

Wednesday 13 May 2026

## Volunteer workforce stable, but under pressure

The Federal Budget offers welcome reforms and initiatives to support Australians and communities at a time of significant cost-of-living pressures and uncertainty.

Volunteering is critical to Australian society, especially at times like this, delivering essential services from support in the care economy to food relief and shelter as well as strengthening community cohesion, improving mental health and reducing social isolation. While the latest data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that volunteering is resilient with 9.5 million Australians volunteering in 2025, similar to 2020 levels, the sustainability of this trend is not guaranteed.

“Cost-of-living pressures directly affect people’s ability to volunteer, and at the same time lead to increased demand for the essential services that volunteers help provide, such as food relief,” said Mark Pearce, CEO of Volunteering Australia.

Australians are spending significantly more hours volunteering with organisations with a total of 618 million hours volunteered in 2025, up from 490 million hours in 2020. This demonstrates the commitment of Australia’s volunteers, but also suggests growing demand for essential services provided by the volunteer workforce.

We welcome the measure to provide \$5.7 million over four years from 2026–27 (and \$1.7 million per year ongoing) to continue capacity building initiatives within the families and communities sector. This provides increased base funding for peak bodies, including Volunteering Australia.

We also welcome the continuation of the Volunteering and Community Connectedness funding stream, including funding for the Volunteer Management Activity and Strong and Resilient Communities (SARC) and Volunteer grants. In addition, we welcome the Government’s commitment of \$0.4m in 2026-27 to enable the National Office for Child Safety (NOCS), to continue implementing the National Standards for Working with Children, including screening.

Volunteering Australia’s [Pre-Budget Submission](#) called for targeted, strategic investment in volunteering to enable the Australian Government to meet key priorities and progress the co-designed National Strategy for Volunteering. There is a missed opportunity to fund the National Strategy for Volunteering through the Budget, but we will work with Government towards funding this critical piece of volunteering infrastructure. It is also disappointing that cost-of-volunteering relief wasn’t factored into the Budget as outlined in our Budget submission, with most volunteers (54.4%) incurring volunteering expenses in 2025.

“Despite stable volunteer participation, we cannot take Australia’s volunteers for granted. Strategic investment in volunteering remains crucial to safeguard its contribution to resilient and cohesive communities, and to ensure it is sustainable during these uncertain times,” said Mr Pearce.

ENDS

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