

# REDISCOVERING THE CIVIC AND ACHIEVING BETTER OUTCOMES IN PUBLIC POLICY

## Policy Briefings Number 12

**Title:** How does choice architecture influence organ donor registration? A randomised controlled trial comparing opt-in, opt-out and mandated choice registration systems

### Background to the Project:

- 28% of the UK population is signed up to the National Organ Donor Register - not enough to generate the required number of organs needed each year - at least a 50% more organ donors are needed
- A recent organ donation taskforce advised *against* a move to an 'opt'-out' system where people are presumed to be donors unless they actively opt out - the UK, at present, continues to operate an 'opt-in' or 'informed consent' system
- Those countries with opt-out systems have significantly higher rates of organ donation (25-30%) as compared to opt-in systems
- Some states in the US operate 'mandated choice' systems whereby all citizens are asked if they wish to be donors and legally have to decide say 'yes' or 'no'

### Aims of the project and methods:

- This project aimed to test out which of the three methods – **opt-in** (informed consent), **opt-out** (presumed consent) or **mandated choice** (yes/ no forced choice question) – would generate the greatest number of organ donor registrations amongst those not already registered, using a randomised controlled trial online survey design
- 4011 people took part in the online survey (Ipsos Mori Panel)
- The sample reflected the general population in terms of gender, age & region of residence

- The survey explored views on systems to register organ donors, and general attitudes towards organ donation
- At the end, respondents were asked if they wanted to visit the national organ donor website to join the register
- The question was asked in three ways, to reflect either an opt-in system ('check the box to visit the site to register'), an opt-out system ('uncheck the box if you do not wish to visit the site to register') or a mandated choice system ('would you like to visit the site to register, yes/ no') - respondents were randomly assigned to a survey containing one of these questions
- We tracked those clicking onto the national organ donor register website, as well as the number actually registering on the website

## Key Findings:

### Attitudes toward organ donation

- **69%** responded positively to the idea of organ donation in general, with 30% *strongly* in favour of the idea
- **55%** responded positively to the idea of being on organ donor
- **27%** stated that they intended to join the organ donor register (26% said 'no'; 47% said 'don't know')
- **69%** stated willingness to accept an organ if needed

### Views on recruiting organ donors

- **53%** responded positively to the idea that people should **not** be assumed to be organ donors **unless they opt in** (**29%** *strongly agreeing* & **11%** *strongly disagreeing*)
- **42%** responded positively to the idea that everyone should be automatically signed up to the register but should be able to opt out (**21%** *strongly agreeing* & **25%** *strongly disagreeing*)
- **63%** responded positively to the idea that everyone should be asked whether they wanted to be a donor and would have to answer 'yes' or 'no' (**35%** *strongly agreeing* & **6%** *strongly disagreeing*)
- **30%** responded positively to the idea that people who have signed up for the register should be prioritised for

transplants above those who have not, **40%** responded negatively

- **15%** responded positively to the idea that people should be provided with a financial incentive to join the register; **63%** responded negatively

### **The impact of opt-in, opt-out and mandated choice systems**

- **23%** of the **opt out** group clicked through from the survey to visit the National Organ Donor Register website
- **20%** of the **mandated choice** group clicked through from the survey to visit the National Organ Donor Register website
- **15%** of the **opt in** group clicked through from the survey to visit the National Organ Donor Register website
- However, **very few people completed the online registration process on the National Organ Donor Register website** (less than 0.5% of the overall sample – 9 respondents from the mandated choice group; 7 from the opt-out group; 4 from the opt-in group)

### **Policy Relevance and Implications:**

- Even those not already on the organ donor register are broadly in favour of the idea of organ donation, with the majority committed to the idea of being organ donors
- Yet when presented with a chance to register, few take up this option – there is a persistent gap between peoples' stated attitudes and their behaviour
- The way you ask a question about signing the organ donation register seems to matter
- Opt-out and mandated choice questions generate larger numbers visiting the organ donor website as compared to opt-in systems, by a small but significant margin of 5% (mandated choice)/ 7% (opt out)
- However people are very reluctant to take the extra step of completing an online organ donor registration form
- Including a question on organ donation within other application forms (eg passport, driving license), as is current practice, may work well to avoid duplication and effort involved in completing a stand-alone organ donor

registration form. In view of support for mandated choice, policy makers should consider changing the form of question used from opt-in to mandated choice.

- There is little public support for paying donors or prioritising donors for transplants above non-donors

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