

AAA Human Body Donation Committee Best Practices Document Summary

In 2019, the American Association for Anatomy (AAA) commissioned a new task force (now a committee) to champion best practices in human body donation (HBD). The Human Body Donation Committee (HBDC) seeks to advance the mission of the association by promoting ethical whole-body donation for education and research. The HBDC developed a Best Practices document to suggest processes, programs, and procedures which, by prioritizing the numerous and complex ethical considerations involved with HBD, can help guide HBD programs and health sciences education institutions to reach their education and research goals while treating those who have altruistically donated their bodies in a respectful and dignified manner.

This Best Practices document was created according to three basic tenets that align with the objectives of the HBDC:

- Increase awareness of issues important to body donors and the body donation process.
- Assist HBD programs, anatomy educators, and researchers in advocating efforts for their programs as well as for legislation and regulations that positively impact human body donors and donor program institutions.
- Promulgate written policies and procedures for HBD programs that are transparent, and ensure that the donation process is ethical and respectful.

HBD programs should develop and communicate their own internal policies and procedures based on accepted best practices and guidelines, and maintain resources that support education and research while prioritizing the interests of human body donors and their families before, during and after donation. Overall, the AAA HBDC's Best Practices document provides a comprehensive set of guidelines for institutions that accept body donations for anatomical education and research. The guidelines emphasize the importance of ethical and respectful practices throughout the donation process while providing practical guidance on various aspects of the process. The key principles of the Best Practices document are as follows.

Principle 1: Prioritizing Ethical and Legal Concerns

- Ethics should be paramount in guiding programs' decision making
 - Individuals that altruistically donate their bodies deserve respect and dignity.
 - Guiding principles include Autonomy, Beneficence, Justice, Non-maleficence, Privacy, Respect, Stewardship.
- Policies and procedures, including those related to a business model, consent, procurement, chain of custody, and final disposition, should be transparent.
- HBD programs should operate as not-for-profit (revenue neutral).
- Oversight (self, and external) helps to ensure best practices are maintained.
- HBD programs must operate according to their laws and regulations, which often vary by state and country.
 - HBD programs should advocate for changes in laws and regulations to improve ethical treatment of human body donors.

Principle 2: Community Education and Engagement

- Communications about donors and the program should follow principles of transparency, dignity, respect, sensitivity, and accuracy.
- Respectful terminology should be used.
- Advertising and outreach should avoid coercion or enticement.
- Ideally, the population of donors should represent the characteristics of the end-users, the local populace, AND the patients whom the end-users will treat.
- Direct solicitation to vulnerable populations is discouraged. Examples of vulnerable populations include the critically ill, prisoners, and the homeless.

Principle 3: Policies and Procedures

- Emphasize the importance of informed consent.
 - Institutions should provide donors and their next of kin with clear information about the donation process.
 - This should include the uses of the donated bodies, restrictions on their use, the procedures involved in preparing the body for anatomical study, and the eventual disposition of the body.
 - The consent should comply with the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act in the applicable state.
 - The consent should include how personal information may be used and protected, how the donor may be prepared, how long the donor body may be used, how it will be tracked and safeguarded, and the final disposition process should be outlined.
- BDPs should operate under the guidance of a governing board or oversight committee consisting of individuals who are knowledgeable about ethics, law, and practice of BDPs, and independent of the BDP operations staff.
- Chain-of-custody should be preserved. HBD programs should establish a system for donor identification and tracking. This system should include procedures for ensuring the proper identification of the donor and the tracking of the donated body throughout the donation process.
- HBD programs should establish procedures for maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of the donor's personal information.
- Operations of a BDP should include the following individual roles: manager, donation coordinator, anatomical preparator, technician, transport personnel.
- Donor eligibility criteria should address the program's requirements for capacity, medical status, and other considerations that preclude an interested individual from becoming a donor to the program.
- Donor suitability guidelines help a program determine which donations best meet current needs for education and research.
- Time of death considerations include timeliness, program notification, determination of suitability, transportation, documentation (death certificates, disposition permits, and social security), and tracking.
- Donor preparations vary widely based on locale, education and/or research needs.

- Donor storage prioritizes respect, security, safety, and tracking.
- After a donor has been used for education or research, their remains should be given a respectful disposition that conforms to the donor's wishes and commitments made by the HBD program.
- End users are encouraged to organize expressions of gratitude for the donors' gifts. These may be in the form of memorial services, gifts, or mementos.

Concluding statement

With the vast diversity of body donor programs in the United States (and internationally), it is important to have standardized foundational guidelines that can lead to a community ethos on the proper and respectful care of the altruistic individuals who donate their bodies for education and research. The HBDC developed these guidelines to provide body donation programs with practical as well as aspirational guidance on how to operate their program in a highly ethical and efficient manner. These guidelines are recommendations only, and are not prescriptive. These guidelines will be regularly updated in response to user feedback to ensure that human body donors are treated with the utmost respect and dignity.