



Pre-Budget Submission 2023-24

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Overview

This Pre-Budget submission sets out the investment needed in the 2023-24 Budget to chart the course for volunteering to thrive in the future. **It demonstrates how targeted strategic investment in volunteering will enable the Government to meet its key priorities.**

Volunteering in Australia 2023

Volunteers support our communities in so many ways and are essential workforces in several major sectors - in aged care and disability care, in community welfare, sports and the arts, in crisis preparedness, response and recovery, and in environmental initiatives. In 2019, nearly six million people volunteered through organisations in Australia, and around six million people volunteered informally in their communities. However, the COVID-19 pandemic hit volunteering hard and recent cost of living pressures are taking their toll. The most recent data shows the proportion of Australians who volunteer increased from April 2021 to April 2022 (from 24.2 per cent to 26.7 per cent) but is still well below the pre-COVID rate of 36.0 per cent.¹

The new National Strategy for Volunteering (2023-2033)

The new National Strategy for Volunteering will be owned by the volunteering ecosystem, providing a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia. It will provide strategic direction to enable volunteering across Australia to be effective, inclusive, and sustainable. The new National Strategy for Volunteering was launched in February at the 2023 National Volunteering Conference. **The Australian Government is a key enabling partner in the implementation of the new National Strategy for Volunteering.**

Recommendations

- 1. Establish a National Strategy for Volunteering Partnership Fund.** This Fund would support the implementation of the new National Strategy for Volunteering and include contributions from Government, philanthropy, corporates, and other stakeholders across the volunteering ecosystem.
- 2. Provide Volunteering Cost of Living Relief.** This would help organisations to survive and continue undertaking their vital work during the current cost of living crisis, particularly small, volunteer-run organisations.
- 3. Implement a National Youth Volunteering Initiative.** This initiative could mitigate against poor mental health outcomes for unemployed and underemployed young people and support pathways to paid employment.
- 4. Develop a nationally co-ordinated approach to volunteer engagement in emergencies.** As the frequency and scale of emergencies in Australia increases, a nationally co-ordinated approach would help to mobilise volunteers rapidly, safely, and effectively during times of need.
- 5. Invest in the Aged Care volunteer workforce.** Funding should be allocated for the volunteering recommendations made by the Aged Care Royal Commission.

¹ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/research-early-insights-from-the-volunteer-perspective/>

Introduction

Government priorities and the criticality of volunteering

Volunteers play an essential role in many Government priorities,² for example in:

- Improving aged care and supporting health services
- Enhancing support for people with disability
- Responding during emergencies and improving disaster readiness
- Protecting and rectifying the natural environment and acting on climate initiatives
- Strengthening charities and non-profits
- Advancing First Nations justice and wellbeing
- Supporting rural and regional communities
- Providing pathways for young people
- Protecting mental health

Volunteering brings social, cultural, and economic benefits to the nation. As identified during the development of the new National Strategy for Volunteering, volunteering is a workforce issue.³

While responsibility for volunteering at the Commonwealth level sits within the Department of Social Services, volunteers are heavily involved across an array of sectors that fall within the remit of other Commonwealth Government portfolios. Volunteers involved in community services, welfare, and homelessness represent only one fifth of Australia's formal volunteers. Other large sub-sectors, such as sport and recreation, religious, faith-based, and spiritual, and children and youth each engage over one million volunteers, and there are over 900,000 volunteers in environmental charities, yet the government portfolios for these domains do not have explicit responsibilities for volunteering.

Data also reveals sizeable volunteer workforces in mental health (4.4 per cent of volunteers), aged care (8.8 per cent), and disability (4.7 per cent).⁴ Based on estimates of the current Australian population, each of these sectors engage more than 300,000 volunteers. This means that key government initiatives, such as *A Matter of Care: Australia's Aged Care Workforce Strategy*, *Australia's Disability Strategy*, and the *National Mental Health Workforce Strategy*, need to plan for the involvement of volunteers and consider how underpinning initiatives will affect volunteering to avoid unintended consequences to those volunteer workforces and sectors, and the people they aim to assist.

Beyond workforce implications, a detailed understanding of volunteering is necessary to advance other priorities across government. For example, 32.5 per cent of volunteers identified that their volunteering primarily aimed to assist children and youth. This suggests that an estimated 2.2 million

² See the Incoming Government Brief for information on how volunteering contributes to many of these priorities.

³ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/National-Strategy-for-Volunteering-Discovery-Insights-Report.pdf>

⁴ Biddle, N., Boyer, C., Gray, M., & Jahromi, M. (2022). Volunteering in Australia: The Volunteer Perspective. Available online at <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wpcontent/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>

people may volunteer with children and young people in Australia.⁵ Understanding the many ways volunteering can be affected by policy, and the significant ways it supports key government and societal priorities, requires a comprehensive approach that acknowledges all types of volunteering.

