



**Volunteering**  
AUSTRALIA



**FEDERAL ELECTION PLATFORM 2025**

# **VOLUNTEER NATION: POSITIVE IMPACT, STRONG COMMUNITIES**

**Volunteering Australia calls on all political parties and candidates to commit to:**

- **Implement the National Strategy for Volunteering**
- **Provide cost-of-living relief to volunteers**
- **Increase funding for the Volunteer Management Activity**
- **Reform Volunteer Insurance**
- **Develop a National Volunteer Passport**

### VOLUNTEERING AUSTRALIA CALLS ON ALL POLITICAL PARTIES AND CANDIDATES TO COMMIT TO:

#### **Implement the National Strategy for Volunteering**

The National Strategy for Volunteering (2023-2033) provides a clear and compelling case for targeted and sufficient investment in volunteering and is widely supported, as demonstrated through the [Coalition of Support](#).

#### **Provide cost-of-living relief to volunteers**

It is essential that volunteers are not out-of-pocket for contributing their time and effort, and for maintaining relevant qualifications, certifications, and worker screening checks.

#### **Increase funding for the Volunteer Management Activity**

The Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) aims to create opportunities for people to participate in the social and economic life of their community through volunteering. This important program must be expanded.

#### **Reform Volunteer Insurance**

Consistent and affordable volunteer insurance, that better protects volunteers in the course of their duties, is urgently required given current gaps in coverage.

#### **Develop a National Volunteer Passport**

A National Volunteer Passport would improve portability of volunteer credentials between organisations and jurisdictions.



**Volunteering is essential to the fabric of Australian society. It brings social, cultural, and economic benefits to the nation. Investing now in the activities and resources that sustain volunteering will build on the creation of the National Strategy for Volunteering and the strong history of volunteering in Australia.**

### STRONG FOUNDATIONS

At its core, volunteering is about people: people doing things for others, for their community, and for the nation.

Volunteering empowers people to make a positive impact and leads to more inclusive and flourishing communities. It is a uniquely good indicator of community wellbeing as it captures social connectedness, physical and mental health, sense of purpose, and connection to place. It can also be a pathway to skills development and employment.

Volunteers are an essential workforce. Australian society relies on volunteers to provide a myriad of essential activities and programs, in our schools, hospitals, community centres, and on our playing fields. Volunteers are often on the frontline when crises hit – fighting bushfires, supporting recovery from floods, and providing support to those at risk in our communities.

Many national priorities – such as aged care, disability, homelessness, community welfare, and the environment and climate – rely heavily on volunteers to deliver services and take action.



The scale of volunteer involvement in Australia is substantial. Around six million people volunteer through organisations across the nation. Millions more volunteer informally in their local communities, helping neighbours and strangers, especially in times of crisis and adversity. Many people do both, and in 2022 over half the population (57 per cent) had undertaken either informal or formal volunteering.<sup>1</sup>

50% of charities are run solely by volunteers, and the charity sector, which employs 10.5 per cent of Australia's working population, engages 3.2 million volunteers.<sup>2</sup>

### PROGRESS SO FAR

The foundations for a more effective, inclusive and sustainable volunteering ecosystem have been laid:

- The [National Strategy for Volunteering](#) was launched in February 2023, providing a ten-year blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia.
- The first action plan for the National Strategy, [Action Plan 2024-2027](#) implements the top priorities in the National Strategy: improving the volunteer experience, maximising social and community impact and securing the conditions for volunteering to thrive.
- The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement were refreshed in 2024. These provide a framework outlining best practice for volunteer involvement.
- The Volunteering Gateway provides a central online platform for tools and resources for people who manage volunteers.
- Volunteering Australia and the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies work together to advocate for volunteering and provide leadership to ensure its growth and sustainability in all areas of public policy from education to emergency management.



### AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS

In 2023-24, 18,355 people volunteered for the Australian Red Cross, supporting disaster relief and recovery, social connection programs, food relief, and retail stores.<sup>12</sup> Volunteers spent 78,401 hours connecting with older and vulnerable people in Australia through the Telecross and Telechat programs.

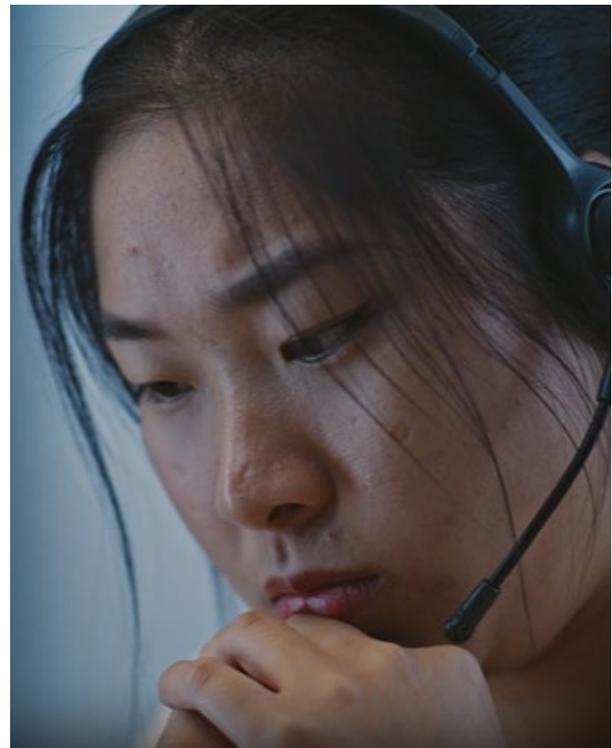
### WHAT IS AT RISK?

