Funding Renewed for Living Organ Donor Travel Expense Reimbursement Program

Arlington, VA: The National Living Donor Assistance Center (NLDAC) is pleased to announce that funding for its donor travel program has been renewed by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Through a cooperative agreement, HRSA will provide $3.25 million per year through August 31, 2024 for NLDAC to continue operating the Reimbursement of Travel and Subsistence Expenses toward Living Organ Donation Program.

Many people who would like to donate an organ to a family member or friend find it difficult or impossible to cover the non-medical expenses involved in the process. Living donors usually need to travel to the transplant center at least three times—for evaluation, surgery, and follow-up appointments—and stay nearby for up to two weeks after the surgery. The cost of these trips can be a significant barrier to living organ donation, especially for potential donors who live far from their transplant center. Some transplant recipients can help their donors with these costs, but many do not have the means to reimburse their donor.

With funding from HRSA, NLDAC operates a nationwide system that increases access to living donor transplantation for these patients. The program covers the cost of transportation, lodging, and meals for eligible donors and their caregivers on evaluation, surgery, and follow-up trips to the transplant center, up to $6,000. Approved donors receive a controlled value card to pay for their travel expenses. Patients must be U.S. citizens or lawfully admitted residents with their primary residence in the U.S., and not have access to reimbursement of these costs through a state program, an insurance policy, or the recipient of the organ. The recipient’s ability to reimburse their donor is assessed by comparing their household income to the NLDAC income guidelines, which are currently set at 300% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, and cover just over half of U.S. households. Recipients may request a waiver for financial hardship if their income exceeds the guidelines, but they would have trouble helping their donor.

NLDAC received its first application in 2007. Since then, the program has received over 9,800 applications, leading to 5,283 living donor surgeries. In surveys of donors who received assistance from NLDAC, 75% reported they could not have donated without this program, meaning NLDAC has made
3,962 living donor transplants possible. The program has provided $18.3 million for living donor travel expenses to date.

NLDAC is a consortium that includes the University of Kansas, the American Society of Transplant Surgeons, Arbor Research Collaborative for Health, and Mayo Clinic-Arizona. Dr. Akinolu Ojo, NLDAC’s Director, said, “We are very pleased to be able to continue operating this important program to help remove financial disincentives to living organ donors. Many people who are willing to donate an organ would not be able to do so without this program.”