The Australian Government's 2023 Budget Statement *Measuring What Matters* aims to provide a foundation for Australia's effort to "lift living standards, boost intergenerational mobility, and create more opportunities for more people."⁶ It recognises that traditional macroeconomic indicators do not provide a holistic view of community wellbeing. Volunteering is a uniquely good indicator for community wellbeing as it captures social connections, physical and mental health, sense of purpose, and connection to place.⁷ Volunteering is a critical indicator for the Well-being Framework being developed in Australia, which underscores the importance of making volunteering a cross-portfolio issue in government (see below).

Implementing the National Strategy for Volunteering

Funded by the Department of Social Services and led by Volunteering Australia, the new National Strategy for Volunteering is the culmination of a 12-month co-design process with individuals and organisations from across the volunteering ecosystem. This included volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, researchers and academics, volunteering peak bodies, volunteering support services, staff in local, state, and federal government departments, staff from companies with employee volunteering programs, enabling organisations, and members of the general public.

The National Strategy for Volunteering sets out the desired outcomes for volunteering in Australia over the next ten years. It provides a clear and compelling case, underpinned by robust data and evidence, for targeted and sufficient investment in volunteering and celebration of the role it plays in creating thriving communities. Following the launch of the National Strategy for Volunteering in February 2023, stakeholders from across the volunteering ecosystem, including the Federal Government, will need to consider how to collaboratively resource implementation.

One of the strategic objectives of the new National Strategy for Volunteering is to make volunteering a cross-portfolio issue in Government. This would entail governments consistently considering the needs of volunteers and supporting volunteering through comprehensive policy and investment. Making volunteering a cross-portfolio issue at all levels of government will ensure that policies that affect volunteers are developed with careful consideration of the opportunities and challenges they may create for volunteer involvement. Repositioning volunteering as a whole of government imperative will ensure it is routinely considered and invested in. Making volunteering a cross-portfolio issue is a critical step for both safeguarding and elevating volunteering in Australia.

⁵ Based on a population of 25,422,788 as reported in the 2021 Census. Note: no weighting of survey responses was applied in calculating this figure.

⁶ Commonwealth of Australia. (2022). *Measuring what matters*. Available online at <http://budget.gov.au/2022-23-october/content/bp1/index.htm>

⁷ Increasing the number of volunteers in Australia should be a natural outcome of the National Strategy for Volunteering if structural changes are achieved. Growing participation in volunteering cannot be progressed in isolation. Improving the volunteer experience and comprehensively valuing volunteering will pay dividends when it comes to increasing volunteer participation.

The legacy of COVID-19 and new challenges

Prior to COVID-19, volunteering participation (through organisations and groups) had been declining over time. Official data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) shows that the formal volunteering rate⁴ declined from 36 per cent in 2010 to 29 per cent in 2019, with the decline most evident for women. Volunteers contributed nearly 600 million hours to the community in 2019; a 20% decrease since 2014.⁵ Many of the problems that impede the volunteering sector today are long-standing issues – inadequate resourcing of volunteer management, poor recognition of volunteers, and an overall lack of strategic development and investment.

Volunteering was hit hard by COVID-19. Volunteering Australia commissioned the Australian National University (ANU) to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on formal volunteering. This research revealed two out of three volunteers (65.9 per cent) stopped volunteering in 2020 during the early stages of COVID-19, with this reduction in volunteering being equivalent to 12.2 million hours per week. By May 2021, only half (56.4 per cent) of volunteers who had stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 had returned.⁸

This dramatic decline in formal volunteering had significant consequences for volunteers and the capacity of organisations to meet community need. The ANU analysis showed that those who had to stop volunteering during COVID-19 had lower life satisfaction and higher psychological distress outcomes than those who were able to continue. Conversely, those who continued volunteering experienced less loneliness.

Whilst many volunteers offer their time formally through organisations, others self-organise and volunteer informally in the community. This ‘informal volunteering’ proved to be resilient during the pandemic: 32.1 per cent, or 6,511,400 people, volunteered informally in 2020, which is a similar rate to 2019 of 33.4 per cent, or 6,676,100 people.⁹

Data from the ABS General Social Survey 2020 also shows significant changes in the nature of volunteer participation. The number of people who volunteered online increased from 8.5 per cent in 2019 to 17.3 per cent in 2020, and three in four volunteers who indicated that online volunteering was available in their organisation or group chose to volunteer online.¹⁰ The proportion of people volunteering for community/ethnic groups increased from 11.6 per cent in mid-2019 to 22.7 per cent in March 2021.¹¹

About this Submission

This Submission was drafted by Volunteering Australia in collaboration with the State and Territory volunteering peak bodies. It draws heavily on the extensive consultation that took place during the development of the new National Strategy for Volunteering (2023-33).

