



Pre-Budget Submission 2022-23
January 2022

Overview

Australian society relies on volunteers to provide a myriad of activities and programs, in our schools and hospitals, residential and home care settings, playing fields, and community centres. Volunteers are often on the frontline when crises hit – fighting bushfires, delivering food packages, and providing support to those at risk in our communities. Through the resilience and innovation of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations, voluntary action has been a vital pillar in supporting communities through recent challenges.

However, volunteering has been badly impacted by COVID-19. Two thirds of people who were volunteering through organisations or groups stopped volunteering during the early stages of the pandemic,¹ compounding a longer-term decline in volunteering participation.² If volunteering is to recover as the nation learns to live with COVID-19, targeted investment is needed as a matter of urgency and must be sustained into the future.

Recommendations:

1. **A Volunteering COVID-19 Recovery Plan.** This plan would enable volunteers to re-engage safely, support the adaptation of volunteering programs, and facilitate the recruitment of new volunteers to ensure services and programs can recover.
2. **A Volunteering Futures Program.** This program would facilitate the future adaptation of volunteering and support the strategic priorities identified in the new National Strategy for Volunteering currently under development.
3. **A National Youth Volunteering Initiative.** Young people have been disproportionately affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19. This initiative could mitigate against poor mental health outcomes for unemployed young people and support pathways to paid employment.
4. **A nationally co-ordinated approach to volunteer engagement in emergencies.** As the frequency and scale of emergencies in Australia increases, a nationally co-ordinated approach will help to mobilise volunteers rapidly, safely, and effectively.
5. **Investment in the Aged Care volunteer workforce.** Funding should be allocated for the Aged Care Royal Commission's volunteering recommendations in Budget 2022-23 and into the forward estimates

¹ <https://csrcm.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/volunteering-during-first-year-covid-19-pandemic-april-2021>

² https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-Key-Statistics_2020.01.pdf

Introduction

Ongoing volunteering challenges and the legacy of COVID-19

Prior to COVID-19, volunteering participation (through organisations and groups) had been declining over time. Official data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) shows that the formal volunteering rate⁴ declined from 36% in 2010 to 29% in 2019, with the decline most evident for women. Volunteers contributed nearly 600 million hours to the community in 2019; a 20% decrease since 2014.⁵ Many of the problems that impede the volunteering sector today are long-standing issues – inadequate resourcing of volunteer management, poor recognition of volunteers, and an overall lack of strategic development and investment.

Volunteering was hit hard by COVID-19. Volunteering Australia commissioned the Australian National University (ANU) to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on formal volunteering. This research revealed two out of three volunteers (65.9%) stopped volunteering in 2020 during the early stages of COVID-19, with this reduction in volunteering being equivalent to 12.2 million hours per week. By May 2021, only half (56.4%) of volunteers who had stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 had returned.³

This dramatic decline in formal volunteering had significant consequences for volunteers and the capacity for organisations to meet community need. The ANU analysis showed that those who had to stop volunteering during COVID-19 had lower life satisfaction and higher psychological distress outcomes than those who were able to continue. Conversely, those who continued volunteering experienced less loneliness.

Whilst many volunteers offer their time formally through organisations, others self-organise and volunteer informally in the community. This ‘informal volunteering’ proved to be resilient during the pandemic: 32.1%, or 6,511,400, volunteered informally in 2020, which is a similar rate to 2019 of 33.4%, or 6,676,100⁴.

Data from the ABS General Social Survey 2020 also shows significant changes in the nature of volunteer participation. The number of people who volunteered online increased from 8.5% in 2019 to 17.3% in 2020, and three in four volunteers who indicated that online volunteering was available in their organisation or group chose to volunteer online.⁵ The proportion of people volunteering for community/ethnic groups increased from 11.6% in mid-2019 to 22.7% in March 2021.⁶

³ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/research/research-briefing-volunteering-during-the-first-year-of-covid-19/#/>

⁴ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-2020-Key-Statistics-about-Volunteering-in-Australia-General-Social-Survey-Household-Impacts.pdf>

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (March 2021) ‘Table 5.1: Persons aged 18 years and over, Participation in unpaid voluntary work and unpaid help, by selected characteristics: Proportion’ [data set], *Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey, March 2021*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/household-impacts-covid-19-survey/mar-2021>

⁶ *ibid*

Throughout COVID-19, volunteer involving organisations have innovated to continue to meet community need but face ongoing challenges. Many organisations still do not have the capacity to recruit, induct, train, and manage new volunteers during an often complex return-to-work environment. Organisations are facing higher operating costs to meet COVID-19 safe workplace requirements, and to ensure compliance with vaccine advice and mandates, and many have struggled to cover these costs and adapt.