A thriving volunteering ecosystem is crucial to ensure the provision of essential services, such as food relief, mental health support, aged care, youth services, animal welfare, and emergency response and recovery. It also underpins activities that strengthen and enrich our communities, such as sport, the arts, religion, and cultural and other events.

One fifth of Australia's formal volunteers are involved in community services, welfare, and homelessness. Other large sub-sectors, such as sport and recreation, and religious, faith-based, and spiritual organisations each engage

more than one million volunteers,<sup>3</sup> and there are hundreds of thousands of volunteers in environmental organisations.<sup>4</sup>

Data also reveals sizeable volunteer workforces in mental health (4.4 per cent of formal volunteers), aged care (8.8 per cent), and disability (4.7 per cent).<sup>5</sup> Each of these sectors engages more than 300,000 volunteers.<sup>6</sup>



### EMERGENCY SERVICES

The majority of personnel in State and Territory Emergency Services are volunteers, responding to storm, flood and cyclone events. In 2023-24 there were 24,357 emergency services volunteers and 3,082 paid staff nationally. In fire services organisations, nationally, the numbers of volunteer personnel (both firefighters and support staff) have decreased by 14.3 per cent between 2014-15 and 2023-24. At the same time, natural disasters have become more intense and frequent.

### LIFELINE

Lifeline engages 10,000 volunteers across Australia who answer calls from over 1 million people each year. These volunteers are indispensable to Australia's mental health system.

### CHALLENGES FACED

Declining numbers of formal volunteers coupled with barriers to participation, such as cost, and reliance on volunteers to deliver essential services without adequate training and support, threaten the sustainability of volunteering. However, these challenges can be addressed. Many of these barriers, such as cost, also extend to the five million Australians who volunteer informally in our society.

#### Decline in formal volunteers

Over the long-term, formal volunteering has been in decline in Australia. As noted by the Productivity Commission, the formal volunteering rate fell from 36 per cent in 2010 to 25 per cent in 2020 and has yet to fully recover from the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

Several factors are responsible for this decline, many of which relate to the challenges people face in their broader lives, such as being time poor or having to balance paid work and unpaid care. As outlined in the National Strategy for Volunteering, we can continue to rebuild these numbers. It demands a whole-of-government approach to resourcing and supporting the volunteering ecosystem across the nation.



#### Volunteering is not free

While volunteers give their time willingly for the common good and without financial gain, volunteering is not free. Volunteer involving organisations incur costs for the recruitment, volunteer management, and training of volunteers, as well providing insurance, tools, and equipment to allow volunteers to perform their roles. Volunteers incur costs, such as transport, and may be called on to cover the cost of clothing or equipment. Around half of formal volunteers incur out-of-pocket expenses when volunteering.<sup>8</sup>

Cost-of-living pressures are adding significant barriers to participation. For organisations, rising operating costs are not being met by rising incomes.<sup>9</sup>

### TOY LIBRARIES

In 2023-24, Toy Libraries Australia's members engaged 11,000 volunteers, supporting 84,000 children and their families to borrow educational toys, games, and puzzles and create strong community connections.

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The rising cost-of-living may mean having to work longer instead of retiring, or work more hours, meaning fewer opportunities to volunteer. Plus, the costs associated with volunteering are rising. Research shows young people are especially impacted by financial barriers to volunteering.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, demand for volunteer run services such as food relief and community welfare – and therefore demand for volunteers – has increased. These pressures also affect and create barriers for the millions of Australians who volunteer informally in our communities, and in different modes, including spontaneous and virtual volunteering.

### LANDCARE

The Landcare community is comprised of over 6,000 groups and more than 140,000 volunteers undertaking projects focussed on sustainable land management practices and environmental conservation.



### THE OLYMPIC SPIRIT

Brisbane is hosting the Olympic and Paralympic games in 2032 and tens of thousands of volunteers will be needed to help deliver the event. In 2024, 45,000 volunteers were needed to support the games in Paris, selected from 300,000 applicants from over 150 countries.<sup>13</sup> A successful volunteer program of this scale takes more than volunteers themselves. It also requires investment in volunteer management, recruitment and training, worker screening processes, insurance and uniforms. Best practice volunteer programs support the diverse needs of volunteers, such as those with a disability, and provide accredited training and qualifications that volunteers can use beyond major events, leaving a legacy beyond the games.

## **WHAT DOES THE ECOSYSTEM NEED?**

Volunteering does not just happen and is not free; it requires investment.