⁸ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/research/research-briefing-volunteering-during-the-first-year-of-covid-19/#/>

⁹ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-2020-Key-Statistics-about-Volunteering-in-Australia-General-Social-Survey-Household-Impacts.pdf>

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics (March 2021) ‘Table 5.1: Persons aged 18 years and over, Participation in unpaid voluntary work and unpaid help, by selected characteristics: Proportion’ [data set], *Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey, March 2021*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/household-impacts-covid-19-survey/mar-2021>

¹¹ *ibid*

This Budget Submission has been provided to the Australian Government via the Treasury. It has also been provided to officials in the Department of Social Services (the Minister for Social Services has lead responsibility for volunteering), the Department of Health, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, the National Office for Child Safety in the Attorney General's Department, the National Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Budget Recommendations

Initiative	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Volunteering Partnership Fund	\$3m	\$5m	\$7m	\$7m
Volunteering Cost of Living Relief	\$2m	\$2m	\$2m	\$2m
National Youth Volunteering Initiative	\$3m	\$3m	\$3m	\$3m
National Emergency Management Coordination	\$3m	\$3m	\$3m	\$3m
Aged Care volunteer workforce investment	To be allocated within existing aged care funding commitments			

1. Establish a National Strategy for Volunteering Partnership Fund

The Australian Government is a key enabling partner in the new National Strategy for Volunteering and funding is sought as a contribution to the Volunteering Partnership Fund. Implementation of the National Strategy for Volunteering, enabled through the Volunteering Partnership Fund, would directly contribute to the achievement of key Government priorities, specifically workforce challenges in emergency response and in the care and support sectors.

Investment: \$22 million over four years into a 'Volunteering Partnership Fund' which will support the implementation of the National Strategy for Volunteering.

This Fund would include contributions from Government, philanthropy, corporates, and other stakeholders across the volunteering ecosystem.

Outcomes for Government: In the 2021 Budget, the Australian Government (Department of Social Services) allocated funds to Volunteering Australia to lead the development of a new National Strategy for Volunteering (National Strategy). To provide a core evidence base for the National Strategy development, this funding also supported the production of the *Volunteering in Australia* research reports,¹² which provide a comprehensive understanding of the volunteering landscape in Australia, map current trends, and provide insight into how volunteering may evolve into the future.

¹² <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>; <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Organisation-Perspective.pdf>

Through collaborative consultation, the National Strategy for Volunteering has been designed and will be owned by the volunteering ecosystem, providing a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia. It will provide strategic direction for the volunteering ecosystem and enable volunteering across Australia to be effective, inclusive, and sustainable. The new National Strategy for Volunteering was launched in February at the 2023 National Volunteering Conference.

All members of the volunteering ecosystem will have a role to play in implementing the new National Strategy for Volunteering and in ensuring volunteering thrives in the future. The volunteering ecosystem is a network of people, organisations, institutions, and agencies that are all working for the collective viability and recognition of volunteering in Australia. This includes volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, volunteering support services,¹³ State and Territory volunteering peak bodies, Volunteering Australia, other national peak bodies, community organisations, philanthropy, business, the research community, Governments, and enabling organisations. The Australian Government is a vital member of the volunteering ecosystem, as volunteering is critical to the delivery of many of the Government's priorities.

The proposed Volunteering Partnership Fund would support the implementation of the new National Strategy for Volunteering. Financial contributions will be sought from Government, philanthropy, corporates, and others in the volunteering ecosystem.

Volunteering Australia has secured funds from the Department of Social Services to continue to lead the development of the new National Strategy for Volunteering as it moves through to implementation. The National Strategy for Volunteering has a ten-year timeframe (2023 – 2033). Year one, commencing in 2023, will be the Establishment Phase. The Establishment Phase will include four key initiatives:

1. Co-Design of a Three-Year Action Plan
2. Development of a Governance Blueprint
3. Development of a Model for Shared Accountability for Implementation
4. Development of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

One of the priorities of the Model for Shared Accountability for Implementation is funding partnerships.

Whilst the Establishment Phase includes the co-design of the first three-year Action Plan, much of the work required to progress this was undertaken during the development of the National Strategy itself. Even though the volunteering ecosystem is vast and complex, several key initiatives emerged as priorities through the National Strategy consultations. These included:

- A volunteer passport¹⁴
- An outcomes measurement tool to evaluate the volunteer experience
- A volunteer leadership development and capability framework
- A national centre for volunteering research
- A national public awareness campaign on volunteering
- A whole of Australian Government regulatory review of volunteering

¹³ Volunteer Support Services are also known as Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs) and Volunteer Support Organisations (VSOs)

¹⁴ The Community Council of Australia has proposed a one-stop registration process to enable volunteers to be registered and insured more quickly without the red tape of multi-jurisdictional compliance.

The National Strategy for Volunteering has identified eleven strategic objectives, which, if achieved, would transform volunteering in Australia. These objectives were developed directly from consultations with stakeholders from communities across Australia, including those volunteering, living, and working in geographically diverse and unique places. The National Strategy for Volunteering was intentionally designed to leverage the efficiency of implementation at a national level, to ensure benefits flow directly to individual communities.