The latest Pulse of the For-Purpose Sector survey⁷ found that almost 3 in 4 (74%) of responding organisations reported being financially strained or stressed during COVID-19, with organisations reporting significant changes to volunteering. Close to a third of organisations who engage volunteers (31%) indicated they had fewer volunteers than six months prior. Only half of these organisations' volunteering programs were fully operational at the time of the Wave 2 survey (July/August 2021).

The need and opportunity to rebuild

Volunteering is essential to the nation's recovery and its ongoing wellbeing. Volunteers are part of the nation's workforce, playing vital roles in disability, health, welfare and aged care services, sports and the arts, environmental protection, and disaster resilience, response, and recovery. Research consistently demonstrates that volunteering can contribute to good mental health and wellbeing⁸. Volunteering also builds social cohesion and community resilience which will be much needed in the coming years.

Whilst there are many challenges facing volunteering, opportunities also exist - for example, to bring in new cohorts of volunteers and to redesign volunteering programs to be more inclusive, efficient and responsive to future needs. Opportunities exist for volunteering to become more diverse and inclusive and ensuring volunteering is open to everyone.

We have an opportunity to do things differently. Volunteers and organisations have already shown great resilience and adaptability during recent crises. During COVID-19, many informal community volunteers emerged to support those in need. Now is the time to build on this community spirit and invest in the strategic adaptation of volunteering.

About this submission

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 since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic 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 together with official data, research evidence and our collective expertise.

⁷ <https://www.csi.edu.au/news/new-research-reveals-continued-strain-charities-and-social-services-after-profoundly-hard-year/>

⁸ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/research/evidence-insights/>

Budget recommendations

Initiative	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Volunteering COVID-19 Recovery Plan	\$5m	-	-	-
Volunteering Futures Program	-	\$10m	\$10m	\$10m
National Youth Volunteering Initiative	\$3m	\$3m	\$3m	\$3m
National Emergency Management Coordination	\$3m	\$3m	\$3m	\$3m
Aged Care volunteer workforce investment	To be allocated within existing aged care funding commitments			

1. A Volunteering COVID-19 Recovery Plan

Additional investment of \$5million in 2022/23.

A national COVID-19 recovery plan for volunteering needs to be urgently developed, funded and implemented. Reinvigorating volunteering will require all elements of the volunteering ecosystem to play their part and work together. This includes volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, volunteering support services, volunteering peak bodies, partner organisations, and governments. The Australian Government needs to provide investment to support the practical implementation of this plan. This investment would enable:

- *A national ‘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 public health directives.
- *Resources 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 data collection and impact measurement* – to enable volunteering peak bodies and volunteer involving organisations to capture levels of volunteering activity and how it impacts on wellbeing outcomes.
- *Adaptation of volunteering programs* – to enable organisations to adapt volunteering programs digitally or in other ways to meet COVID-19 safe working practices.

On this last point, one way of distributing much needed funds would be to expedite the 2022 Volunteer Grants. To do this, consideration should be given to returning the administration of the program to the State and Territory peak volunteering bodies who administered the Supplementary

Grants round in 2020. We have previously expressed concern about the current administrative model that relies on Members of Parliament acting as gatekeepers to the fund⁹.

It should also be noted that, over the last decade, there has been an ongoing reduction to the quantum of Volunteer Grants. In 2010, \$21 million of Volunteer Grants was distributed. The 2021 Budget allocated only \$10 million per annum in the forward estimates. In the 2019-20 Supplementary Volunteer Grants round, 780 Volunteer Involving Organisations received grants totalling \$2.7 million. However, the grants were hugely oversubscribed. Over 5,300 organisations across Australia submitted application requests totalling \$20.8 million. Consideration should be given to restoring Volunteer Grants to 2010 levels of funding with ongoing indexation.

