



Supplementary Pre-Budget Submission 2020
August 2020

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Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on volunteering. Overall, two in three volunteers (65.9 per cent)¹ stopped volunteering during COVID-19, amounting to an estimated loss of 12.2 million hours per week of volunteer work.

Many volunteers (particularly those in high-risk groups, such as older volunteers) are not returning, the costs of recruiting new volunteers is prohibitive (for organisations already hit hard by COVID-19), and the capacity to adapt volunteer programs and absorb higher operating costs (due to COVID-19 safe workplace requirements) is limited.

Without action and investment, volunteering will not recover. This will have deep consequences for volunteers, organisations that rely on volunteers, and the individuals and communities they serve. Volunteers are a vital part of the nation's workforce and play significant roles in disability, health, welfare and aged care services, the sustainability of sports and the arts, environmental protection, and emergency management. Pre-COVID, nearly six million² Australians volunteered each year.

The following proposals will reinvigorate volunteering and help ensure that volunteers can safely and effectively contribute to the future wellbeing of the nation:

- **A Reinvigorating Volunteering Action Plan.** This requires investment of \$5million³. The plan would enable volunteers to re-engage safely, support the adaptation of volunteer programs, and facilitate the recruitment of new volunteers to ensure services and programs can continue.
- **A National Youth Volunteering Initiative.** Investment of \$10million should be earmarked for this. At a time when paid jobs are scarce, this initiative could mitigate against poor mental health outcomes for young unemployed people and support pathways to paid employment.
- **A nationally co-ordinated emergency management approach to volunteer engagement.** Investment of \$3million should be dedicated to developing and rolling this out. As the frequency and scale of emergencies in Australia increases, a nationally co-ordinated approach will help to rapidly, safely, and effectively mobilise volunteers who are vital at times of emergency.

¹ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/research/research-briefing-the-experience-of-volunteers-during-covid-19/>

² 4159.0 - General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2014

³ It should be noted that this quantum of investment does not address the wider needs of volunteer involving organisations who are financially vulnerable because of the impact of COVID-19. For example, see https://www.csi.edu.au/media/Charities_and_Covid-19_Report.pdf and <https://covid.sportsfoundation.org.au/>

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Introduction

The impact of COVID-19 on volunteering

Volunteering has been hit hard by COVID-19. Volunteering Australia commissioned the Australian National University to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on volunteering. This research revealed two out of three volunteers (65.9 per cent) stopped volunteering. This reduction in volunteering is equivalent to 12.2 million hours per week.

This dramatic decline in volunteering has had significant consequences for volunteers. The ANU analysis showed that those who had to stop volunteering during the COVID-19 had lower life satisfaction and higher psychological stress outcomes than those who were able to continue. Those who continued volunteering experienced less loneliness.

In a national survey⁴, 80 per cent of volunteer involving organisations reported standing down volunteers as a result of COVID-19, with three quarters of these standing down between half and all of their volunteers. At the same time, 37 per cent of these organisations reported an increase in demand for their services due to the pandemic. In Victoria, the situation has been significantly compounded by the Stage 4 restrictions and the grave situation affecting aged care facilities in particular - this at a time when volunteers and the support they provide is most needed.

Volunteering is essential for the social and economic recovery of the nation. Volunteering can support the mental health and wellbeing of millions of individual volunteers as the country navigates difficult economic times. Volunteering builds social cohesion and community resilience which will be much needed in the coming years.

Volunteers are a vital part of the nation's workforce. Volunteers play essential roles and enhance the care in disability, health, welfare, and aged care services. The sustainability of sports and the arts, environmental protection, and emergency management are all reliant on volunteer workforces.

Challenges to the recovery of volunteering

As we learn to live with COVID-19, many specific challenges are preventing volunteering from recovering. This includes:

- Confusion over official information and guidance regarding volunteering
- Barriers to re-engaging volunteers in high-risk groups
- Costs of recruiting and managing new volunteers
- Lack of insurance protection for volunteers
- Financial sustainability of many volunteer involving organisations
- Lack of strategic direction from government

⁴ Volunteering Australia (12 May 2020) National Snapshot: Volunteering during the COVID19 shutdown, Internal briefing paper, p.1.

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A common misunderstanding is that volunteering is ‘free’. Like the paid workforce, the volunteer workforce requires investment in recruitment, induction, compliance activities, training, and management. This requires adequate funding of volunteer practices and management. Many organisations do not have the capacity and/or capability to recruit, induct, train, and manage new volunteers during the complex, safe return-to-work environment. Organisations are facing higher operating costs to meet COVID-19 safe workplace requirements, and many do not have the capacity needed to adapt.

