

Submission on the draft National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy

June 2023

Written by: Jack McDermott (Policy Officer, Volunteering Australia)

Overview

Volunteers are part of Australia's care and support economy. Strategic consideration of volunteers in the National Strategy for the Care the Support Economy is therefore crucial to achieving its aim of a "sustainable and productive care and support economy that delivers quality care and support with decent jobs."

The National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy should include a statement specifying which activities are in scope. This should explicitly include the contributions of volunteers in the care and support workforce. Volunteering is additional to and distinct from paid work and unpaid care done informally within the household. Volunteering needs to be included and this distinction made clear in the National Strategy.

As currently drafted, the National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy contradicts current Government policy which incorporates volunteers within workforce considerations.

- The care and support economy includes the contributions of around 1 million volunteers in Australia.
- Existing policy frameworks for the care and support sectors specify volunteers as part of their respective workforces. Any actions, particularly those focused on whole-of-system solutions, must consider that volunteers are included in existing initiatives and acknowledge the differences between volunteers and paid workers in relevant frameworks.
- Many of the initiatives proposed in the draft National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy target regulation that already includes volunteers, such as work, health and safety practices and worker screening checks. The exclusion of volunteers in the National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy will undermine its aim to develop whole-of-system solutions for the care and support sectors. Indeed, whole-of-system solutions will inevitably be flawed if volunteers are excluded, including:
 - o The proposed Worker Safety Action Plan
 - o The proposed Regulatory Review Action Plan

Volunteering Australia makes the following recommendations on the draft National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy:

- 1. Include volunteering in the scope of the National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy.**
- 2. Specify that volunteers are part of the care and support workforce and include volunteers in relevant workforce initiatives.**
 - o Given their contributions to the sector and recognition as part of the workforce in the aged care and disability sectors, volunteers should be included in the scope of the National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy.
 - o Where relevant initiatives apply to volunteers, their inclusion should be specified and acknowledged as distinct from the role of paid staff.

Introduction

About this submission

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

About the National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy

The Australian Government released the draft National Care and Support Economy Strategy for consultation. The draft strategy was developed by the Care and Support Economy Taskforce. The focus of the Taskforce is to develop a national strategy that sets a shared vision for the care and support economy in Australia, and can bring together disparate efforts to address challenges across the sectors.¹

The draft strategy focuses on paid care and support services in:

- aged care
- disability care and support
- veterans' care
- early childhood education and care (ECEC).

The draft National Strategy for the Care and Support Sector aims to complement the substantial work already being undertaken in each of the aged care, disability support, veterans' care and ECEC sectors, by developing whole-of-system solutions.²

Volunteering in the care and support economy

Care and support work is a major component of the Australian economy. The Health Care and Social Assistance industry is Australia's largest by employment, accounting for 14.4 per cent of Australia's total workforce.³ Data collected as part of the Volunteering in Australia research in 2022 found that 597,300 people volunteered in aged care organisations and 319,000 volunteered in disability organisations.⁴ Data from the ACNC Charity Annual Information Statement database also indicates that 43,521 volunteers in charities and not-for-profits which identified veterans and/or their families as their main beneficiaries.⁵ While it is difficult to compare data from different sources, and

¹ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/care-and-support-economy-taskforce-terms-reference>

² <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/draft-national-care-and-support-economy-strategy-2023.pdf>, 1

³ <https://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/GainInsights/IndustryInformation/HealthCareandSocialAssistance>

⁴ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>; based on the count of the Australian population reported in the 2021 Census; <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/population-census/2021>

⁵ According to the ACNC Annual Information Statement data, accessed in 2021:

<https://data.gov.au/dataset/ds-dga-34b35c52-8af0-4cc1-aa0b-2278f6416d09/distribution/dist-dga-1da3681e-6149-45db-8458-9173947bd5bc/details?q=acnc>

comprehensive data on volunteers in early childhood education and care is not currently available, this indicates that there are around 1 million volunteers involved in the care and support economy in Australia. The sustainability and productivity of the care and support economy is vital to the wellbeing and quality of life of Australians. As such, acknowledging and supporting volunteering in care and support is of critical concern.

Volunteers also add unique value to these services, and undertake roles that are different to those of paid staff. In the disability sector, these include social support and community participation, supported activities, skills development, out of home support, practical support, organisational support, and advocacy.⁶ In the aged care sector, volunteers most often assist with social activities, transport, and planned activities support.⁷ Many of these volunteers are directly engaged in the provision of paid services, such as those provided under the NDIS and through Commonwealth aged care programs like the Commonwealth Home Support Programme and the Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme. Including volunteers in the National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy is therefore crucial to ensure that these roles are strategically considered in future initiatives.