Volunteer Grants are an effective means of stimulating volunteering in local communities and supporting the adaptation of volunteering programs. The grants, while only representing a nominal value for the Federal Budget, make a large difference to the operation of small community and cause-based volunteer involving organisations and the volunteer workforces they engage. The grants are also an important signal from Government to volunteer involving organisations and volunteers that they are valued, appreciated and supported in this complex environment.

We reiterate the importance of Volunteer Grants to local community organisations, note that there is widespread support for the grants, and recommend as a minimum that the 2022 grants round is expedited. This would form part of the implementation of an overall Volunteering COVID-19 Recovery Plan.

2. A Volunteering Futures Program

Investment of \$10 million per annum (from 2023/24) to support innovation and facilitate the future adaptation of volunteering.

In the 2021 Budget, the Australian Government (Department of Social Services) allocated funds to Volunteering Australia to lead the development of a National Strategy for Volunteering (National Strategy). To provide a core evidence base for the National Strategy development, Volunteering Australia will also produce a *Volunteering in Australia* report, which will provide a comprehensive understanding of the landscape of volunteering in Australia, map current trends, and provide insight into how volunteering may evolve into the future.

Through collaborative consultation, the National Strategy will be designed and owned by the volunteering ecosystem and provide a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia. It will provide strategic direction for the volunteering ecosystem and enable volunteering across Australia to be effective, inclusive, and sustainable.

All members of the volunteering ecosystem will have a role to play in ensuring volunteering thrives in the future. The volunteering ecosystem is a network of relationships between volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, volunteering support services¹⁰, State and Territory volunteering

⁹ [Volunteer Grants position statement V3 \(volunteeringaustralia.org\)](#)

¹⁰ Volunteer Support Services are also known as Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs) and Volunteer Support Organisations (VSOs)

peak bodies, Volunteering Australia, other national peak bodies, community organisations, philanthropy, business, the research community, and Governments, all working for the collective viability and recognition of volunteering in Australia.

A vital member of the ecosystem is the Australian Government who should provide continued investment (with indexation) to support a sustainable and impactful future for volunteering. This could be achieved through the establishment of a new Volunteering Futures Program which would focus on facilitating innovation and future-proofing volunteering. This might involve a contestable fund open to the diversity of members of the volunteering ecosystem¹¹.

The broad aims might include:

- Advancing innovation and digital volunteering solutions: Enabling innovation and adaptation of volunteering programs using digital technology, in particular addressing digital exclusion in regional and remote Australia through resources, training and overall support.
- Supporting volunteering pathways: Providing pathways for volunteers to move from informal (including spontaneous volunteering during emergencies) to formal volunteering and facilitating pathways from volunteering to paid employment.
- Progressing diversity and inclusion: Growing high quality volunteering opportunities for those currently experiencing barriers to participation and taking deliberate efforts to address access and systemic barriers¹².

The specific aims of the Futures Program should be determined via the process to develop the new National Strategy for Volunteering.

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 (including mental health), aged care, emergency management, environmental protection, and international development. A Volunteering Futures Program should therefore be a whole of government initiative.

A commitment from the Australian Government to a Volunteering Futures Program would help secure the long-term sustainability of the volunteer workforce and support the sector through major transitions. This includes 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 bushfires.

¹¹ A similar fund exists in the UK. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/volunteering-futures-fund-invitation-for-grant-makers>

¹² This would go beyond what is possible with the current Volunteer Management Activity and its focus on three priority groups: people with disability, First Nations and recent migrants.

3. A National Youth Volunteering Initiative

Investment of \$10 million per annum.

Young people have been disproportionately affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19, with subsequent impacts on their mental health and future wellbeing. Research demonstrates that volunteering can provide a protective effect against poor mental health.¹³ Volunteering can provide meaningful activity for young people when they are unemployed and help them to develop skills and capabilities that can support a pathway to employment. Young people can also be more at risk of exploitation regarding requests for them to take on unpaid work through inappropriate placements being promoted as volunteer placements and unpaid internships.