Many of the problems that are surfacing in the sector are the same long-standing issues, but amplified – weak resourcing of volunteer management, poor recognition of volunteers, and an overall lack of strategic development and investment.

Whilst there are many challenges to the reinvigoration of volunteering, opportunities also exist – for example, to bring in new cohorts of volunteers and to redesign volunteer programs to be more efficient, inclusive, and responsive to future needs. The proposals in this submission seek to overcome barriers and leverage current opportunities.

About this submission

The proposals in this Supplementary Pre-Budget Submission respond to the challenges the volunteering sector is now facing, following the impact of COVID-19. This submission and its recommendations complement the Pre-Budget Submission made by Volunteering Australia in December 2019⁵.

This submission was drafted by Volunteering Australia in collaboration with the State and Territory volunteering peak bodies. Several surveys of members and stakeholders have been undertaken during COVID-19 to understand better the impact on the sector and the concerns of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations. This submission draws on the results of these surveys and our collective expertise.

This submission focuses on reinvigorating volunteering activity and enabling more Australians to volunteer and contribute to the nation’s recovery. We also support the proposals of other peak bodies, such as CCA⁶ and ACOSS⁷, which argue for support to charities and community sector organisations (volunteer involving organisations) for them to survive the impact of COVID-19.

⁵ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/2020-21-pre-budget-submission/>

⁶ <https://www.communitycouncil.com.au/content/cca-submission-inform-federal-budget-202021>

⁷ <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/200716-Community-Sector-Briefing-FINAL.pdf>

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Budget recommendations in this submission

Investment in a Reinvigorating Volunteering Action Plan

Investment of \$5million.

Reinvigorating volunteering will require all elements of the volunteering ecosystem to play their part and work together. This includes volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, volunteer support services, volunteering peak bodies, partner organisations and governments. A package of measures - a national 'Reinvigorating Volunteering Action Plan - needs to be urgently developed and implemented. This should be a partnership between the volunteering sector and the Australian Government.

Ideas for inclusion in this plan are:

- *A refresh of official information* - to ensure official information consistently refers to volunteer workers
- *A 'good to volunteer' communications campaign* – to communicate to volunteers and organisations how volunteering can be safely undertaken, both continued and re-started, in accordance with Government directives
- *A fund to support volunteer program adaptation* – to enable organisations to adapt volunteer programs digitally or in other ways to meet COVID-19 safe working practices
- *Resources and reform to support volunteer recruitment and management* – to support the costs of recruitment, onboarding, accreditation, training, and management of new volunteers and streamline the registration process
- *Better insurance protection for volunteers in a COVID-19 environment* – to address the risks volunteers are currently facing because of the pandemic insurance gap⁸
- *A national and 'whole of government' volunteering statement* – to ensure a more strategic approach to volunteering so that it can better support the social and economic recovery

Developing and funding a National Youth Volunteering Initiative

Investment of \$10million.

We know that young people will be particularly badly affected in the coming years experiencing higher levels of unemployment and subsequent risks to their mental health and to their future wellbeing. As mentioned above, research tells us that volunteering can help protect against poor

⁸ For further information, see https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19_Volunteer_Protection_Joint_Policy_Statement_final_19Aug2020.pdf

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mental health⁹. Particularly when paid jobs are not available, volunteering can provide meaningful activity and help develop skills and capabilities that can support a pathway to paid employment.

We also know that it is likely there will be a high demand for volunteers in some sectors – those that typically have an increase in demand for services during recessions (such as emergency relief and homelessness services) as well as those that are reliant on volunteers from high risks groups (such as older people) and who may decide or may not be able to return to volunteering in a COVID-19 context. There is an ongoing and high demand for volunteering in other sectors, such as environmental conservation.

A national volunteering youth initiative¹⁰ could aim to:

- Provide meaningful volunteer opportunities for young unemployed people (18-25 years)
- Target young people who are at particularly high risk of long-term unemployment or who are from disadvantaged groups and areas
- Focus on providing opportunities in sectors that have high demand for volunteers

The wider goal of this initiative would be an important early intervention and preventative mental health initiative.

Developing this initiative would require a scoping exercise with partners from the volunteering sector, youth organisations, mental health organisations, governments, and others to determine how best to operationalise the program. It could link to the idea of a ‘My Volunteer Year’ which would allow young volunteers to record and receive certification for their volunteering achievements.

Investment in a nationally co-ordinated emergency management approach

Investment of \$3million.

Under Australia’s federal system, States and Territories have primary responsibility for matters related to emergency management. The Australian Government provides support for emergency management through funding mechanisms, research undertakings and at times, coordination assistance.

