

Submission to the Measuring What Matters Statement

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Overview

This submission makes the case for the inclusion of volunteering in Australia's well-being framework. The Living Standards Framework adopted by the New Zealand government includes volunteering indicators and United Nations Volunteers recommends that volunteering should form part of well-being frameworks. The annual 'Australia's welfare' reports produced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare include volunteering as a well-being indicator.

Including volunteering as a well-being metric is particularly important in Australia due to our rich culture of volunteering and the prominent involvement of volunteers in important parts of community life.

- Volunteering is a powerful and multifaceted indicator of well-being in Australia. Participation in volunteering is associated with better life satisfaction, happiness, self-esteem, and perceived psychological well-being.
- Volunteering – when understood as including cultural obligation and reciprocity – is embedded in the everyday cultural lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and presents the opportunity for greater visibility of this vast community contribution.
- Data on both formal and informal volunteering is currently collected through the General Social Survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, as well as other high-quality and reliable data sources.
- The proportion of people in Australia who participate in formal volunteering through an organisation and who informally volunteer in the community should be included as indicators in Australia's well-being framework.

Introduction

About the Measuring What Matters consultation

In the October 2022 Budget, the Commonwealth Government committed to release a new stand-alone Measuring What Matters Statement tailored to Australia, with the aim to start the conversation on well-being reporting exercises and provide the beginnings of an Australian well-being framework.¹ This Statement will draw primarily from the OECD Framework for Measuring Well-being and Progress, but will also consider indicators that reflect Australia's unique conditions and national priorities.

About this submission

This submission was drafted by Volunteering Australia in collaboration with the State and Territory volunteering peak bodies.

¹ https://budget.gov.au/2022-23-october/content/bp1/download/bp1_bs-4.pdf

Volunteering as a well-being indicator

Volunteering and well-being

Volunteering is a powerful and multifaceted indicator of well-being in Australia, which captures social connections, physical and mental health, and sense of purpose, as well as connection to place and contribution to community and the economy. Participation in volunteering is associated with better life satisfaction, happiness, self-esteem, and perceived psychological well-being.²

Volunteering in the community creates opportunities for social interaction, and evidence suggests that giving support to others is a particularly beneficial form of social connection.³ A recent study of volunteering in Australia found that those who continued to volunteer during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced greater life satisfaction than those who stopped volunteering.⁴

Volunteering is also a meaningful activity through which millions of people in Australia contribute to society. Australian society relies on volunteers to provide a myriad of activities and programs, in our schools and hospitals, residential and home care settings, playing fields, and community centres. Through their involvement, volunteers contribute to Australia's charities and not-for-profits sector, build social networks, and strengthen community cohesion. Like paid work, volunteering generates substantial benefits for both those who engage in it and those who use the goods and services created. Many people, such as people aged 65 years and older, are more likely to contribute to the economy and to Australian communities through volunteering. The most recent official analysis produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics values the efforts of volunteers in Australia's non-profit institutions at \$17.3 billion for the 2012-13 financial year.⁵ Acknowledging volunteering is therefore vital to appropriately assess the well-being benefits of work and productivity in Australia.

The rate of volunteering in Australia is therefore a crucial indicator of meaningful social connection which is not adequately captured by the suite of measures in the OECD Framework, including other indicators of social contact or those related to jobs and earnings. For this reason, volunteering is also used as a well-being indicator abroad, as in New Zealand's Living Standards Framework,⁶ and at home in the annual 'Australia's welfare' reports produced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.⁷ United Nations Volunteers recommends that "volunteerism should be part of a new measuring framework that goes beyond GDP and demonstrates progress in human well-being and

² <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Evidence-Insights-Volunteering-and-mental-health-Final.pdf>

³ Neal Krause, A. Regula Herzog, and Elizabeth Baker, "Providing Support to Others and Well-Being in Later Life," *Journal of Gerontology* 47, no. 5 (1992): 300-311, doi:10.1093/geronj/47.5.P300; Post 2011, 819

⁴ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 67

⁵ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/national-accounts/australian-national-accounts-non-profit-institutions-satellite-accounts/latest-release>

⁶ <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-10/tp-living-standards-framework-2021.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/indicators/australias-welfare-indicators/socialconnection/social-connection>

sustainable human development.”⁸ Capturing these vital aspects of individual and community well-being is essential to a fit-for-purpose well-being framework.

