



Submission on Aged and Community Services Australia

**‘Aged and Community Services in Australia:
A Framework’**

March 2005

About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering in Australia. Its mission is to represent the diverse views and needs of the volunteer movement while promoting the activity of volunteering as one of enduring social, cultural and economic value.

Volunteering Australia receives funding from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) under the National Secretariat Program (NSP) to represent the interests of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations.

Volunteering Australia's member organisations consist of the state and territory volunteering peak bodies, which in turn represent volunteer-involving organisations and interested individuals. Volunteering Australia works closely with a large network of regional volunteer resource centres (VRC's), other peaks and not-for-profit organisations across all sectors.

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Formal volunteering and 'caring'

The aged and community services sector involves many thousands of volunteers and other unpaid workers.

To clarify the context in which we discuss volunteering, it may be useful here to clarify the distinction between various types of unpaid work. *Formal volunteering* is an activity which takes place through not for profit organisations or projects and is undertaken:

- to be of benefit to the community and the volunteer;
- of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion;
- for no financial payment; and
- in designated volunteer positions only.

The requirement 'in designated volunteer positions only' is a major point of distinction between *formal* and *informal volunteering*. Informal volunteering does not involve designated positions in organisations and is likely to happen on a relatively ad hoc and irregular fashion. Compare a volunteer working for Meals on Wheels with somebody who mows their elderly neighbours lawn occasionally. The first person provides the example of a formal volunteer, with their set duties and hours, operating in a designated position. The second fits more clearly the 'irregular' task of the informal volunteer.

Caring is unpaid work, often by a family member, but is distinguishable from volunteering because it does not occur for or through organisations, is not in designated positions and may not be undertaken according to free will in all cases.

It is important that the framework recognize the importance of volunteering as a worthwhile activity that augments a well resourced and managed aged and community services sector. It should never be used as a vehicle for cost-cutting by government or private interests.

Volunteers and the aged and community services sector

Volunteering is an integral part of the aged care sector. Many organisations and services rely on the efforts of volunteers to assist in their work with the aged. Community and welfare organisations claimed 26 per cent of all volunteer hours in 2000¹. This figure includes volunteer hours dedicated to work in the aged and community services sector.

A survey of all the Home and Community Care (HACC) programs in New South Wales published in 2002 showed that 80 per cent of volunteer hours for HACC programs were concentrated in four areas: food services, respite care, transport and social support². Volunteer retention is high with only around 15% of volunteers leaving within their first year³.

¹ ABS (2001) Voluntary Work Survey

² NSW Bradfield Nyland Group for NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (2002) *Survey of Home and Community Care funded organisations to develop a profile of volunteer support and quantify the costs incurred by volunteers: Report of findings p3*

³ NSW Bradfield Nyland Group for NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (2002) *Survey of Home and Community Care funded organisations to develop a profile of volunteer support and quantify the costs incurred by volunteers: Report of findings p4*

The framework states that providing effective and widespread community care provides important benefits to clients and for many is the service of choice. In light of this **Volunteering Australia recommends the framework explicitly recognise the contribution of volunteering in community care and undertakes to support and develop this contribution.**