In response to the COVID-19 emergency, the Australian Government has responded with a raft of measures including activating the National Coordination Mechanism and convening National Cabinet. The interplay of these national mechanisms, which differ from emergency to emergency,

⁹ See also compelling recent research by Kim et al (2020). *Volunteering and subsequent health and well-being in older adults: an outcome-wide longitudinal approach*. American Journal of Preventive Medicine.

¹⁰ The Group of Eight Universities ‘[Roadmap to Recovery](#)’ report made a similar proposal – the establishment of a funded national service program for young people. The ‘Aussies All Together’ program was described as an inclusive volunteering program to provide ‘meaning, purpose and social connectedness’ to those involved.

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with the formal powers, legislation and responsibilities of State and Territory governments, creates significant complexity in the operating environment volunteer involving organisations that have both a formal and informal role in disasters. There was little engagement of the volunteering sector in the national emergency management response to COVID-19 despite volunteers typically being a key resource for surge capacity during emergencies. At a State and Territory level, there were different levels of engagement ranging from zero engagement to high-touch partnerships, such as the Care Army initiative in Queensland.

The increasing frequency and scale of emergencies in Australia is creating the need for an effective, coordinated approach for the involvement of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations in disasters. An approach is needed that strongly aligns with both individual State and Territory and national disaster arrangements. This would provide greater clarity to rapidly, safely, and effectively mobilise both volunteers and volunteer involving organisations that are vital to community preparedness, response to and recovery from emergencies. This should include:

- Establishment of a national forum or institution, with similar forums at State/Territory level, to bring together and coordinate volunteer organisations that play a role in disasters and in planning, responding to and recovery from emergencies.
- A joined-up approach to emergency volunteer platforms which can facilitate effective registration, management, and deployment of prospective spontaneous volunteers.

An Australia-wide integrated network of co-ordinating forums (at national and State/Territory levels) would be made up of volunteer involving organisations active in disasters and include those working across disaster prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery activities. These organisations would come together to share knowledge and resources, capture lessons learned, implement efficiencies, reduce duplication, develop best practice, promote communication and consistent messaging, and work together in a collaborative way. A coordinated approach will reduce duplication and save money and resources.

This approach would strengthen the contributions of volunteerism to increase community resilience across all phases of disasters by:

- Establishing guiding principles, best practice and resources for volunteer involving organisations working in disasters.
- Ensuring collaboration between volunteer involving organisations working in disasters, particularly when working across State and Territory jurisdictions.
- Recognising that local volunteerism and local capability is a fundamental resilience and recovery strategy and attribute of a resilient community that has the capability and will to determine and lead its own recovery process.
- Influencing a more planned approach to surge requirements in large and catastrophic events

The development of an Australia-wide network (of co-ordinating forums at national and State/Territory levels) would be an effective, efficient and impactful solution to how volunteer organisations active in disasters can work together to best engage volunteers and provide positive outcomes for communities and governments.

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The development of a nationally coordinated approach should be informed by the national principles for disaster recovery¹¹, the current Australian Disaster Preparedness Framework¹² and best practice volunteer management.¹³ It should be aligned with individual State and Territory and national disaster arrangements.

Conclusion

We have long argued that the Australian Government should take a more strategic and whole of government approach to volunteering, for example articulated through a National Volunteering Statement. This should include formal recognition of the contribution that volunteers make to our organisations, communities, economies, and government programs. Lead responsibility for volunteering at the federal level sits with the Department of Social Services yet volunteers contribute to public policy concerns across government and are part of the workforces in a range of publicly funded services including disability, health and aged care services.

A commitment from the Australian Government to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the volunteering workforce and to supporting the sector through major transitions is much needed. This includes sector reforms led by government (as in the aged care and disability sectors), demographic shifts and the changing nature of work, and future crises such as pandemics and bushfire seasons.

The immediate priority is to revive volunteering following the profound and ongoing impact of COVID-19 and to support the social and economic recovery of the nation. This Supplementary Pre-Budget Submission proposes vital investment to support the revival of volunteering. The 2020 federal Budget should invest in:

- A Reinvigorating Volunteering Action Plan.
- A National Youth Volunteering Initiative.
- A nationally co-ordinated emergency management approach to volunteer engagement.

This will enable millions of Australians to contribute through volunteering and millions more to experience the value that volunteers bring to communities and vital services.

¹¹ <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/national-principles-disaster-recovery>

¹² <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/australian-disaster-preparedness-framework.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/national-standards-and-supporting-material>

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Authorisation

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



Mr Mark Pearce
Interim 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 strong, connected communities through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, promote and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

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