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Kidneys for Communities' new program aims to increase living kidney donations impacted by COVID

New national community-directed donation program takes center stage for National Kidney Month

March 10, 2021—TOLEDO, OHIO—Tackling the living kidney-donor shortage, [Kidneys for Communities](#), a nonprofit, has launched the first-ever national community-directed donation program to increase the pool of living kidney donors in the United States.

The pandemic has impacted living kidney donations across the U.S. According to the U.S. Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN), living kidney donations in 2020 dropped to just 5,237, the lowest number in just over two decades.

“We are battling end-stage renal disease on all fronts,” said Ira Brody, executive director of Kidneys for Communities. “End-stage renal disease is the ninth leading cause of death in the U.S. While prevention through kidney-health education is key, those who are in the final stages of chronic kidney disease are currently relying on a small pool of living donors a year, made even smaller by COVID. More than 240 people on dialysis die every day because they could not find a donor, so expanding the pool of living kidney donations could mean survival for many.”

The Kidneys for Communities model addresses the significant shortage of living kidney donations in the U.S., where more than 100,000 people are in immediate need of a kidney transplant, according to the OPTN. Based on OPTN data, of those who receive kidneys from living donors, approximately 95 percent know or are associated with the donor through their community network.

The community-directed donation model increases living kidney donations by allowing potential donors who belong to membership-based associations to direct their lifesaving donation to someone—even a potential stranger—based on a community they want to support.

Kidneys for Communities is harnessing the power of community through proactive outreach programs that drive education and awareness about living kidney donations. Celebrating National Kidney Month, Kidneys for Communities is asking leaders of membership-based associations and community organizations to sign up for its “Put Your Kidney Where Your Heart Is” toolkit to empower members to learn more about kidney donation and support others in their organizations. With this program in place, Kidneys for Communities is working to make the living kidney donor shortage a thing of the past.

To further increase living donor and recipient matches, Kidneys for Communities partners with leaders in the renal transplantation field, including Alliance for Paired Kidney Donation, which matches willing but incompatible kidney donor and recipient pairs through paired donations.

Through Kidneys for Communities and Alliance for Paired Kidney Donation, a person can donate their kidney on a community member's behalf, similar to a voucher concept; the member in need is then entered into a pool, where they're matched with a viable donor. This creates a chain that allows for at least two people in need to receive a kidney: the member of the respective community and another recipient in need.

"We put the daunting task of finding a living-donor on the shoulders of patients suffering from end-stage renal disease," said Founder and CEO of Alliance for Paired Kidney Donation, Michael Alan Rees, M.D., Ph.D. "Kidneys for Communities wants to change this by tipping the scales back in the direction of donors through the power of a common cause. We believe this commonality shifts the idea from helping a stranger, to helping someone, whom they have not yet met, but with whom they share a powerful connection — the community connection."

Paired donation is based in part on Nobel Prize winner and Stanford Economist Alvin Roth's contributions to algorithms that help match patient-donor pairs to one another, so that each patient receives a transplant of a well-matched kidney.

"Kidney donors save lives," said Roth. "Living kidney donation is often left to happenstance or a hopeful recipient's individual outreach efforts. Kidneys for Communities opens up the idea of donating based on mutual community affiliation. Together with paired donation, it means that donors can help members of their community while also helping others, in a streamlined process."

About Kidneys for Communities

Kidneys for Communities is a nonprofit that partners with organizations to impact the lives of their members by offering resources about living kidney donations that are shared with membership, increasing the chances of matching those who are in need of a kidney with those who want to help.

Kidneys for Communities addresses the shortage of living kidney donors needed for end-stage renal disease (ESRD) patients through proactive community outreach programs. Kidneys for Communities is unlocking the connections created through membership-based communities that can increase the number of living kidney donors in the U.S. The leadership team includes innovative leaders and partners in the field of nephrology and renal transplantation, including Alliance for Paired Kidney Donation.

Individuals who medically pre-qualify will be referred to Kidneys for Communities' primary partner, the Alliance for Paired Kidney Donation, or other paired kidney exchange programs that offer vouchers and financial-reimbursement benefits. To find out more, visit kidneysforcommunities.org.

Sources: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, OPTN and CDC/Chronic Kidney Disease Initiative

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