



Submission to the development of the National Disability Strategy

October 2020

Submission to the National Disability Strategy

Overview

We recommend that the National Disability Strategy:

- *Recognise and support the important role of volunteering in the lives of people with disability.*
 - Volunteering offers opportunities for social, economic, and cultural inclusion. People with disability should have equal access to these opportunities. Volunteering can be particularly beneficial to people with disability in offering self-empowerment and pathways to paid employment.
- *Include how the volunteering sector can support the delivery of defined outcomes in the Strategy.*
 - The sector offers inclusive volunteering programs, guidance, and opportunities. The Strategy should support the development and extension of these initiatives so that more people with disability gain the benefits of volunteering.
- *Incorporate strategic consideration of, and investment in, the volunteer workforce engaged in disability services.*
 - Volunteers play a vital role in disability services and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Volunteering is time freely given, but enabling volunteering is not free. Like paid workers, volunteers need induction, training and ongoing management. Volunteers need to be considered strategically in workforce planning if disability services are to meet the needs and aspirations of people with disability.

Introduction

About the National Disability Strategy

Australia's first National Disability Strategy (2010-20) was signed in 2011. The Strategy was a 10-year agreement which committed all governments to a unified, national approach to 'an inclusive Australian society that enables people with disability to fulfil their potential as equal citizens'¹. The new Strategy is now in the process of being developed². The government describes the new Strategy as the key mechanism to engage all parties in ongoing systemic reform of disability policy in Australia. The intention is that all outcomes for people with disability set out in the strategy will be measurable and reported upon.

About this submission

This submission was drafted by Volunteering Australia in collaboration with the State and Territory peak volunteering bodies. We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the development of the National Disability Strategy.

¹ <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/publications-articles/policy-research/national-disability-strategy-2010-2020>

² <https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/a-new-national-disability-strategy>

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We have considered the Position Paper³ which discusses how the new National Disability Strategy can build and improve on the current Strategy. The proposed new features to enhance accountability and improve implementation are vital and welcome. The intention to clarify the role of sectors outside of government in the new Strategy is also a very positive development. This should include the volunteering sector.

Our collective expertise relates to volunteering and, hence, this is the focus of our submission.

The Position Paper makes no reference to volunteering. Overall, this submission highlights the importance of volunteering in the lives of many people with disability and the role of volunteers in disability services. We urge that these dual outcomes be reflected and addressed in the new National Disability Strategy.

Issues to consider in the new Strategy

The inclusion of volunteering

In the previous National Disability Strategy (2010-2020), volunteering and its importance to the lives of people with disability was recognised to some extent. The Strategy highlighted that businesses and community organisations needed to provide “an inclusive, flexible and accessible environment for people with disability who work or volunteer for them...”

Further, under Outcome 1 in the previous Strategy (*People with disability live in accessible and well-designed communities with opportunity for full inclusion in social, economic, sporting and cultural life*), the Strategy identified an ‘area for further action’ being the need to “Improve access and increase participation of people with disability in sporting, recreational, social, religious and cultural activities whether as participants, spectators, organisers, staff or volunteers.”

The new Strategy should reflect that ‘full inclusion’ relates to volunteering as well as other aspects of life such as paid employment and the wide diversity of activities that make life fulfilling.

Benefits of volunteering for people with disability

Volunteering brings benefits which facilitate broader wellbeing and inclusion. Research consistently demonstrates that volunteering has a wide range of positive benefits for those who volunteer, including significant mental and physical health benefits⁴ and offering pathways to employment⁵.

³ <https://engage.dss.gov.au/nds-stage2-consultation/national-disability-strategy-position-paper/>

⁴ For example, see literature review and 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.

⁵ See for example,

https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/employment_research_report.pdf

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Research⁶ conducted with people with disability has demonstrated that volunteering among people with disability can reduce feelings of alienation and loneliness and allow an individual with disability to shift from being a recipient of welfare services into an empowered provider of services to others.

More inclusive volunteering

The volunteering sector supports the full inclusion of people with disability.

Various initiatives support this commitment, including:

- The 'Victoria ALIVE (Ability-Links-Inclusive-Volunteering-Everyday) Project'⁷ which aimed to improve disability inclusion in the volunteering community sector, through supporting organisations to be welcoming, inclusive and accessible for people with disability. The Victoria ALIVE project was delivered by Volunteering Victoria in partnership with Neighbourhood Houses Victoria.
- The 'Inclusive Volunteering Program'⁸ run by VolunteeringACT is designed to help people with barriers to volunteering to find meaningful volunteering opportunities. Participants include people living with disability. VolunteeringACT work with organisations to create inclusive volunteering environments for participants of the Program.
- The 'Inclusive Volunteering Pathways to Employment Program'⁹ is offered by VolunteeringACT, The Centre for Volunteering (NSW), and Volunteering Tasmania. It aims to reduce and remove barriers to volunteering and employment for people living with disability and those on a mental health recovery journey. The Program supports participants to engage in volunteering as a pathway to employment and works with organisations to help them become more inclusive.
- 'Volunteerability' is a new program being launched soon in South Australia, run by Volunteering SA&NT in partnership with Orana Disability Services. The program will support people with disability to find meaningful volunteering opportunities, with the support of trained volunteer buddies. Every stakeholder will have access to free training, support, and resources.

In addition to these specific initiatives, all the State and Territory peak volunteering bodies provide guidance, support, and resources¹⁰ to volunteer involving organisations to enable them to be more inclusive of people with disability.