Volunteering in existing policy frameworks

Volunteers are included in a number of relevant policy initiatives for the care and support sectors. Volunteers are recognised as part of the workforce by the NDIS Commission and by the Department of Health and Aged Care.⁸ Worker screening checks are required for volunteers in both aged care roles and in risk assessed roles with NDIS providers.⁹ Volunteer roles are acknowledged in key strategic initiatives for the disability sector, including *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031* and the *National Disability Advocacy Framework 2023-2025*. Volunteers are included in existing data collection efforts for the care and support economy, including the Aged Care Workforce Census.

In the aged care sector in particular, volunteers are recognised as crucial to the workforce and are included in key strategic initiatives. Volunteers are included in *A Matter of Care: Australia's Aged Care Workforce Strategy*, and referenced consistently throughout the most recent consultation paper on the new model for regulating aged care.¹⁰ Where volunteers are relevant to particular objectives or considerations, the document refers to either “workers and volunteers” or specifies that volunteers are included in the aged care workforce. The Aged Care Royal Commission recommended initiatives to better promote and support volunteers and the Aged Care Volunteer

⁶ <https://www.interchange.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Value-Added-Volunteer-Supported-Services-and-the-Challenge-of-the-NDIS.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/10/2020-aged-care-workforce-census.pdf>

⁸ <https://ndiscommission.gov.au/workers>; <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/a-matter-of-care-australia-s-aged-care-workforce-strategy.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.health.gov.au/topics/aged-care-workforce/screening-requirements>;
<https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/workers/worker-screening/ndis-worker-screening-check>

¹⁰ <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-04/a-new-model-for-regulating-aged-care-consultation-paper-2-details-of-the-proposed-new-model.pdf>

Visitors Scheme,¹¹ and the *Caring for Older Australians* report from the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Aged Care includes a series of proposals on improving conditions for volunteers.¹²

Major research initiatives to support policy for the care and support economy, such as the proposed Care Economy Cooperative Research Centre, also include significant research programs on volunteering.

Volunteering and the National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy

The exclusion of volunteers in the National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy will undermine a systems approach to the care and support economy. As a result, many of the proposed whole-of-system solutions for the care and support sectors would be insufficient or incomplete. For example, under the ‘safe and inclusive workplaces’ objective (Objectives 2.2 and 2.4), the draft Strategy identifies a Worker Safety Action Plan as a key initiative.¹³ In organisations that engage both paid staff and volunteers, relevant work, health and safety laws apply to volunteers.¹⁴ This initiative will therefore need to consider how efforts to improve worker safety will include volunteers and affect volunteer involvement.

The draft Strategy also suggests a Regulatory Review Action Plan under the ‘productive care and support services’ objective (Objective 3.2), which aims to develop a better approach to worker screening. Worker screening checks, such as the national NDIS Worker Screening Check, are required for volunteers in particular roles across the care and support sectors. Many volunteers also require Working with Children Checks, which are currently being reviewed by the Commonwealth in an effort to further improve national consistency.¹⁵ Advancing this objective must therefore consider volunteers and the issues related to volunteer screening requirements, such as a framework to identify risk assessed volunteer roles and the volunteer fee waiver process.

The draft National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy states that: “A key aim of this Strategy is to provide a holistic view across the care and support economy. This will help facilitate comprehensive solutions addressing the shared needs of care and support workers, providers and the communities they serve. A holistic approach will also help improve the overall quality, accessibility, and sustainability of care and support, and ultimately contribute to building a more equitable and inclusive care and support economy.”¹⁶ The Strategy will fail to meet this aim if

¹¹ https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/final-report-volume-1_0.pdf, 238-239

¹² <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/aged-care/report/aged-care-volume1.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/draft-national-care-and-support-economy-strategy-2023.pdf>, 37

¹⁴ <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/A%20Guide%20to%20Work%20Health%20and%20Safety%20for%20Volunteer%20Organisations.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.regulatoryreform.gov.au/priorities/productivity-enhancing-regulatory-reforms>

¹⁶ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/draft-national-care-and-support-economy-strategy-2023.pdf>, 6

volunteers are not included. The contributions of volunteers should be explicitly included in its scope.