Co-funding by partners from across the volunteering ecosystem will be sought to progress the initiatives identified in the Action Plan, with Government funding being an essential part of the Volunteering Partnership Fund model proposed to underpin implementation.

2. Provide Volunteering Cost of Living Relief

As part of its overall cost of living response, the Australian Government should increase funding for Volunteer Grants in line with inflation and cost of living. The 2023 Volunteer Grants should be expedited, and a key objective of this round of grants should be to support cost of living pressures being faced, particularly by small, volunteer-run organisations.

Investment: An increase of \$2million per annum

This would help organisations to survive and continue undertaking their vital work during the current cost of living crisis, particularly small, volunteer-run organisations.

Outcomes for Government: Direct support to organisations providing vital assistance to Australians experiencing cost-of-living pressures, from food to shelter, will demonstrate the Australian Government is addressing cost-of-living pressures through a range of avenues, including already established and successful non-government organisations working on the ground and in communities.

The new National Strategy for Volunteering focuses on a long-term vision for volunteering; however, the consultation phase of the project identified that current challenges facing volunteers and organisations are acute and increasingly unsustainable.

Cost of living and housing pressures in Australia sharpened in 2022, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics recording the largest quarterly increase in living costs in over 20 years.¹⁵ The cost of living has also increased slightly over the past decade, particularly for pensioner households and households that rely on government payments.¹⁶ Cost of living and housing pressures will challenge both the capacity of people to volunteer and the work of volunteers in Australia. People experiencing financial difficulties were more likely to have stopped volunteering during COVID-19 and are less likely to have recommenced, and financial barriers to volunteering can be significant.¹⁷

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). Selected Living Cost Indexes, Australia. Available online at <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/selected-living-cost-indexes-australia/latest-release>

¹⁶ Commonwealth of Australia. (2022). Australia's cost of living over the last decade. Available online at https://www.apf.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/Briefing_Book46p/CostLiving

¹⁷ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 36-38

These pressures are acutely felt by volunteer involving organisations, many of which are experiencing increased demand for services and rely heavily on volunteers to meet this need.¹⁸ Operational costs for volunteer involving organisations have increased sharply. Out-of-pocket expenses for volunteers have also increased (for example, petrol costs) and organisations need to reimburse volunteers for these costs.

One way of supporting volunteer involving organisations is through Volunteer Grants. It should also be noted that, over the last decade, there has been an ongoing reduction to the quantum of Volunteer Grants. In 2010, \$21 million of Volunteer Grants was distributed. The 2021 Budget allocated only \$10 million per annum in the forward estimates. In the 2019-20 Supplementary Volunteer Grants round, 780 volunteer involving organisations received grants totalling \$2.7 million; however, the grants were 670 per cent oversubscribed. More than 5,300 organisations across Australia submitted application requests totalling \$20.8 million. Consideration should be given to restoring Volunteer Grants to 2010 levels of funding with ongoing indexation.

Volunteer Grants are an effective means of stimulating volunteering in local communities and supporting the adaptation of volunteering programs. The grants, while only representing a nominal value for the Federal Budget, make a large difference to the operation of small community and cause-based organisations and the volunteers they engage. It should be noted that half of all charities are entirely volunteer run.¹⁹ The grants are also an important signal from Government that volunteers and volunteer involving organisations are valued, appreciated, and supported in this complex environment.

During consultations for the National Strategy for Volunteering a significant number of stakeholders raised the cost burden of volunteering. It was suggested that enabling volunteers to claim their out-of-pocket expenses in their tax returns could reduce the financial burden of volunteering.

It is also vital at this time that funding to support volunteering infrastructure is maintained. This includes for peak volunteering bodies and volunteering support services, which provide critical support to volunteers and volunteer involving organisations.

3. Implement a National Youth Volunteering Initiative

The Australian Government should invest in a national youth volunteering initiative that empowers young people to make a difference in their communities. Making volunteering more accessible and meaningful for young people is vital for promoting the social, professional and wellbeing benefits of being actively involved in the community.²⁰

Investment: \$3 million per annum

Outcomes for Government: This initiative builds on the Australian Government's creation of an Office for Youth and its \$10.5 million Budget 2022 measure to develop a youth engagement strategy and an associated youth advisory council. The Government has committed to this program of engagement and the Office will consider a wide range of issues impacting young Australians from

¹⁸ Cortis, N. and Blaxland, M. (2022) Helping people in need during a cost-of-living crisis: findings from the Australian Community Sector Survey. Available online at https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ACSS_demand_snapshot_2022.pdf

¹⁹ <https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/reports/australian-charities-report-8th-edition>

²⁰ Further information on the power of youth volunteering initiatives is available here: https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/9_Youth-Volunteering-initiatives.pdf

education to mental health to unemployment. A national youth volunteering initiative would amplify the Australian Government's leadership in this policy area, helping Australia's young people to get involved in their communities, develop skills, engage on issues that are meaningful to them, and connect with others. This initiative could mitigate against poor mental health outcomes for unemployed and underemployed young people and support pathways to paid employment. This initiative would also support the sustainability of volunteering through normalising and embedding volunteering as a social and cultural practice early on in life.

