Question: My mother, who is African American, is a Type II diabetic who has reduced kidney function. I am worried that she may eventually need a transplant. It got me thinking about organ donation, so I have decided to be an organ donor myself. In doing some research to finalize all the paperwork, I saw some reports indicating that minorities, especially African Americans, make up more than half of the donor recipient list. Is this true?

Why are minorities in so much greater need of organs and what can I do to help besides being an organ donor myself?

Answer: Unfortunately, the information you found is indeed correct. As you noted in your question, transplantation issues disproportionately affect African Americans who comprise only 12 percent of the U.S. population yet make up over one-quarter of the 103,000 persons on the waiting list for organs and over one-half of those waiting for donated kidneys.

The situation is only made worse by very long wait times for organs to become available, and some never receive the organs they need. Despite the efforts of many individuals and organizations, organ donation rates remain quite low.

Why minorities are overrepresented

The high percentage minorities represented in the organ waiting list is due to the fact that many of the conditions leading to the need for a transplant have
higher rates among these groups. Conditions that commonly lead to the need for transplantation include:

- **Smoking**
- **Diabetes**
- **High blood pressure**
- **Heart disease**

**Talk to your doctor**

It is important to have this conversation with your doctor. Sometimes there is a lack of awareness of the true risk for organ failure, the challenges associated with waiting for an organ, and the maintenance required to keep an organ from being rejected by the body.

The best thing you can do is help your mother avoid the need for a new organ entirely. Your mother's physician can help her to manage her diabetes in such a way that the damage to her kidneys is slowed down. A healthy lifestyle is important to not only maintaining current organ function, but in also preparing for donation.

Learning about diabetes and kidney failure may help your mother understand why she needs to do all the things her doctor asks of her such as: monitoring and controlling blood sugars, monitoring and controlling blood pressure, getting regular exercise and eating right.

**National Minority Donor Awareness Day**

August 1st is National Minority Donor Awareness Day. To learn more about what you can do, visit [Donate Life America](http://www.donatelife.net).

Organ donation is not the only problem we face. Although there are more than 100,000 people of all ages, races, and religions in desperate need of lifesaving organ transplants that may not come in time, hundreds of thousands more are in need of tissue transplants to restore their health, mobility, and sight.

**References**

- U.S. Census Bureau. American FactFinder: [Race Alone or in Combination: 2000](http://www.census.gov/productions/p20/00-214).