A national volunteering youth initiative¹⁴ could aim to:

- Provide meaningful volunteer opportunities for unemployed young people (aged 18-30 years).
- Target young people who are at 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.
- Ensure volunteer managers are confident engaging young volunteers and can address barriers to young people volunteering (for example, by providing support to adapt programs to suit young volunteers' preferences for greater flexibility.)
- Address cost barriers to volunteering¹⁵.
- Provide improved guidance on safe and appropriate volunteer placements in relation to young people's rights and responsibilities with a view to reducing exploitation.

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.

In addition, the skills and experience young people gain through volunteering should be formally recognised to better support a pathway to paid employment. This would need to include governments and the volunteering sector working with industry groups, unions, and employers to support an accreditation scheme for volunteering. It would allow young volunteers to record and receive certification for their volunteering achievements.

¹³ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Evidence-Insights-Volunteering-and-mental-health-Final.pdf>

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ The NSW State of Volunteering research 2021 found that volunteers spend annually on average \$1900 of their own money to volunteer.

4. A nationally co-ordinated emergency management approach

Investment of \$3 million.

The final report of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements recommended (Rec: 21.3) that the Australian Government convene regular forums for charities and volunteer groups to improve coordination of recovery support. The Australian Government supported this recommendation, but it has not yet been enacted¹⁶.

In response to COVID-19, the Government activated the National Coordination Mechanism and convened National Cabinet. 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 and following emergencies. The interplay of national mechanisms with State/Territory government measures creates significant complexity in the operating environment for volunteer involving organisations.

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 aligns individual State and Territory disaster arrangements with national disaster arrangements. This would provide greater clarity to rapidly, safely, and effectively mobilise both volunteers and volunteer involving organisations in emergencies. A nationally coordinated approach should include:

- Establishment of a national forum, with similar forums at State/Territory level, to bring together and coordinate volunteer involving organisations that play a role in planning, responding to, and recovering from emergencies.
- A joint approach to emergency volunteering platforms that can facilitate effective registration, management, and deployment of spontaneous volunteers.
- National standards regarding the inclusion of emergency management volunteers in ongoing COVID-safe measures, including in a nationally consistent definition of essential workers¹⁷.

An Australia-wide integrated network of coordinating 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. This approach could 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.

¹⁶ An Enduring Charities Forum and a dedicated disaster recovery coordination group were initially progressed by the National Bushfire Recovery Agency, but these structures were not maintained in the transition to the new National Recovery and Resilience Agency.

¹⁷ Work on a national definition for essential workers is currently being taken forward by the federal Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources.

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

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

The development of a nationally coordinated approach should be informed by the national principles for disaster recovery,¹⁸ the current Australian Disaster Preparedness Framework,¹⁹ and best practice volunteer involvement.²⁰ It should be aligned with individual State and Territory and national disaster arrangements.

5. Investment in the Aged Care volunteer workforce.

Funds to be allocated from within new aged care funding commitments

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety reported in February 2021²¹. The Commission recommended that aged care providers should increase their support for volunteering and volunteers. For providers who operate a volunteer program, the Commission argued a staff member must be assigned to the role of volunteer coordination and that they should provide induction and ongoing training to volunteers and supervise their activities. Recommendation 44 stipulates how the Australian Government should promote volunteers and volunteering in aged care to support older people to live meaningful and dignified lives. The Australian Government accepted this recommendation.

This recommendation cannot be enacted without additional investment. Funding should be allocated for the Aged Care Royal Commission's volunteering recommendation in Budget 2022-23 and into the forward estimates.

Volunteers are a vital part of the aged care workforce. The 2016 National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey estimated that volunteers are engaged extensively across aged care, with 83 per cent of residential facilities and 51 per cent of home care and home support outlets engaging the services of volunteers. Some services, such as Meals on Wheels²², are delivered primarily by volunteers. However, the recent 2021 Aged Care Census revealed that volunteers were

¹⁸ <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/national-principles-disaster-recovery>

¹⁹ <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/australian-disaster-preparedness-framework.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/national-standards-and-supporting-material>

²¹ <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report>

²² <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/submission/AWF.660.00126.0001.pdf>

disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the paid workforce²³ and there is now a significant challenge to reinvigorate volunteering across aged care.

Volunteers are not 'discretionary' – they provide care and support that is vital to the wellbeing of older people. Volunteers contribute in a qualitatively distinct way that cannot always be replicated by paid staff, contributing through activities such as respite care assistance, planned group activity assistance, companionship, and befriending.