Volunteering in Australia’s well-being framework

The Treasury has indicated that they will be adapting the OECD Framework for Measuring Well-being and Progress to the Australian context. Volunteering is not included as an indicator in the OECD Framework, but volunteering in Australia has a distinct character,⁹ and is fundamental to advancing urgent policy priorities in key areas. In adapting the OECD Framework to the Australian context, it is therefore crucial that volunteering be added.

Volunteering plays a central role in Australia’s current domestic priorities and international commitments. Many sectors which are fundamental to the well-being of people across Australia, such as mental health, disability support, food and emergency relief, conservation and environment, arts and heritage, and sports, depend heavily on volunteer involvement. The recent Volunteering in Australia research revealed sizeable volunteer workforces in aged care (8.8 per cent of Australia’s volunteers), disability (4.7 per cent), and mental health (4.4 per cent),¹⁰ and found that over 2.2 million people in Australia volunteer for organisations that aim to assist children and youth.¹¹ The efforts of volunteers are therefore critical to the well-being of people with disability, older people, people experiencing mental ill-health, and children and young people in Australia.

Further, through the resilience and innovation of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations, voluntary action has been a vital pillar in supporting communities through recent challenges. 233,284 people volunteered in government emergency services organisations in Australia in the 2020- 21 financial year,¹² and a further 217,776 are engaged in 1,192 registered charities which identified ‘emergency and relief’ as their main activity.¹³

Volunteering – when understood as including cultural obligation and reciprocity – is embedded in the everyday cultural lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The inclusion of volunteering in Australia’s well-being framework presents an opportunity for greater visibility of this vast community contribution.¹⁴

⁸ <https://www.unv.org/sites/default/files/UNV%20TOOLKIT%20-%20HOW%20VOLUNTEERISM%20CAN%20CONTRIBUTE%20TO%20ACHIEVING%20THE%20SDGS.pdf>

⁹ https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/VRP_The-Seven-Waves-of-Volunteering-in-Australia-a-brief-history..pdf

¹⁰ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 42

¹¹ Based on a population of 25,422,788 as reported in the 2021 Census.

<https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 46

¹² <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/emergency-management>

¹³ The ACNC Annual Information Statement dataset is updated weekly. The figures presented in this report were accessed 11 April 2022. <https://data.gov.au/dataset/ds-dga-34b35c52-8af0-4cc1-aa0b-2278f6416d09/details?q=acnc>

¹⁴ https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Community-Giving-in-First-Nations-Communities_Nov-2022.pdf

As this data illustrates, a robust volunteering ecosystem is vital to well-being in Australia. Ensuring that Australia's well-being framework includes data on the contributions of volunteers will be essential to its success.

How to include volunteering

Dimensions of well-being

The OECD Framework includes 36 headline indicators across 11 dimensions of well-being.¹⁵ Volunteering is a relevant indicator of many of these dimensions, including Work and Job Quality, Health, Knowledge and Skills, Subjective Well-being, Social Connections, and Civil Engagement. Volunteering could be included as an indicator under any of these categories, or included as its own category. In New Zealand's Living Standards Framework 2021, volunteering is included under the 'Work, Care and Volunteering' category.

Considering the significant benefits of volunteering to facilitating social interaction, fostering a sense of purpose, and contributing to society, volunteering should be included as an indicator of 'Social Connections' or 'Work and Job Quality.'

