



Future of Work and Workers
Select Committee on the Future of Work and Workers
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Volunteering Australia Contacts

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About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering. We work to advance volunteering in the Australian community.

Volunteering Australia's vision is to promote strong, connected communities through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, promote and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

We work collectively with the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies to deliver national, state/territory and local volunteering programs and initiatives in accordance with the Government's priorities.

Introduction

Volunteering Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Select Committee on the Future of Work and Workers.

Volunteering continues to play a significant role in Australian society, making an estimated annual economic and social contribution of \$290 billion.ⁱ Recent data indicates there are 5.8 million Australians or 31 per cent of the population who are engaged in formal volunteering activities and programs.ⁱⁱ

Volunteering Australia emphasises that it is essential that volunteering is considered in all discussions about the future of work and workers, particularly given the enormous impact the volunteering sector makes in the areas of infrastructure development, building social capital and community cohesion, and assisting with the delivery of long-term, innovative and agile service provision.

In this submission Volunteering Australia outlines that volunteering can provide a critical pathway to employment and can be helpful in addressing the changing nature of work in Australia. However, funding is instrumental to necessitate this.

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Volunteering Australia Response

Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment

There have been many changes to the labour market, including the casualisation of the workforce, job insecurity, and the stagnating of wage growth. The burden to make ends meet for many people is increasing, with many people experiencing financial hardship in paying for essentials such as their mortgage, rent, food, bills and transportation. The number of unemployed and underemployed Australians has grown, with recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicating there is only 1 job available for every 10-people looking for paid work.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is the view of Volunteering Australia that volunteering increases workforce participation and allows people to build employment related skills. Volunteering Australia's *2016 State of Volunteering in Australia* report outlined that gaining skills and experience was one of the top reasons that people chose to volunteer.^{iv}

Research supports the potential of volunteering as a pathway toward paid employment. A 2013 report from the United States group, 'The Corporation for National and Community Service', found that unemployed individuals who volunteered over the next year have a 27 per cent higher odds of being employed at the end of that year than non-volunteers.^v Additional research conducted for SEEK.com.au by Nature Research revealed 95 per cent of employers agree that volunteering can be a great way to gain experience and skills that can be used in paid work, with 95 per cent also agreeing that volunteering can be a credible way of getting real-work experience (especially for first-time job seekers).^{vi}

Similarly, a 2011 Victorian Government report on the *Indicators of Community Strength in Victoria: Framework and Evidence*, found that volunteering is a potential pathway to employment, by increasing workforce participation, and connecting people to career paths that are better paid and more stable.^{vii}

In regional areas, volunteering can be a positive way to engage with the labour market. Volunteering Australia highlighted in our submission to the Productivity Commission on 'Transitioning Regional Economies' that while Western Australia's Avon Valley (Wheatbelt) experiences higher rates of population growth, the uneven spread has created the highest rates of youth unemployment in the state.^{viii} Volunteering can play a unique role in improving the rates of youth employment, by building key work skills for youth and providing a bridge toward gainful employment.^x

Volunteering as a Preventative Health Measure

Volunteering is a valuable preventative health measure and can have a considerable impact on the future of work and workers. Research indicates that volunteers gain valuable skills, developing both personally and professionally from their involvement in volunteering activities. In fact, organisations who engage volunteers in the disability support sector have found there is a marked difference in the outcomes achieved by volunteers compared with paid staff.^{xi}

Evidence indicates that people who volunteer are happier and healthier individuals. Recent studies have indicated that 96 per cent of volunteers say that engaging in volunteering "makes people happier"^{xii}, while 95 per cent of volunteers say that volunteering is related to feelings of wellbeing.^{xiii}

In fact, only a few hours of volunteer work has an impact on an individual's happiness and mood, and sustained volunteering is associated with better mental health.^{xiv} The experience of helping others provides meaning, a sense of self-worth, a social role and health enhancement.^{xv} Volunteers have also identified

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personal benefits from their involvement in volunteering activities including, “improved wellbeing and a community connection, and (they) believe they have made a notable contribution to common good.”^{xvi}

Volunteering Australia underscores that strategies are required to address systemic disadvantage, that can prevent specific cohorts from engaging with the labour market. People with disability, those from CALD backgrounds, older Australians, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, or people with a mental illness can face multiple barriers with engaging with the workforce. Volunteering can provide a great way into the labour market, as well as rich source of social capital, allowing for the development of meaningful relationships and the reduction of social isolation.

Investment in Volunteering

Volunteering Australia emphasises the critical role the volunteer workforce plays in the delivery of key programs, supports and services, and the need for Governments to adequately fund the volunteer workforce in order to ensure these services can operate efficiently.

The operational cost of engaging volunteers is often overlooked. A 2011 Productivity Commission inquiry into Caring for Older Australians highlighted that informal care provided by volunteers should be factored into funding, though often was not. Recommendations from the report stated that “funding for services which engage volunteers in service delivery consider the costs associated with:

- Volunteer administration and regulation
- Appropriate training and support for volunteers.”^{xvii}

It is also important for organisations to invest in the training and management of their volunteers, with organisations often encountering significant costs. The National Aged Care Alliance report on the *Aged Care Quality Framework* stressed that there should be the inclusion “of adequate training and ongoing support of volunteers to ensure the provision of quality services and protection for consumers.”^{xviii} It is the view of Volunteering Australia that volunteers must be supported in their role, with adequate access to resources, services, and education, such as assistive technologies, to ensure the best possible service provision.

