

29 May 2026

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs

Re: National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Securing the NDIS for Future Generations) Bill 2026

Dear Committee Secretary,

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering, working to promote a sustainable volunteering ecosystem in Australia through leadership at the national level, advocating for policies and infrastructure that enable volunteering and communities to thrive. 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 recognises the need to improve the sustainability of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) to help support people with disability into the future. This submission responds to the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Securing the NDIS for Future Generations) Bill 2026*, narrowly focusing on the potential impacts on volunteers and volunteering.¹ There are two possible unintended consequences we wish to highlight for consultation:

- a. The potential for an additional burden to be placed on volunteers in the disability sector.
- b. The potential for reduced access to volunteering opportunities for NDIS participants.

To address these potential impacts, we recommend that:

1. Changes to the supports available to people with disability be designed, funded, timed and sequenced to ensure unpaid carers and volunteers are not expected to take on roles more appropriately performed by paid workers.
2. The design of the Inclusive Communities Fund recognises the value of volunteering for social, civic and community engagement and inclusive volunteering initiatives be eligible for funding.

Impacts on volunteers supporting people with disability

Amendments to Schedule 1 Part 3 – *Strengthen the link between an impairment and the need for support* and to Schedule 1 Part 9 – *Eligibility based on access to other services* in particular could have unintended consequences for the volunteer workforce in the disability sector.

If there is a gap between people not being eligible for support under the NDIS or receiving reduced support and being able to access services elsewhere, or if other systems do not or cannot provide sufficient services (or are not available locally), then the main alternative is for those needs to be met by family members, and by volunteers, either formally through an organisation or informally.

¹ Volunteering Australia defines volunteering as time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.

There may be negative implications volunteers – in terms of increased workloads and/or reduced capacity to volunteer due to increased caring responsibilities. This could impact a large number of volunteers. The most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data released in May 2026 shows that around 160,000 people volunteered with a disability organisation in 2025.² This does not include those who volunteered informally, as data is not available for this group.

Recruiting and retaining volunteers is challenging in a cost-of-living crisis, particularly if increased operational and budgetary pressures on volunteer involving organisations working with people with disability means that volunteers must cover their own out-of-pocket expenses, for example fuel costs. The ABS data cited above shows that in 2025, 54% of all formal volunteers incurred expenses and of these 9% were reimbursed.

As articulated in the National Strategy for Volunteering, volunteers should not be exploited as ‘free labour’, used to replace paid workers or compensate for shortages in the paid workforce, or be wholly responsible for delivering public services.³

Impacts on people with disability who volunteer

Amendment to Schedule 1 Part 4 – *Support determinations* would enable the Minister to reduce the funding component amount for a specified group of supports across all plans with no individual variations. This would give effect to the Government’s proposal to cut the amount of funding provided for social, civic and community participation. Some NDIS participants use this funding to enable them to participate in volunteering, for example where they require support to do so.

Research shows that volunteering makes a positive contribution to mental health for all volunteers and has been found to improve self-assessed psychological wellbeing, self-esteem, happiness, and satisfaction with life.⁴ Social interaction and sense of purpose are the key mechanisms linking volunteering activity to better mental health.⁵ Volunteering enables people to contribute to their community through causes that matter to them and are valuable to their communities. The NDIS website provides numerous stories detailing the contributions NDIS participants are making through volunteering and [the benefits they gain](#).

In addition, volunteering can be a pathway to employment, helping people to build skills and confidence. This is recognised in the NDIS guide to employment.⁶

The latest ABS data shows that in 2025 **people with disability volunteered formally through an organisation at similar rates to the overall population (24.5% compared to 22.6%) and informally at an identical rate to the general population (29.5%)**. This is despite evidence suggesting people with disability still face barriers to volunteering, as they do in other areas of life, such as access to transport, the accessibility of volunteering

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, General Social Survey 2025, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/2025#data-downloads> Table 3.3

³ Strategic Objective 1.3 – Ensure Volunteering is Not Exploitative. <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/the-strategy/>

⁴ https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/VRP_Volunteering-and-Mental-Health.pdf

⁵ Ibid

⁶ <https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/life-transitions/employment-support/guide-employment>. In particular, see the ‘Let’s talk about work’ booklet linked at the bottom of the page.

venues and locations, and attitudinal barriers like the assumptions, stereotypes and misconception of people with disability.⁷

The proposed \$200 million Inclusive Communities Fund should support community organisations to enable people with disability to participate in volunteering for social, civic and community engagement, where group-based activities are appropriate and individual supports are not required. In addition to benefitting individuals and communities, this would align with the National Strategy for Volunteering, in particular Strategic Objective 1.2 – Make Volunteering Inclusive and Accessible.

While we understand significant and foundational reforms will be the focus, we welcome the opportunity to engage further and early with this process to ensure that there are no unintended consequences for volunteers and volunteering as a result of NDIS reforms.

Authorisation

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

A blue ink signature, likely of Mr Mark Pearce, written in a cursive style.

Mr Mark Pearce
Chief Executive Officer

Endorsements

This position statement has been endorsed by the seven state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies.



⁷ https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=275&wpfd_file_id=58736&token=&preview=1 pp.7-9.

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