Data sources

Reliable data on volunteering in Australia is available through three main sources which would be appropriate for use in Australia's well-being framework. These are outlined here, and a summary of the relevant survey questions is included in the box below.

The General Social Survey

The most appropriate source of reliable and comparable data on volunteering in Australia is collected through the General Social Survey. The General Social Survey was most recently conducted in 2020 and collected data from approximately 5,300 households around Australia.¹⁶ The General Social Survey includes questions on volunteering, including two which can be used to derive the proportion of people aged 15 years and older in Australia who volunteer formally and informally. These questions are included in *Module 7.9: Voluntary work* and labelled *VOL_Q02* and *VOL_Q81* respectively in the 2020 General Social Survey questionnaire, available on the Australian Bureau of Statistics website.¹⁷

Official data on formal volunteering is also collected through the Census and the Time Use Survey. However, the Australian Bureau of Statistics regards the figure collected in the General Social Survey as the most accurate and reliable estimate of the rate volunteering in Australia.¹⁸ The General Social

¹⁵ https://budget.gov.au/2022-23-october/content/bp1/download/bp1_bs-4.pdf, 126;
<https://www.oecd.org/sdd/47917288.pdf>, 8

¹⁶ Data on volunteering was also collected through the General Social Survey in 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, and 2019.

¹⁷ <https://www.abs.gov.au/methodologies/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia-methodology/2020>

¹⁸ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/comparison-volunteering-rates-2006-census-population-and-housing-and-2006-general-social-survey/latest-release>

Survey is the only current official data collection initiative in Australia that includes data on both formal and informal volunteering.

ANUpoll surveys

The ANUpoll series of surveys conducted by the Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods also collects reliable and comparable data on volunteering. The ANUpoll surveys included questions about both formal and informal volunteering in late-2019, April 2020, April 2021, and April 2022. The ANUpoll is representative of the Australian population aged 18 years and older. The April 2022 survey collected data from 3,587 Australians aged 18 years and over.

In 2022, as part of the Volunteering in Australia research, the volunteering module in the April 2022 ANUpoll survey was developed by Volunteering Australia and the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods. This could be a highly valuable and ongoing source of data on volunteering for use in Australia's well-being framework.

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey is a household-based panel study that collects valuable information about economic and personal well-being, labour market dynamics and family life on more than 17,000 people in Australia aged 15 years and over each year.¹⁹

HILDA respondents are asked whether in general, and how often in a typical week, they volunteer. The HILDA survey only collects data on formal volunteering through an organisation or group, and includes a brief prompt with a few examples.²⁰

Box: Summary of data sources

General Social Survey Module 7.9: Voluntary work (VOL)

Formal volunteering (**VOL_Q02**): In the last 12 months, did you do any unpaid voluntary work for any of these types of organisations?

- *Organised sporting group / team*
- *Youth group (such as guides, scouts, a choir)*
- *A charity organisation or cause*
- *Student government*
- *Religious organisation*
- *School or preschool*
- *Some other kind of volunteer work*

Informal volunteering (**VOL_Q81**): In the last 4 weeks, did you help anyone [not living with you] with the following activities?²¹

¹⁹ <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/hilda>

²⁰ <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/hilda/for-data-users/questionnaires-and-fieldwork-materials>

²¹ This excludes help provided to family in another household. Note: the exclusion of members of the household from this survey instrument could overlook informal volunteering by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and CALD communities in instances where it is more culturally commonplace to have

Please select all that apply:

- 10. Domestic work, home maintenance or gardening
- 11. Providing transport or running errands
- 12. Any unpaid child care
- 13. Any teaching, coaching or practical advice
- 14. Providing any emotional support
- 15. Personal care / assistance
- 16. Lobbying / advocacy
- 17. Community assistance
- 18. Environmental protection
- 19. Any other help
- 20. Did not provide unpaid help [Exclusive]

Life in Australia™ Wave 60 Module X

Formal volunteering (**X1**): Over the last 12 months did you spend any time doing voluntary work through an organisation or group?