Given the [lack of support for volunteering](#) in the recent Federal Budget, we call on all political parties and candidates to commit to:

### **IMPLEMENT THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR VOLUNTEERING**

The National Strategy for Volunteering (2023-2033) was co-designed and is owned by all members of the volunteering ecosystem. It provides a clear and compelling case, underpinned by robust data and evidence, for targeted and sufficient investment in volunteering and recognition of the role it plays in creating and maintaining thriving communities. The National Strategy has wide support from the volunteering ecosystem, as demonstrated by the [Coalition of Support](#).

The Australian Government is a key enabling partner in the implementation of the National Strategy for Volunteering, with several Federal departments and agencies making valuable commitments through the first three-year Action Plan. We call on all political parties and candidates to commit to [fund implementation and coordination](#) of the National Strategy for Volunteering.

### **PROVIDE COST-OF-LIVING RELIEF TO VOLUNTEERS**

Ensuring that volunteers are not out-of-pocket for contributing their time, and for maintaining relevant qualifications, certifications, and worker screening checks, is essential. To help address cost-of-living pressures, we call on all political parties and candidates to maintain or increase [funding that provides direct support to volunteers](#) and volunteer involving organisations, such as the Volunteer Grants program.



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### INCREASE FUNDING FOR THE VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY

The Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) aims to create opportunities for people to participate in the social and economic life of their community through volunteering. The VMA, delivered by state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies, focuses on developing and implementing strategies to build the capacity of volunteer involving organisations to recruit and retain volunteers. We call on all political parties and candidates to [increase investment in the VMA](#), recognising the true cost of delivering services.

### REFORM VOLUNTEER INSURANCE

We call on all political parties and candidates to work towards a model for more consistent and affordable volunteer insurance in Australia that better protects volunteers in the course of their duties. An alarming one in four volunteer involving organisations do not offer insurance to their volunteers.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, volunteers are not typically covered by Workers Compensation, and Voluntary Workers Personal Accident Insurance covers injury, but not illness acquired while performing volunteer duties, as was highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### DEVELOP A NATIONAL VOLUNTEER PASSPORT

A National Volunteer Passport would improve portability of volunteer credentials between organisations and jurisdictions. Currently, engagement of volunteers is often delayed or complicated by duplicative training requirements and worker screening processes, which are often not portable between jurisdictions. This can

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be a significant burden both for volunteers and organisations, particularly those that operate in more than one state or territory. We call on all political parties and candidates to support the creation of a [National Volunteer Passport](#) to improve the portability of volunteer credentials.

## THE WAY FORWARD

**Valuing volunteering means more than just holding volunteers in high regard or speaking about the importance of their contribution. It also means more than reducing volunteering to an economic valuation. Genuinely valuing volunteering requires action to support it, including recognition of its contribution to cohesive communities and to essential services that would otherwise not be delivered.**

**Invest now for a sustainable, thriving volunteer nation, for positive impact and strong communities.**

### MEALS ON WHEELS

Meals on Wheels engages 35,000 volunteers across over 590 service outlets around Australia. Each year, they deliver nutritious meals, social connection and wellbeing checks to over 200,000 older Australians who are unable to cook or shop for themselves or are living with an illness or disability.



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### ABOUT VOLUNTEERING AUSTRALIA

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering. Our mission is to support a thriving volunteering ecosystem in Australia by promoting and advocating for volunteering and providing leadership at a national level. The seven state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies work to advance volunteering in their respective jurisdictions and are Foundation Members of Volunteering Australia.

Our vision is for a future where volunteering is the heart of Australian communities. This vision was co-designed with thousands of people from across Australia during the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering.

Volunteering Australia believes volunteering empowers people to make a positive impact and leads to more inclusive and flourishing communities.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Volunteering Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

#### Contact Volunteering Australia

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Data is collected for formal volunteering with a 12 month reference period and for informal volunteering with a four week reference period.
- 2 <https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/reports/australian-charities-report-9th-edition> p.19
- 3 <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 42; estimates based on a population of 25,422,788 as reported in the 2021 Census.
- 4 <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 42; estimates 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.
- 5 <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 43.
- 6 Note: Many people volunteer with multiple organisations, meaning sub-sector data on formal volunteers cannot be summed to match total number of formal volunteers.
- 7 <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/philanthropy/report/philanthropy.pdf> pp 23 and 101
- 8 <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 62
- 9 <https://www.communitydirectors.com.au/articles/canberra-moving-too-slowly-on-sector-reform-survey>
- 10 <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 38
- 11 Holmes, K., Dunlop, P. D., Lockstone-Binney, L., Davies, A., Farid, H. M., & Lavery, C. (2022). Volunteering in Australia: The Organisation Perspective. Volunteering Australia, <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-inAustralia2022-The-Organisation-Perspective.pdf>
- 12 <https://www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/cms/publications/annual-reports/annual-report-2024.pdf>
- 13 <https://press.paris2024.org/news/the-paris-2024-volunteer-convention-brought-together-40-000-volunteers-in-a-party-atmosphere-bc0a-7578a.html>