

Open Markets for Organs

Current United States law allows individuals to donate human organs for transplant and allows individuals to receive donated human organs for transplant. Indeed, public policy and ad campaigns encourage the behavior – however, it is currently illegal to buy or sell human organs.

According to the Health Resources and Services Administration, over 50,000 people were added to the organ transplant list in 2011 alone. In that same year, only about 28,500 transplants occurred. Those who didn't receive transplants continued to wait; many die before they receive donor organs. An average of 18 people on the transplant list dies each day waiting for an organ.¹ Simply stated, there aren't enough compatible organs available.

Some individuals have suggested the possibility of allowing healthy individuals to be legally permitted to sell their organs as a way to combat the shortage. Proponents of an open organ market argue that allowing people to sell their organs would increase the supply of available organs. Openly traded organs would include only those organs that can be donated by living donors: kidneys, and pieces of livers, lungs, and pancreases are the most common. Opponents describe a disturbing future in which those of means harvest the organs of the young and poor, and contend that there are some things that money simply cannot buy.

¹ Data collected from U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration. <http://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/latestData/rptData.asp> as well as <http://www.organdonor.gov/index.html>.