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## Ont. creates \$500,000 fund for families of patients awaiting organ donation

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TORONTO — Ontario families who must temporarily move to another city while a loved one awaits a life-saving organ donation will get some financial help from the province with their living expenses, Health Minister George Smitherman said Monday.

Smitherman announced the creation of a \$500,000 annual fund for the Trillium Gift of Life Network - the organization that administers Ontario's organ donor program - to provide direct aid to families who have to spend months living near a hospital waiting for the transplant operation.

"We'll ask Trillium Gift of Life to develop some criteria that will allow us to reach out to provide some direct financial support to ease the burden associated with the disruption that comes from having to move to a transplant centre, in the hope that that page or call will come very quickly," he said.

"We must remain, every single day, focused on those who are on a wait lists, for whom that call cannot come too soon, in the hopes that we can prevent the loss of life for those people who wait for tissue and organ donations."

Trillium president and CEO Frank Markel said there are 1,600 people in Ontario waiting for an organ or tissue donation, a reduction of about 100 from last year.

There were 146 individual organ and tissue donors in Ontario last year - down from a record 172 in 2006 - and they helped save more than 600 lives, Markel said. So far this year, there have been 117 organ donors in the province.

"(Trillium) will continue to make crucial strides in increasing the number of lives saved through organ donation," Markel said.

"We all have the power to save lives."

Manuel Castillo of Mississauga, Ont., whose 15-year-old son Manny died last year after a rugby accident, joined Smitherman and Markel at a news conference to talk about the need for more organ donors, and said he's certain his son would be proud to have helped save five other lives.

"We're so glad about the decision we made to donate Manny's organs," Castillo said.

"For us, it's really healing to know that Manny gave many others a new life, but also it's good to know that after he died, some of his friends already signed a card or talked with their parents about organ donations."

The government also announced details of its program to cover out-of-pocket-expenses for people who agree to become living organ donors, who accounted for 84 of the 146 Ontario residents who donated organs or tissue for transplant last year.

Effectively immediately, people in Ontario who agree to donate an organ or part of an organ can apply to be compensated for travel costs, hotels, meals and even lost income. The program will be retroactive to last August, when Premier Dalton McGuinty first promised up to \$5,500 in compensation for living organ donors.

Manitoba and British Columbia already offer similar compensation programs to help living donors cover some of their expenses.