⁶ For a recent summary of literature, see Yanay-Ventura, G. (2019). "Nothing About Us Without Us" in Volunteerism Too: Volunteering Among People with Disabilities. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 30(1), 147-163.

⁷ <https://www.victoriaalive.org.au/>

⁸ <https://www.volunteeringact.org.au/services/inclusive-volunteering-program/>

⁹ <https://www.volunteering.com.au/inclusive-volunteering-program/>

¹⁰ See for example, <https://www.volunteeringact.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Building-Inclusive-Bridges.pdf> and <https://www.volunteeringact.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Lets-Talk-About-Inclusion-Promoting-inclusion-in-your-volunteer-involving-organisation.pdf>

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It is estimated that in 2019,¹¹ around 1.5 million people with disability volunteered through an organisation (24% of all formal volunteers). Around 1.8 million people with disability volunteered informally in their communities (27% of all informal volunteers) in the four weeks prior to the 2019 General Social Survey (GSS) being undertaken.

Volunteering took a huge hit during COVID-19 with two out of three volunteers¹² stopping volunteering. Data is not available for the impact on volunteers with disability, but wider evidence¹³ suggests that the impact is likely to be more severe than for those not living with disability.

People with disability face many barriers to volunteering. Research¹⁴ has demonstrated that many organisations do not offer volunteering positions to people with disability and those individuals who do manage to secure volunteering roles can face many challenges, owing to prejudice or lack of awareness and support.

Research commissioned by Volunteering Tasmania¹⁵ highlighted three key themes to understanding how people with disability can volunteer: physical accessibility; attitudes and management; and support requirements. The authors of this research argued that for volunteering to be successful for a volunteer with disability all three themes need to be considered.

Role of volunteers in disability services

In previous work,¹⁶ Volunteering Australia has highlighted that the disability sector and the NDIS are heavily reliant on the volunteer workforce to deliver key programs and services. Volunteers provide supports and services that are integral components of the NDIS.

Recent research¹⁷ has explored the preliminary impact of the introduction of the NDIS on volunteering in disability services in Western Australia. This research focused on the issues from the perspectives of disability service providers and volunteer management professionals. Overall, the authors of this research concluded that the impact of the NDIS on volunteering (rates, experience, and impact) is yet to be fully felt and should be subject to further investigation.

¹¹ See Table 4 of GSS 2019 data downloads <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release#data-download>

¹² <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/new-research-the-experience-of-volunteers-during-covid-19/#/>

¹³ See evidence presented at the disability Royal Commission and here

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/covid-has-revealed-some-uncomfortable-truths-about-australia-and-people-with-disability-20200915-p55w00.html>

¹⁴ See summary in Yanay-Ventura, G. (2019).

¹⁵ <https://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Inclusive-Practice-Report-Volunteering-and-disability-project-2009-10.pdf>

¹⁶ https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1499838799VAResponsetoProductivityCommissionsinquiryontheNationalDisabilityInsuranceSchemeNDISCosts.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.volunteeringwa.org.au/news/the-impact-of-the-ndis-on-volunteering-in-the-disability-services-sector-in-wa-report>

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However, the research did highlight that the value of volunteers in disability services is widely recognised with: 95% (of survey respondents) believing volunteers enhance outcomes for the organisation; 93% for the community; 88% for the family of the individual; and 87% for the individual.

Volunteering Australia's 2016 State of Volunteering in Australia report¹⁸ acknowledged a misalignment in the level of community interest in volunteering in disability services compared to the number of positions to be filled. The report found that the disability services sector was the fifth highest (out of 22 categories) for unmet volunteer demand (i.e. demand for volunteers exceeds supply), behind community services, youth services, education, and health.

The review of the Volunteer Management Activity¹⁹ undertaken for the Department of Social Services highlighted several ways in which the volunteering landscape in Australia is changing. This included acknowledgement of a growing demand for volunteer-supported services to supplement government funding (such as community, aged care and disability services).

Overall, data and research on the scale, role, and impact of the volunteer workforce in disability services is scarce.

The Australian Government, in partnership with the State and Territory governments, is currently developing a National NDIS Workforce Plan. This is to develop a cohesive and nationally agreed approach to workforce development given the size and capability of the workforce required. It is not clear whether the NDIS National Workforce Plan will consider the role of volunteers.

Volunteering Australia has previously suggested²⁰ that the volunteer workforce (including the cost of volunteer management) needs to be costed and accounted for in the NDIS, given the reliance of volunteers in the Scheme.

In general, in considering how key publicly funded services might successfully meet defined outcomes, it is critical to factor in the contribution and costs of the volunteer workforce. This also means proactively considering the role of volunteers alongside paid workers - in policy, service provision, planning and strategy.

¹⁸ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/research/stateofvolunteering/>

¹⁹ <https://www.dss.gov.au/communities-and-vulnerable-people-programs-services-volunteer-management/report-on-the-review-of-the-volunteer-management-activity>

²⁰ https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1499838799VAResponsetoProductivityCommissionsinquiryontheNationalDisabilityInsuranceSchemeNDISCosts.pdf

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Conclusion

Volunteering offers opportunities for social, economic, and cultural inclusion. Everyone has the right to these opportunities. The new National Disability Strategy should drive the further inclusion of people with disability in volunteering.

The critical role of volunteers in delivering services to NDIS service providers and the trends, barriers and future of this involvement, also needs to be considered in the Strategy revision.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and look forward to supporting the delivery of the new Strategy.

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Authorisation

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



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

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