Young people have much to gain from volunteering and were disproportionately affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19, with subsequent impacts on their mental health and future wellbeing. Further, the rate of volunteering among young people decreased significantly during COVID-19 and has yet to show signs of recovery.²¹ Research demonstrates that volunteering can provide a protective effect against poor mental health.²² Volunteering can provide meaningful activity for young people when they are unemployed and help them to develop skills and capabilities that can support a pathway to employment. Young people can also be more at risk of exploitation regarding requests for them to take on unpaid work through inappropriate placements being promoted as volunteer placements and unpaid internships.

A national volunteering youth initiative²³ would aim to:

- Provide meaningful volunteering opportunities for unemployed and underemployed young people.
- Ensure Volunteer Managers can engage young volunteers and can address barriers to young people volunteering (for example, by providing support to adapt programs to suit preferences for greater flexibility).
- Address cost barriers to volunteering.²⁴
- Provide improved guidance on safe and appropriate volunteering placements with a view to reducing exploitation.

The wider goal of this initiative would be an important early intervention and preventative mental health initiative.

Developing this initiative would require a scoping exercise with partners from the volunteering sector, youth organisations, mental health organisations, governments, and others to determine how best to operationalise the program. Consideration should be given to that age range of young people who would benefit from this initiative, and whether it should include school aged young people. Young people leaving education systems would have the opportunity to develop greater social capital and deeper connection with community as they undergo a period of significant life change.

²¹ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 26

²² <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Evidence-Insights-Volunteering-and-mental-health-Final.pdf>

²³ The Group of Eight Universities 'Roadmap to Recovery' report made a similar proposal – the establishment of a funded national service program for young people. The 'Aussies All Together' program was described as an inclusive volunteering program to provide 'meaning, purpose and social connectedness' to those involved.

²⁴ The NSW State of Volunteering research 2021 found that volunteers spend annually on average \$1900 of their own money to volunteer.

The skills and experience young people gain through volunteering should be formally recognised to better support a pathway to paid employment. This would need to include governments and the volunteering sector working with industry groups, unions, and employers to support an accreditation scheme for volunteering. It would allow young volunteers to record and receive certification for their volunteering achievements.

4. A nationally co-ordinated approach to volunteer engagement in emergencies

The Australian Government should invest in the coordination of volunteers and volunteering during emergencies in national disaster resilience arrangements. As the frequency and scale of emergencies in Australia increases, a nationally co-ordinated approach will help to mobilise volunteers rapidly, safely, and effectively during times of need.

Investment: \$3 million per annum

Outcomes for Government: The proposed inclusion of volunteering in the nationally co-ordinated emergency management approach builds on the Australian Government's Disaster Ready Fund (\$200 million per annum) and other initiatives designed to strengthen Australia's disaster management response, including the creation of the new National Emergency Management Agency, new funding for Disaster Relief Australia to support recovery efforts, a collaboration with insurers to drive down premiums, and the establishment of a Special Envoy for Disaster Recovery.

This initiative would deliver on a recommendation of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, which recommended the Australian Government convene regular forums for charities and volunteer groups to improve coordination of recovery support.

Responding to Natural Disasters

The final report of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements recommended that the Australian Government convene regular forums for charities and volunteer groups to improve coordination of recovery support (Rec: 21.3). The Australian Government supported this recommendation, but it is yet to be enacted.²⁵

In response to COVID-19, the Government activated the National Coordination Mechanism and convened National Cabinet. There was little engagement of the volunteering sector in the national emergency management response to COVID-19 despite volunteers typically being a key source for surge capacity during and following emergencies. The interplay of national mechanisms with State/Territory government measures creates significant complexity for volunteer involving organisations.

The increasing frequency and scale of emergencies in Australia has created a need for an effective, coordinated approach for the involvement of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations in disasters.

An approach is needed that enables greater cooperation and coordination between State/Territory and Commonwealth arrangements for volunteering in natural disasters. This would provide greater

²⁵ An Enduring Charities Forum and a dedicated disaster recovery coordination group were initially progressed by the National Bushfire Recovery Agency, but these structures were not maintained in the transition to the new National Recovery and Resilience Agency.

clarity to rapidly, safely, and effectively mobilise both volunteers and volunteer involving organisations in emergencies. A nationally coordinated approach should include:

- Establishment of a national forum, with similar forums at State/Territory level, to bring together and coordinate volunteer involving organisations that play a role in planning, responding to, and recovering from emergencies.
- National standards regarding the inclusion of emergency management volunteers in ongoing health and safety measures (including COVID-safe requirements), alongside a nationally consistent definition of essential workers.²⁶

An Australia-wide integrated network of coordinating forums (at national and State/Territory levels) would be made up of volunteer involving organisations active in disasters and include those working across disaster prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. Such an approach would strengthen the contributions of volunteerism to increase community resilience across all phases of disasters by:

- Establishing guiding principles, best practice, and resources for volunteer involving organisations working in and following disasters.
- Ensuring collaboration between volunteer involving organisations working in disasters, particularly when working across jurisdictions.
- Recognising that local volunteerism is a fundamental recovery and resilience strategy and attribute of a resilient community that has the capability to lead its own recovery process.
- Influencing a more planned approach to surge requirements for large and catastrophic events.