While volunteers are an important part of the aged care workforce, the management of volunteers is a specialised form of management and is not equivalent to the management of paid staff. Ongoing sector development and capacity building is required to ensure best practices in volunteer management are being used. This is one of the many reasons for why it is essential to ensure the right policy settings and funding arrangements are in place, which do not overlook the role of volunteering into the future.

Currently Volunteering SA&NT and Volunteering Tasmania provide sector capacity building and support to volunteer involving organisations funded by the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP). This funding enables these volunteering peak bodies to support Managers and Coordinators of Volunteers and other staff involved in volunteering programs in service provider organisations, with volunteer management training using the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement as a framework. This is one of the best means of ensuring safe and effective volunteer management practices are adopted.

One element of the Commonwealth Government's aged care reform agenda²⁴ is structural reforms to home aged care²⁵ which involves creating a single 'Support at Home' program. This is replacing the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP), the Home Care Packages (HCP) Program, Short-Term Restorative Care Programme (STRC), and residential respite programs. Given the importance of volunteers in the delivery of home aged care, the Government should consult with the volunteering sector and ensure that the Federal Budget allocates funding to support volunteering. This should focus on supporting professional volunteer management and ongoing training of volunteers and volunteer managers.

The State and Territory peak volunteering bodies have the capability to develop and deliver training for volunteers in the proposed single Support at Home Program, as evidenced by the current arrangements delivered by Volunteering SA&NT and Volunteering Tasmania. The training developed needs to be consistent nationally and follow the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement and the Aged Care Quality Standards. Training also needs to be an annual requirement to ensure volunteers receive updates to regulations etc, that knowledge of the standards remains current, and there is consistency across aged care organisations that they are following standards properly. The State and Territory peak volunteering bodies are best placed to develop and provide the training required to meet the Royal Commission's recommendation.

²³ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/AGED-CARE-CENSUS-2020-factsheet-Final.pdf>

²⁴ <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/aged-care/aged-care-reforms-and-reviews>

²⁵ <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/aged-care/aged-care-reforms-and-reviews/reform-to-in-home-aged-care>

It should be noted that there are other workforces, such as in disability services and mental health (see below), where volunteer involvement is important. Federal policy arrangements should make sure that funding is allocated to support these volunteer workforces.²⁶

Other priority issues

This submission articulates five recommendations for consideration in the 2022-23 Federal Budget. A number of other issues are important for the sustainability of volunteering into the future and merit highlighting here.

Volunteer Management Activity

The review of the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) was completed in 2021. From 1 July 2021, the Australian Government commenced the distribution of up to \$33.5 million (excluding GST) over five years under the new Volunteer Management Activity to Volunteering Peak Bodies across Australia. Peak bodies will partner with other services to develop and support the new VMA program to increase and strengthen volunteer participation.

Volunteering Australia welcomed the inclusion of funding indexation for the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) in the 2019-20 budget, and a commitment to the program's continuation. The 2021-22 Budget allocated funding for the Volunteer Management Activity at circa \$6 million p.a. plus indexation to 2024-25 (\$33.5 million over five years).

Funding in the 2022-23 Budget should extend funding into the forward estimates through to 2025-26.

Equal Remuneration Order/Social and Community Services Supplementation

In the 2020-21 Budget, \$44 million a year was allocated to top up the base funding for grant programs impacted by the cessation of the Social and Community Services Pay Equity Special Account. There was also funding in the Attorney-General's portfolio of around \$29 million a year for ongoing base funding to be increased to replace the supplementation for family law services funded under the Family Relationship Services Program.

In the 2021-22 Budget, funding of \$124.7 million over two years allocated to extend Social and Community Services funding (which replaced Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) supplementation) in the homelessness sector.

It is vital that in the 2022-23 Budget this funding is maintained and that further strategic consideration is given to how the funding of community services is sustainable into the future.

²⁶ Volunteering Australia has been advocating for improved recognition of volunteers in government-funded workforces. For example, see <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/policy/advocacy-campaigns/advocating-for-the-role-of-volunteering-in-mental-health/>

Employment Services

The Commonwealth Government has committed to reforming employment services to ensure they deliver better services to job seekers and employers and a better system for providers. The transition to the New Employment Service Model will take place from July 2022.