Please include voluntary work for sporting teams, youth groups, schools, or religious organisations. Please exclude work in a family business or paid employment. Please exclude work to qualify for a government benefit or to obtain an educational qualification or due to a community / court order.

Informal volunteering (**X14**): *Informal volunteering is unpaid help that takes place outside the context of a formal organisation. It excludes help provided to other members of your household or to family members living outside your household. When answering these questions please exclude any volunteering you have already reported.*

In the last 4 weeks, did you help anyone not living with you with the following activities?

Please select all that apply.

1. Domestic work, home maintenance or gardening
2. Providing transport or running errands
3. Any unpaid childcare
4. Any teaching, coaching or practical advice
5. Providing any emotional support
6. Personal care / assistance
7. Lobbying / advocacy
8. Community assistance
9. Environmental protection
10. Food preparation / service / delivery
11. Disaster / emergency response
12. Any other help
13. Did not provide unpaid help^
98. (Don't know) / Not sure^
99. (Refused) / Prefer not to say^

extended family and/or other community/mob members living in your home for periods of time while providing the types of informal support that is outlined here.

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey Self Completion Questionnaire Part B: You, Your Lifestyle and Your Living Situation

Formal volunteering (**B20**): In general, how often do you do the following things: ... *i) Volunteer your spare time to work on boards or organising committees of clubs, community groups or other non-profit organisations.*

1. Never
2. Rarely
3. Occasionally
4. Sometimes
5. Often
6. Very Often

Why use these indicators?

Volunteering in Australia takes place both formally, through organisations and groups, and informally in the community. Evidence from the recent Volunteering in Australia research, based on a representative sample of adults in Australia, found that certain demographic groups, such as those born overseas in a non-English speaking country, were more likely to volunteer informally.²² To accurately capture volunteering in Australia and to acknowledge the voluntary activity of diverse groups across Australia, both formal and informal volunteering should be included in Australia's well-being framework. Both figures are currently collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics through the General Social Survey and through the ANUpoll surveys, and the 'Australia's welfare' reports from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare currently use both indicators in their reporting.²³

There are many aspects of volunteering that could be captured in the data included in a well-being framework. Some of the surveys outlined above also include data on time spent volunteering, the type of organisation volunteered for, the types of activities undertaken, the people or groups assisted, reasons for volunteering, and other aspects of volunteering. To capture the broad benefits of volunteering in Australia, the proportion of people who volunteer is the most relevant single measure.

Volunteering is a relevant and powerful indicator of well-being. As well as being an important indicator of social connections, volunteering is central to well-being across a number of key policy domains, including health, knowledge and skills, environment quality, subjective well-being, and civic engagement. Volunteering is highly relevant to Australia's well-being policy priorities, measured regularly through reliable and comparable data collection methods, and easily understandable.

²² <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 64

²³ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/indicators/australias-welfare-indicators>

Recommendations

Given the evidence presented above, Volunteering Australia recommends that formal volunteering through an organisation or group and informal volunteering in the community are included as indicators in Australia's well-being framework. This data should come from the relevant questions on voluntary work included in the General Social Survey.²⁴

²⁴ These questions are included in *Module 7.9: Voluntary work* and labelled VOL_Q02 and VOL_Q81 respectively in the 2020 General Social Survey questionnaire, available here: <https://www.abs.gov.au/methodologies/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia-methodology/2020>

Authorisation

This submission has been authorised by the Chief Executive Officer of Volunteering Australia.



Mr Mark Pearce
Chief Executive Officer

Endorsements

This submission has been endorsed by the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies.



About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering, working to advance volunteering in the Australian community. The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies work to advance and promote volunteering in their respective jurisdictions and are Foundation Members of Volunteering Australia.

Volunteering Australia's vision is to promote strong, connected communities through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, promote, and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

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