



PRESS RELEASE

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AMERICAN SOCIETY OF NEPHROLOGY AND THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES LAUNCH \$4M KIDNEYX EMPOWER PRIZE CHALLENGE TO BOOST LIVING KIDNEY DONATION

HIGHLIGHTS

- The 2026 KidneyX EMPOWER Prize Challenge will award \$4M for innovative solutions focused on reducing barriers, improving outcomes, increasing awareness, and better supporting living kidney donors.
- Living kidney donation can improve outcomes and save lives, yet the number of living donors has remained static for nearly two decades due to significant, persistent barriers.
- Nearly 100,000 Americans are currently on the kidney transplant list and over 10 people die each day waiting for a kidney donation.

Washington, DC (April 15, 2026) —The American Society of Nephrology (ASN) in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), is launching the 2026 KidneyX EMPOWER Prize Challenge, a new \$4 million national prize competition to accelerate innovation in support of living kidney donors and the people with kidney diseases whose lives depend on them. The competition, slated to open on April 15, invites submissions from a wide range of participants, including patients, living donors, caregivers, health care professionals, researchers, technology and digital health companies, engineers, and entrepreneurs.

In 2019, HHS and ASN launched The Kidney Innovation Accelerator (KidneyX) - a public-private partnership to accelerate innovation in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of kidney diseases through prize competitions and cross-sector collaboration. To date, more than 70 recipients have received over \$25 million in KidneyX prizes to advance their work. The 2026 EMPOWER Prize Challenge builds on this momentum by emphasizing living kidney donation as a critical pathway to improving outcomes and saving lives.

Nearly 100,000 Americans currently await kidney transplant, and more than 10 people die each day while on the waitlist. Living donation is one of the most effective treatment options for kidney failure, offering better quality of life and outcomes than dialysis and improved patient survival and organ longevity compared to deceased donor transplants.

Despite its proven clinical efficacy, the number of living donors—fewer than 7,000 annually—has not grown significantly for nearly two decades. The inability to expand living donations reflects the significant and persistent barriers living donors face including financial, logistical, educational, and social challenges.

The \$4 million EMPOWER Prize Challenge directly targets these challenges by calling for solutions that address:

- **Public Awareness & Mentorship:** Develop participatory, community-based models to better identify and support potential living donors.
- **Donor Interventions:** Create educational tools to reassure donors about outcomes and address fears of surgery or long-term health risks.
- **Donor Readiness & Eligibility:** Provide tools to help potential donors overcome barriers such as body mass index management, smoking cessation, and financial planning.
- **Donor-Centered Outcomes:** Implement monitoring strategies and data collection efforts to support donors in their long-term health and well-being journeys after their kidney donation, helping provide reassurance and improved outcomes.
- **Center Practices:** Focus on sharing of knowledge, such as successful best practices that reduce administrative barriers and delays across a broader geographic area.

By advancing innovations in these areas, KidneyX aims to ensure living donors are supported before, during, and after donation as they help more Americans receive life-saving transplants.

“Innovation in kidney care must begin with the experiences of people with kidney diseases and living donors,” said ASN President Samir M. Parikh, MD, FASN. “By fostering innovations that empower living donors and streamline the process, we are not only better supporting Americans who save the lives of others but also reducing the long-term burden on the Medicare program, safeguarding both our nation’s kidney health and its fiscal future.”

“Living kidney donation delivers some of the best outcomes for patients with kidney failure, yet avoidable barriers still stand in the way,” said HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. “Through the \$4 million KidneyX EMPOWER Prize Challenge, we are calling on innovators to remove those barriers and expand access to patient-centered, equitable donation—so more Americans can live longer, healthier lives.”

Submissions for the 2026 KidneyX EMPOWER Prize Challenge are targeted to open on April 15, 2026. Interested participants can learn more, register for updates and reminders, and submit an interest form now at: kidneyxempowerchallenge.org.

Selected winners will receive monetary prizes and national recognition, helping accelerate the development and real-world adoption of their solutions.

Advancing Data Standards and Interoperability in Kidney Care

In addition to administering the 2026 EMPOWER Prize Challenge, the HHS Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) will work closely with the nephrology community to explore opportunities to improve data standardization and enhance interoperability across the kidney care ecosystem.

This effort will focus on identifying gaps and advancing solutions that enable more seamless, secure, and patient-centered data exchange, supporting better clinical decision-making, care coordination, research, and innovation in kidney diseases and transplantation. By strengthening the underlying data infrastructure, HHS and its partners aim to accelerate progress toward more equitable, efficient, and high-quality kidney care.

“Data and technology play a critical role in supporting patients, donors, and clinicians across the transplant ecosystem,” said National Coordinator for Health IT Thomas Keane, MD, MBA. “By fostering innovation through this challenge and advancing more seamless, interoperable data exchange, we can help ensure that individuals have the information and tools they need to make informed decisions and receive high-quality, coordinated care.”

About ASN

Since 1966, ASN has been leading the fight to prevent, treat, and cure kidney diseases throughout the world by educating health professionals and scientists, advancing research and innovation, communicating new knowledge and advocating for the highest quality care for patients. ASN has more than 20,000 members representing 138 countries. For more information, visit www.asn-online.org and follow us on [Facebook](#), [X](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), [Threads](#), and [Bluesky](#).

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