Volunteering and gender equality

The draft National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy also highlights the impact of the care and support economy on women. In our submission to the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality, Volunteering Australia has outlined the gendered nature of volunteering and the potential of volunteering to improve gender equality in Australia.

Volunteering is highly gendered, and largely reflects wider societal and economic patterns and inequalities. For example, women are more likely than men to volunteer for aged care (10.6 per cent of women compared to 6.6 per cent of men), children/youth (19.7 per cent of women and 7.7 per cent of men) and education/training organisations (14.5 per cent of women and 9.9 per cent of men), while men were more likely to volunteer for emergency services/disaster relief (5.6 per cent of women compared to 12.4 per cent of men) and sport/recreation organisations (20.6 per cent of women compared to 30.6 per cent of men).¹⁷ Women are more likely to volunteer informally in the community than men (which receives less support and protections) but are less likely to contribute through governance boards and committees (which provide important leadership and decision-making opportunities). The rate of formal volunteering (i.e., within organisations) is declining for both men and women. However, the decline is most evident for women, whose rate decreased from 38.1 per cent in 2010 to 28.1 per cent in 2019.¹⁸

Volunteering can improve gender equality, for example, through providing opportunities to challenge gender norms, exercise agency, and make social connections. However, the current highly gendered nature of volunteering limits its potential to promote gender equality and diminishes the wider role that volunteering and volunteers can play in enhancing the wellbeing of people of all genders. Further, greater equality in paid employment for women will not be achieved without greater gender equality in volunteering.

Given the gendered nature of volunteering, particularly as it relates to the care and support economy, volunteering must be considered as part of initiatives to properly value care and support work and achieve gender equality.

The National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033

The new National Strategy for Volunteering (2023–2033) is a ten-year blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia. It is the first National Strategy for Volunteering in a decade, providing a strategic framework for enabling safe, supported, and sustainable volunteering. The

¹⁷ Figures indicate the proportion of volunteers, by gender. Based on data collected in ANUPoll 50 (April 2022) as part of the Volunteering in Australia research:

<https://dataverse.ada.edu.au/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.26193/AXQPSE>

¹⁸ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>

National Strategy for Volunteering was developed through a 12-month co-design process with members of the volunteering ecosystem.¹⁹

Our recommendation to include volunteering in the draft National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy aligns with the objectives of the National Strategy for Volunteering, in particular:

- Strategic Objective 3.1: Make Volunteering a Cross-Portfolio Issue in Government
 - o Governments need to consider volunteers and volunteering across all domains. Comprehensive policy and investment in volunteering should be recognised as an essential remit of Governments at every level.
- Strategic Objective 3.3: Commit to Strategic Investment
 - o The availability of and investment in common enabling infrastructure, including technology, research, resources, and support services, will improve capacity and capability across the volunteering ecosystem.

Recommendations

Volunteering Australia makes the following recommendations on the draft National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy:

- 1. Include volunteering in the scope of the National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy.**
- 2. Specify that volunteers are part of the care and support workforce and include volunteers in relevant workforce initiatives.**
 - o Given their contributions to the sector and recognition as part of the workforce in the aged care and disability sectors, volunteers should be included in the scope of the National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy.
 - o Where relevant initiatives apply to volunteers, their inclusion should be specified and acknowledged as distinct from the role of paid staff.

¹⁹ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/the-strategy/>

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.

Volunteering Australia Contacts

Mark Pearce
Chief Executive Officer
ceo@volunteeringaustralia.org
0428 186 736

Sue Regan
Deputy CEO & Policy Director
policy@volunteeringaustralia.org
0480 258 723

State and Territory Volunteering Peak Bodies

VolunteeringACT
www.volunteeringact.org.au
02 6251 4060
info@volunteeringact.org.au

Volunteering Tasmania
www.volunteeringtas.org.au
03 6231 5550
admin@volunteeringtas.org.au

The Centre for Volunteering (NSW)
www.volunteering.com.au
02 9261 3600
info@volunteering.com.au

Volunteering Victoria
www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au
03 8327 8500
info@volunteeringvictoria.org.au

Volunteering Queensland
www.volunteeringqld.org.au
07 3002 7600
reception@volunteeringqld.org.au

Volunteering WA
www.volunteeringwa.org.au
08 9482 4333
info@volunteeringwa.org.au

Volunteering SA&NT
www.volunteeringsa-nt.org.au
08 8221 7177
reception@volunteeringsa-nt.org.au