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment consulted this year on the 'Enhanced Services payment model.' We highlighted in our response to the Department that they should urgently review the extent and cost of the placement services currently provided by Volunteering Support Services but attributed to jobactive providers.

Volunteering Support Services play a vital role in assisting many people to satisfy their mutual obligation requirements through helping them to find a volunteering role with pre-approved volunteer involving organisations. However, Volunteering Support Services receive no funding for performing this function.

The New Employment Service Model, and the new employment service payment model, should delineate the responsibilities of Volunteering Support Services and jobactive providers and ensure each is remunerated for the services provided²⁷.

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. In our submission to the National Disability Strategy, and in recent submissions to the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS and to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability²⁸, we argued that volunteers need to be considered strategically in workforce planning if disability services are to meet the needs and aspirations of people with disability. In its interim report²⁹, the Royal Commission has heard evidence about the involvement of volunteers in services and support to people with disability.

Participation in volunteering can also play an important role in the lives of people with disability, offering opportunities for social, economic, and cultural inclusion. Volunteering can be particularly beneficial to people with disability in offering self-empowerment and pathways to paid employment. It is therefore urgent that volunteer involving organisations receive the resources needed to remove barriers to volunteering for people with disability.

It is imperative that the contributions of volunteering, both in the disability services workforce and in the lives of people with disability, are recognised and resourced in this and future Budgets, in Targeted Action Plans established to support Australia's Disability Strategy, and in the Government's response to the Disability Royal Commission.

²⁸ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/policy/submissions/>

²⁹ <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2020-10/Interim%20Report.pdf>

Mental Health Services

The contribution of volunteers in the mental health workforce needs to be better understood and strategically considered in workforce planning and development. In our submission on the draft of the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy, we argued that the contributions of volunteers to the broader mental health landscape should be recognised and supported. This includes in proposed data collection efforts for the sector, and as a means to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and improve the reach of training programs in the sector.

Participation in volunteering can also play an important role in supporting good mental health, both in prevention and recovery. The mental health benefits of volunteering were acknowledged in the final report from the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health³⁰.

In line with the recent call from the House of Representatives Select Committee on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention³¹, volunteers should be explicitly included in strategic initiatives, including the upcoming National Mental Health Workforce Strategy. The role of volunteering in supporting mental health should also be considered in the implementation of the recent National Preventive Health Strategy.

Conclusion

Volunteers are the often-invisible workforce that supports the nation every day and through challenging times. But volunteering is struggling; because of the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and longer-term trends which are seeing formal volunteering rates in decline. We need to reinvigorate volunteering for the nation's ongoing social and economic recovery and consider what we may need to do differently to ensure volunteering strategy and investment keeps pace with changing circumstances and remains sustainable for years to come. Governments have a distinct and vital role to play in this, through providing strategic leadership and investing in initiatives and infrastructure that will enable volunteering to thrive. The 2022-23 Federal Budget should invest in:

1. **A Volunteering COVID-19 Recovery Plan.** This plan would enable volunteers to re-engage safely, support the adaptation of volunteering programs, and facilitate the recruitment of new volunteers to ensure services and programs can recover.
2. **A Volunteering Futures Program.** This program would facilitate the future adaptation of volunteering and support the strategic priorities identified in the new National Strategy for Volunteering currently under development.
3. **A National Youth Volunteering Initiative.** Young people have been disproportionately affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19. This initiative could mitigate against poor mental health outcomes for unemployed young people and support pathways to paid employment.

³⁰ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health#report>

³¹

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Mental_Health_and_Suicide_Prevention/MHSP/Report

4. **A nationally co-ordinated approach to volunteer engagement in emergencies.** As the frequency and scale of emergencies in Australia increases, a nationally co-ordinated approach will help to mobilise volunteers rapidly, safely, and effectively.
5. **The Aged Care volunteer workforce.** Funding should be allocated for the Aged Care Royal Commission's volunteering recommendations in Budget 2022-23 and into the forward estimates.

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 and resilient communities through volunteering. Our purpose is to lead, strengthen, and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

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08 8221 7177

reception@volunteeringsa-nt.org.au

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www.volunteering.com.au

02 9261 3600

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