The development of an Australia-wide network (of coordinating forums at national and State/Territory levels) would be an effective, efficient, and impactful solution to how volunteer involving organisations active in disasters can work together to best engage volunteers and provide positive outcomes for communities and governments.

The development of a nationally coordinated approach should be informed by the national principles for disaster recovery,²⁷ the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework,²⁸ and best practice volunteer involvement.²⁹ It should be aligned with individual State and Territory and national disaster arrangements. Where relevant, it should be aligned with the objectives outlined in the National Strategy for Volunteering (2023-2033) and State/Territory volunteering strategies.

Protecting the environment

The Government has committed to a suite of environmental policies, which includes policy changes relating to the protection of the Great Barrier Reef, improving Australia's urban rivers and catchments, increasing the number of Indigenous Rangers, and a new Saving Native Species Program. Funding for a renewed Landcare Rangers program in the 2022-23 Budget aims to deliver up to a 1000 full time Landcare Rangers across the country. This is designed to increase the capacity

²⁶ Work on a national definition for essential workers is currently being taken forward by the federal Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources.

²⁷ <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/national-principles-disaster-recovery>

²⁸ <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/australian-disaster-preparedness-framework.pdf>

²⁹ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/national-standards-and-supporting-material>

of local Landcare and Natural Resource Management groups with Landcare Rangers, who will work with local volunteers on conservation and restoration projects.

Volunteers are the backbone of environmental protection in Australia. According to the Annual Information Statement (AIS) data published by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, there are over 900,000 volunteers in charities which identified 'environmental activities' as their main activity.³⁰

Conservation efforts are crucial for mitigating future disasters and are a core element of the 'preparedness' dimension of emergency management. Volunteering Australia and the State and Territory volunteering peak bodies look forward to working with the Government to develop further opportunities for volunteers to contribute to environmental protection and restoration in the broader context of climate change.

5. Invest in the Aged Care volunteer workforce.

The Australian Government should invest in the aged care volunteer workforce to comply with the Aged Care Royal Commission's recommendations and, fundamentally, to improve the care and wellbeing of older people.

Investment: Funds to be allocated from within new aged care funding commitments

Outcomes for Government: This initiative builds on the Australian Government's wide ranging aged care reforms to ensure a critical part of the aged care workforce (volunteers) is rebuilt, maintained, and expanded in line with the Aged Care Royal Commission's volunteering recommendation to promote volunteers and volunteering in aged care to support older people to live meaningful and dignified lives.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety reported in February 2021.³¹ The Commission recommended that aged care providers should increase their support for volunteering and volunteers. For providers who operate a volunteering program, the Commission identified a staff member must be assigned to the role of volunteer coordination and that they should provide induction and ongoing training to volunteers and supervise their activities. Recommendation 44 of the report stipulates how the Australian Government should promote volunteers and volunteering in aged care to support older people to live meaningful and dignified lives. The Australian Government accepted this recommendation.

This recommendation cannot be enacted without additional investment. Funding should be allocated for the Aged Care Royal Commission's volunteering recommendation in Budget 2023-24 and into the forward estimates.

This should be accompanied by the Australian Government taking a more strategic approach to volunteers in the aged care sector, through the development of a national aged care volunteering framework, and to consider the role of volunteers in meeting reform objectives. This initiative should be prioritised in the Health portfolio's budget. Prioritising this initiative delivers recommendation 44 of the Aged Care Royal Commission, as committed to by the Australian Government.

³⁰ https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Volunteering-and-Australias-crisis-resilience_web.pdf, 7

³¹ <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report>

Volunteers are a vital part of the aged care workforce. The 2016 National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey estimated that volunteers are engaged extensively across aged care, with 83 per cent of residential facilities and 51 per cent of home care and home support outlets engaging the services of volunteers. Some services, such as Meals on Wheels,³² are delivered primarily by volunteers. However, the recent 2021 Aged Care Census revealed that volunteers were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the paid workforce³³ and there is now a significant challenge to reinvigorate volunteering across aged care.

Volunteers are not 'discretionary' – they provide care and support that is vital to the wellbeing of older people. Volunteers contribute in a qualitatively distinct way that cannot always be replicated by paid staff, contributing through activities such as respite care assistance, planned group activity assistance, companionship, and befriending. The impact of the contribution of volunteers in home and residential aged care needs to be fully understood and factored into the reform initiatives and how they are funded.

