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Media release

World Blood Donor Day Australians happy to give their blood for free

A new survey by The Australia Institute shows a majority of Australians support giving blood for free and challenges the idea that paying people would help increase supply.

The national survey of 2000 adults found that the notion of paying blood donors does not have widespread community support. Seventy-one per cent (71%) of respondents did not think that donors should be paid for their time when they donate blood.

Introducing some form of payment to people who give blood has been suggested as a way of boosting supplies, despite some health concerns associated with paid donations overseas.

Australia has one of the safest blood supplies in the world thanks to the generosity of its voluntary, unpaid donors. However, sustaining a sufficient supply into the future is a growing challenge, with the dual pressures of people's increasingly busy lives and Australia's ageing population.

While 42% of survey respondents were favourable towards the idea of being reimbursed just for the direct costs of travel to donate, such as a bus or train fare, most people (70%) said that a payment would not make them more likely to donate blood.

When asked to think about how others might respond, however, 85% thought that more people would donate if paid.

Research Fellow Dr Hilary Bambrick said this difference suggests that Australians think of other people as being less altruistic than themselves, and assign more materialistic motivations to other's behaviour than to their own.

"This has major implications for anyone considering introducing paid donation in the future as a way to increase blood supply, as their reasoning may be based on widespread misperceptions about what motivates people," said Dr Bambrick.

"Australia is fortunate in that our current system of non-remunerated, voluntary donation is the global 'gold standard' in terms of safety. While we need to think creatively about ways to attract regular donors into the future, paying people to donate may have little effect on supply."

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Notes for Editors

- World Blood Donor Day 2009 is being held on Sunday 14 June.
- The survey of 2000 adults included 1000 randomly selected respondents to a telephone survey and 1000 demographically representative respondents to an online survey.
- The survey was co-funded by The Australia Institute and the School of Medicine at the University of Western Sydney.
- The survey questions and responses:

Do you think that donors should be reimbursed for the cost of their travel, such as train or bus fare, to donate?

Yes: 42% No: 48%

Do you think that donors should be reimbursed for the cost of their time (usually about one hour) to donate?

Yes: 23% No: 71%

If a payment were offered, do you think you would be more likely, equally likely, or less likely to donate blood?

More likely: 20% Equally likely: 61% Less likely: 9% Not sure: 10%

Thinking about other people on average: if a payment were offered, do you think that more people, just as many people or fewer people would donate?

More people: 85% Just as many people: 12% Fewer people: <1% Not sure: 3%