

Body Bequeathal Program

Donating your body to science



What is Body Bequeathal?

Body Bequeathal is the donation of one's whole body after death. It is different from organ or tissue donation because the entire body is used for study. At Western University, our donors are used in the teaching of undergraduate, graduate and professional students. The body bequeathal program also serves to support a variety of educational specialties related to healthcare and medical education.

Why Bequeath My Body?

Many people of different religious and cultural backgrounds choose to bequeath their bodies for altruistic reasons – to give back to humanity or to increase the quality of health and healthcare for future generations. Others choose to donate their bodies to reduce their final expenses.

Those who learn from our donors are grateful for the unique gift that donation represents. The experience of pursuing educational learning through the bodies of other humans is an extraordinary privilege and all donors are treated with the reverence and dignity they deserve.



Importance of Body Bequeathal

Medical advancements worldwide have been discovered in large part because of the generosity of average citizens who have bequeathed their bodies to science.

The Western University Body Bequeathal Program has been in operation for more than 60 years. Today, the program is administered by the Department of Anatomy & Cell Biology at the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry. The study of the human body is essential to a career in health care. All students who choose to study anatomy at Western are grateful for the selflessness and foresight of donors.

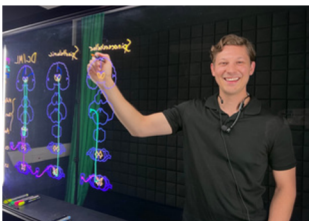
Who Can Donate?

Western University endeavours to accept all body donations. There are, however, certain acceptance criteria that must be met to facilitate a donation. With the assistance of a Bereavement of Ontario (BAO) licensed funeral home or cremation service provider your estate administrator is responsible for handling the logistics of a body donation to Western. Presently, the program will decline individuals who:

- Have certain infectious diseases
- Have had recent major surgery
- Have a body weight below 100 lbs. or above 220 lbs.
- Have been posthumous organ or tissue donors (with the exception of eye enucleation)
- Have recently experienced severe physical trauma
- Die outside of the province of Ontario
- Have a family member who objects to the body donation

In some circumstances, space limitations within the program may also prohibit body bequeathal.

The University staff will determine eligibility and acceptance after they are notified of the death and receive the necessary health and vital information.



The Donation Process

Before Your Death

- Discuss decision with family/decision makers/estate administrators
- Complete Western University Consent Form A – (Completion of this form does not guarantee acceptance)
- Keep your completed Form A with your important documents. It's a good idea to make a copy and give it to your estate administrator and the funeral service provider you've chosen. The form has the program's contact details, so they can easily get in touch when needed
- Consider completing a health information biography to share with the students who will be learning from your donation
- Consider prearrangements with a BAO licensed funeral service provider of your choice



Once Death has Occurred

- The estate administrator or family members should contact a BAO-licensed funeral service provider to inform them of the death and express the preference for making a donation to Western University.
- The family, health care provider or funeral service provider should contact the program with health information of the deceased to discuss eligibility. Eligibility depends on many factors and criteria can vary depending on our needs at the time of death
- If your donation is accepted in Western's Body Bequeathal Program, your funeral service provider will act as your agent to obtain required documentation and transport the deceased to Western University. It is important that this happens as soon as possible after death has occurred
- Western University sends a questionnaire form (Form B) to the estate administrator to complete for additional information

University Timeline

- Study can last 12-36 months
- It is the policy of Western University not to share medical findings or diagnostics of the deceased with the family
- Western University arranges and finances the cost of cremation after study has concluded



Cremation & Release of Cremated Remains

- A local crematorium transfers the donors from Western and takes care of cremation
- The contact information of the estate administrator is shared with the crematorium, and they contact each family individually as the cremated remains are prepared and ready to be picked up
- Certificates of Cremation are provided to the estate administrator for burial, inurnment or travel purposes



Long Term Retention & Ultimate Disposition

- If the estate administrator has indicated on the Form B that permission is granted for long term retention, select material may be kept indefinitely in Western's care for student learning



Who Benefits From My Donation?

Students in medicine, dentistry and other health-related disciplines benefit by gaining a unique understanding of the human body and its form and function. The future patients of these students benefit from this gift through their health care providers' enhanced knowledge of anatomy and sensitivity to patient needs. Health care benefits as research reveals new and different ways to approach medical challenges.

"As medical students, we have the privilege to engage with every facet of humanity, with the hopes of making their lives a little better than we found them. A crucial aspect enabling us to do that is having this experience with those who donate to Schulich medical school. I cannot impart enough how present every person was with us in lab – I thought often of how generous and compassionate our donors are as we learned and will remember always how important this experience has been" – Madison Dusick, MD 2027

"As the years go by, we might forget some of the anatomy lessons but, what we will never forget is their (the donors and families) sacrifice, their selflessness and in turn that will help us become more than just competent doctors, it will help us become empathetic, compassionate and selfless physicians"
– Areeb Hassan, MD 2027

"The decision to donate one's body transcends the boundaries of life and death, a testament to the kindness within us all. Their gifts, both tangible and intangible, serve as a constant source of inspiration, motivating me to learn anatomy as best as I can and to carry forward their legacy of compassion as a future physician"
– Richard Zhe Ren, MD 2027

"Although I will never be able to repay the gift you have given us, know that these stories will stay with my classmates and me for the rest of our lives. Your loved ones were our first patients, greatest teachers and biggest blessing. As we begin our careers as anatomists, educators, physicians, dentists, physiotherapists and pathologist assistants we will carry this gift with us and pass it down to future generations to come" - Emily Danciu, MSc 2025

"Donors are indeed teachers in the truest sense of the word. In fact, they just might be one of the best teachers these students will have in their entire university career" – Dr. Brian Allman, Assistant Professor, Anatomy & Cell Biology

How Does Western Celebrate My Donation?

Each year, the program hosts a non-denominational memorial service for the family members and friends of those who have chosen to bequeath their bodies to Western. It is a time for our learners to share their feelings of gratitude with the families, and for families to share in the final achievement of their loved ones. The celebration is a fitting tribute to the legacy of teaching and education that the donors provide.



Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry

The Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry at Western University has a long tradition of excellence, beginning with the founding of the medical school in 1881 and continuing with the formation of the dental school in 1964.

With more than 1,800 faculty and 2,800 students in medicine, dentistry, medical science, graduate studies and postgraduate training, Schulich Medicine & Dentistry is a Canadian centre of excellence dedicated to preparing tomorrow's dentists, physicians and health researchers to become leaders who will optimize life-long health.

For More Information, Contact:

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