With the rates of formal volunteering on the decline, and a misalignment between the level of community interest in volunteering, especially in sectors with the highest unmet demand,^{xix} it is even more imperative that there is adequate and ongoing Government investment and support in volunteering, to ensure ongoing and uninterrupted service provision.

Ongoing funding is also required to guarantee there is recognition of the numerous social, cultural and economic contributions of volunteering. It will also enable an accurate assessment of funding needs with respect to grants for volunteer programs, determining infrastructure needs and service provision.

Volunteering Australia also emphasises the importance of the investment in programs and services that facilitate volunteering as a pathway to paid employment. This includes adequate financing for Volunteering Support Services to place participants as part of their Mutual Obligation requirements.

Placed-based services, such as Volunteering Support Services, provide the critical infrastructure required for safe, effective and sustainable volunteering. They are responsible for the promotion, resourcing and support of volunteering in local communities, and assist thousands of organisations across the country to recruit, retain and manage their volunteers.

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Volunteering Australia highlighted in our recent pre-budget submission that Volunteering Support Services frequently use their local knowledge to assist Mutual Obligation participants to find a volunteer role with a pre-approved Volunteer Involving Organisations. This interaction is done completely within the existing resources and funding of the Volunteering Support Service. Therefore, Volunteering Australia recommends that Volunteering Support Services should be adequately resourced and recognised for supporting Mutual Obligation participants, given the role they play in improving employment outcomes.

Recommendations

- Recognition of the role of volunteering as a pathway to employment
- Investment in volunteering and volunteer management given the role it plays as a pathway to employment
- Strategies to address systemic disadvantage prohibiting people from engaging with the labour market
- Funding for Volunteering Support Services to place Mutual Obligation participants with Volunteer Involving Organisations

Conclusion

Volunteering Australia thanks the Select Committee on the Future of Work and Workers for the opportunity to provide a response.

We look forward to working with the Government to ensure that the social, economic and cultural contributions of the volunteering sector is acknowledged and supported, through ongoing funding, recognising the value of volunteering as a pathway to employment.

Volunteering Australia would welcome further opportunity to consult or expand on any of our recommendations raised in this submission.

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Authorisation

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



Ms Adrienne Picone

Chief Executive Officer

Endorsements

This submission has been endorsed by the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies.

Glossary

VA	Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering in Australia. It works collectively with the peaks to deliver national, state and local volunteering programs and initiatives.
VIO	Volunteer Involving Organisations are organisations that engage volunteers as part of their workforce.
VSS	Volunteering Support Services (also known as Volunteer Resource Centres or Volunteer Support Organisations) provide place-based volunteer support services to volunteers and VIOs in their locality.

ⁱ Flinders University (31 October 2014) 'Volunteering worth \$290 billion a year', <http://blogs.flinders.edu.au/flinders-news/2014/10/31/volunteering-worth-290-billion-a-year>

ⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) 'General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2014', available online at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4159.0>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017), Job Vacancies, Australia, February 2017, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6354.0Main+Features1Feb%202017?OpenDocument>, Labour Force, Australia, March 2017.

^{iv} Volunteering Australia and PwC (2016) 'State of Volunteering in Australia', <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/State-of-Volunteering-in-Australia-full-report.pdf>.

^v Pro Bono Australia (24 June 2013) 'Volunteering boosts employment opportunities – study', <https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2013/06/volunteering-boosts-employment-opportunities-study/>

^{vi} Nature Research for Seek.com.au (April 2015) 'Seek Volunteer Hirer Research Key Findings'.

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- ^{vii} Indicators of Community Strength in Victoria, op. cit., p17.
- ^{viii} Regional Development Australia Wheatbelt, Wheatbelt Regional Plan 2013 – 2018, p7.
- ^{ix} Volunteering Australia (2017) 'Initial Report – Transitioning Regional Economies', https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1501481154VAResponseonProductivityCommissionInitialReportonTransitioningRegionalEconomies.pdf, p4.
- ^x Volunteering Australia (2017) 'Initial Report – Transitioning Regional Economies', https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1501481154VAResponseonProductivityCommissionInitialReportonTransitioningRegionalEconomies.pdf, p4.
- ^{xi} Volunteering Australia (2017), Response on National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Quality and Safeguards Commission and Other Measures) Bill 2017, https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1501210867VAResponseontheNationalDisabilityInsuranceSchemeAmendmentQualityandSafeguardsCommissionandOtherMeasuresBill2017.pdf, p8.
- ^{xii} Post, S. G. 2011, 'It's good to be good: 2011 5th annual scientific report on health, happiness and helping others', The International Journal of Person Centred Medicine, vol. 1, no. 4, p814.
- ^{xiii} Volunteering ACT, 2013, 'Selfless Service: The State of Volunteering Report in the ACT 2013', p6.
- ^{xiv} Post, S. G. 2011, op. cit., p816.
- ^{xv} Musick, M. A. and Wilson, J. 2003, 'Volunteering and depression: the role of psychological and social resources in different age groups', Social Science and Medicine, vol. 56, p267.
- ^{xvi} Post, S. G. 2011, op. cit., p814.
- ^{xvii} Productivity Commission (2011), Caring for Older Australians, Carers, Overview, <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/aged-care/report/aged-care-overview-booklet.pdf>, pLXX.
- ^{xviii} National Aged Care Alliance (2017), NACA Response: Single Aged Care Quality Framework, April 2017, <http://www.naca.asn.au/Publications/NACA%20response%20Single%20Aged%20Care%20Quality%20Framework.pdf>, p6-7.
- ^{xix} Volunteering Australia and PwC (2016) 2016 State of Volunteering in Australia, <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/State-of-Volunteering-in-Australia-full-report.pdf>.