While volunteers are an important part of the aged care workforce, the management of volunteers is a specialised form of management and is not equivalent to the management of paid staff. Ongoing sector development and capacity building is required to ensure best practices in volunteer management are being used. This is one of the many reasons it is essential to ensure the right policy settings and funding arrangements are in place, which do not overlook the role of volunteering into the future.

Currently Volunteering SA&NT and Volunteering Tasmania provide sector capacity building and support to volunteer involving organisations funded by the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP). This funding enables these volunteering peak bodies to support Volunteer Managers and other staff involved in volunteering programs in service provider organisations, with volunteer management training using the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement as a framework. This is one of the best means of ensuring safe and effective volunteer management practices are adopted.

One element of the Commonwealth Government's aged care reform agenda³⁴ is structural reforms to home aged care³⁵ which involves creating a single 'Support at Home' program. This is replacing the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP), the Home Care Packages (HCP) Program, Short-Term Restorative Care Programme (STRC), and residential respite programs. Given the importance of volunteers in the delivery of home aged care, the Government should consult with the volunteering sector and ensure that the Federal Budget allocates funding to support volunteering. This should focus on supporting professional volunteer management and ongoing training of volunteers and Volunteer Managers. It should ensure that programs that engage a volunteer workforce are adequately funded.

The State and Territory peak volunteering bodies have the capability to develop and deliver training for volunteers in the proposed single Support and Home Program, as evidenced by the current arrangements delivered by Volunteering SA&NT and Volunteering Tasmania. The training developed needs to be nationally consistent and aligned with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

³² <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/submission/AWF.660.00126.0001.pdf>

³³ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/AGED-CARE-CENSUS-2020-factsheet-Final.pdf>

³⁴ <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/aged-care/aged-care-reforms-and-reviews>

³⁵ <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/aged-care/aged-care-reforms-and-reviews/reform-to-in-home-aged-care>

and the Aged Care Quality Standards. Training also needs to be an ongoing requirement to ensure volunteers receive updates to regulations, that knowledge of the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement remains current, and there is consistency across aged care organisations in following the standards properly. The State and Territory peak volunteering bodies are best placed to develop and provide the training required to meet the Royal Commission's recommendation.

It should be noted that there are other workforces, such as in disability services and mental health (see below), where volunteer involvement is important. Federal policy arrangements should make sure that funding is allocated to support these volunteer workforces.³⁶

Other Priority Issues

Volunteer Management Activity

The review of the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) was completed in 2021. From 1 July 2021, the Australian Government commenced the distribution of up to \$33.5 million (excluding GST) over five years under the new Volunteer Management Activity to State and Territory peak volunteering bodies across Australia. Peak bodies are partnering with other services to develop and support the new VMA program to increase and strengthen volunteer participation.

Volunteering Australia welcomed the inclusion of funding indexation for the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) in the 2019-20 budget, and a commitment to the program's continuation. The 2021-22 Budget allocated funding for the Volunteer Management Activity at circa \$6 million p.a. plus indexation to 2024-25 (\$33.5 million over five years).

Funding in the 2023-24 Budget should extend funding into the forward estimates.

Volunteering Research and Data

Volunteering research and data underpin the development of effective volunteer policy and practice and will be vital in informing and monitoring the implementation of the new National Strategy for Volunteering.

To develop the National Strategy, research evidence was collated through an original research project (the Volunteering in Australia research) and a series of research papers (the Volunteering Research Papers Initiative), which capture evidence on a wide array of topics related to volunteering.

The Volunteering in Australia research is a series of reports that provide the core evidence base on contemporary volunteering in Australia. The data collected, primarily through two national surveys, is publicly available on the Australian Data Archive and can be used by policymakers and practitioners across the volunteering ecosystem. The Australian Government should develop a volunteering data strategy and fund the Volunteering in Australia research on a regular basis.

It should be noted that the General Social Survey (GSS) conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics was the only official data source which consistently provided information on volunteers and volunteering using a sample of the general population. The GSS is currently being reviewed and the last data enumerated was in 2020. This data generated from the GSS is vital to the volunteering ecosystem and is extensively used within Australia and internationally.

³⁶ Volunteering Australia has been advocating for improved recognition of volunteers in government-funded workforces. For example, see <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/policy/advocacy-campaigns/advocating-for-the-role-of-volunteering-in-mental-health/>

To assess the contribution of volunteering to government priorities as we endeavour to reinvigorate volunteering, data on volunteering should be included in a nationally representative survey of the general Australian population conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. If the Commonwealth Government is to move to Well-being Budgets (discussed below), then it becomes all the more important that robust official data on volunteering is available.

In 2021, Volunteering Australia established the National Volunteering Research Network to facilitate the sharing of information and knowledge between researchers and members of the wider volunteering ecosystem. The National Volunteering Research Network already has over 100 members and is leading to greater collaboration and enhancing research translation and policy engagement. The Australian Government should consider how this vital piece of research infrastructure is funded going forward.

