit [www.giftofhope.org](http://www.giftofhope.org). Spanish speakers can call 877/577-3747 or visit the Web site’s Spanish-language section.

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