Employment Services and Workforce Australia

The House of Representatives Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services was recently established to inquire into and report on matters related to Workforce Australia Employment Services. The Committee is due to report in September 2023. In our recent submission to the Committee on the ParentsNext program, Volunteering Australia highlighted the value of volunteering to the employment services system, both as a pathway to employment and as a meaningful activity in its own right. We also emphasised the challenges of the mutual obligations system under the broader Workforce Australia and the previous *jobactive* systems, including the lack of consultation with the volunteering ecosystem and the under-resourcing of volunteering support services.

Future employment programs should 1) include participation in volunteering as an optional activity, ensuring that volunteering opportunities are supported and accessible to participants on their own terms, 2) consult with the volunteering ecosystem on how to include volunteering and what resourcing is needed to support volunteering, and 3) fund volunteering support services and other organisations that provide local volunteering support for their role in the Workforce Australia system, ensuring that strategic investment is provided to support the referral and placement of volunteers. In our submission on the New Disability Employment Support Model, we also recommended the funding of programs which connect people with disability to tailored and meaningful volunteering opportunities, the resourcing of volunteer involving organisations to improve accessibility, and that people with disability who receive income support should have the flexibility to fulfill their mutual obligation requirements by volunteering virtually or remotely if they choose to do so.

Disability Services and the review of the NDIS

Volunteers play a vital role in disability services and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Volunteering is time freely given, but enabling volunteering is not free. Like paid workers, volunteers need induction, training, and ongoing management. In our submission to the National Disability Strategy, and in recent submissions to the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS and to the Royal

Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability,³⁷ we argued that volunteers need to be considered strategically in workforce planning if disability services are to meet the needs and aspirations of people with disability. In its interim report³⁸, the Royal Commission has heard evidence about the involvement of volunteers in services and support for people with disability.

Participation in volunteering can also play an important role in the lives of people with disability, offering opportunities for social, economic, and cultural inclusion. Volunteering can be particularly beneficial to people with disability in offering self-empowerment and pathways to paid employment. It is therefore urgent that volunteer involving organisations receive the resources needed to remove barriers to volunteering for people with disability.

It is imperative that the contributions of volunteering, both in the disability services workforce and in the lives of people with disability, are recognised and resourced in this and future Budgets, in the Targeted Action Plans established to support Australia's Disability Strategy, and in the Government's response to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

Mental Health Services

The contribution of volunteers in the mental health workforce needs to be better understood and strategically considered in workforce planning and development. In our submission on the draft of the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy, we argued that the contributions of volunteers to the broader mental health landscape should be recognised and supported. This means including volunteers in proposed data collection efforts for the sector, acknowledging and planning for the involvement of volunteers in key service areas such as suicide prevention, targeting loneliness and social isolation, mental health education, and peer advisory, and supporting volunteering as a pathway to paid employment in the mental health sector.

Participation in volunteering can also play an important role in supporting good mental health, both in prevention and recovery. The mental health benefits of volunteering were acknowledged in the final report from the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health.³⁹

In line with the recent call from the House of Representatives Select Committee on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention,⁴⁰ volunteers should be explicitly included in strategic initiatives, including the upcoming National Mental Health Workforce Strategy. The role of volunteering in supporting mental health should also be considered in the implementation of the recent National Preventive Health Strategy.

Conclusion

³⁷ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/download/154/2021/25790/september-2021-submission-to-the-royal-commission-into-violence-abuse-neglect-and-exploitation-of-people-with-disability.pdf>;
<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/download/154/2021/25786/september-2021-submission-to-the-joint-standing-committee-on-the-ndis-national-workforce-plan.pdf>

³⁸ [Interim Report | Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability](#)

³⁹ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health#report>

⁴⁰

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Mental_Health_and_Suicide_Prevention/MHSP/Report

This Pre-Budget submission sets out the investment needed in the 2023-24 Budget to chart the course for volunteering to thrive in the future. It demonstrates how targeted strategic investment in volunteering will enable the Government to meet its key priorities.

Recommendations

- 1. Establish a National Strategy for Volunteering Partnership Fund.** This Fund would support the implementation of the new National Strategy for Volunteering and include contributions from Government, philanthropy, corporates, and other stakeholders across the volunteering ecosystem.
- 2. Provide Volunteering Cost of Living Relief.** This would help organisations to survive and continue undertaking their vital work during the current cost of living crisis, particularly small, volunteer-run organisations.
- 3. Implement a National Youth Volunteering Initiative.** This initiative could mitigate against poor mental health outcomes for unemployed and underemployed youngpeople and support pathways to paid employment.
- 4. Develop a nationally co-ordinated approach to volunteer engagement in emergencies.** As the frequency and scale of emergencies in Australia increases, a nationally co-ordinated approach would help to mobilise volunteers rapidly, safely, and effectively during times of need.
- 5. Invest in the Aged Care volunteer workforce.** Funding should be allocated for the Aged Care Royal Commission's volunteering recommendations.

Authorisation

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



Mr Mark Pearce
Chief Executive Officer

Endorsements

This position statement 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 a strong, connected, and resilient Australian community through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

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