



The Australian Charter of Aged Care Rights
Department of Health
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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.

As the primary link between the volunteering sector and federal government, Volunteering Australia provides feedback into key decision making. All feedback is informed by research, evidence and consultation with the volunteering sector.

Introduction

Volunteering Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Department of Health on *The Australian Charter of Aged Care Rights*.

Volunteering is at the centre of Australia's national identity, with 5.8 million Australians or 31 per cent of the population engaging in formal volunteering activities and programs.ⁱ There is strong evidence that reinforces the economic impact of the contribution of volunteering. Volunteering delivers a \$4.50 return for every dollar invested.ⁱⁱ Research demonstrates that volunteering yields a 450 per cent return for every dollar invested.ⁱⁱⁱ Nationally this is an estimated annual economic and social contribution of \$290 billion.^{iv}

The Australian Charter of Aged Care Rights or 'The Charter', aims to provide protection for the rights of consumers in aged care settings. This includes collective by in from all those involved in aged care, including family, friends, carers, aged care providers, staff and volunteers.

The Department of Health is developing a single Charter of Aged Care Rights, while consolidating the current four Charters relating to the rights of aged care recipients. These are:

- Charter of care recipients' rights and responsibilities – residential care
- Charter of care recipients' rights and responsibilities – home care
- Charter of care recipients' rights and responsibilities – short-term restorative care (part 1, residential care setting; part 2, home care setting).

Key concepts central to the draft Charter include:

- Dignity, respect and consideration
- Choice and control
- Safety and quality
- Communication and information
- Comments and complaints

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Volunteering Australia Response

Volunteering Australia stresses that volunteers are essential to the aged care workforce, delivering frontline services and ancillary support in aged care and residential settings.

A 2017 Senate inquiry report into the *Future of Australia's aged care sector workforce* also highlighted this with, "83 per cent of residential facilities and 51 per cent of home care and home support outlets utilising volunteer staff."^v The inquiry also heard that "there are five volunteers for every paid worker in the not-for-profit sector, at a value of about \$290 billion per annum. In 2016, 23,537 volunteers provided 114,987 hours of care to older Australians in residential facilities."^{vii}

Volunteering Australia supports the notion of a single Charter across aged care to clear up confusion for consumers, irrespective of the care they receive. There is also considerable duplication between each of the Charters. The current system is also confusing and may prove difficult for consumers, carers, providers and family members to understand which Charter conveys their rights and responsibilities.

The current Charter's outline different rights for consumers, and there are questions as to why some aged care consumers are not afforded the same rights as others. It is essential that the Charter does not differentiate between the different types of care that people are receiving and the rights they are owed. As such, we recommend that the final section of the preamble be removed, as it is inconsistent to outline consumer rights, but then state that they may not be applicable in certain circumstances. Following a human rights-based approach, rights should be universal.

However, we do emphasise that the single Charter should make distinct references to residential care, home care and restorative care – noting that there are differences in the type of care people receive and therefore responsibilities for carers and providers may differ.

It is the view of Volunteering Australia that the health, wellbeing and safety of staff (including volunteers), and older people are paramount. Aged care providers should include all volunteers in their policies and procedures and recognise the duty of care they have toward both consumers and volunteers. A Charter must consider the equal recognition of supports and services provided by both paid and unpaid (volunteer) staff.

Any reference to service providers in the Charter must explicitly state volunteers as a distinct group, given the large provision of services that volunteers provide in aged care.

Feedback from a Volunteer Involving Organisation emphasises this point:

"...any reference to those who deliver services, should include volunteers, as some agencies rely heavily on volunteers to provide services."

Volunteering Australia highlights the valuable role and contributions volunteers provide in aged care service delivery by enhancing the wellbeing of consumers, as well as achieving a sense of satisfaction themselves. Volunteering Support Services, such as Volunteering SA&NT and Volunteering Tasmania, are funded through the CHSP program, delivering vital services that support programs in the aged care sector.

Volunteering Australia recommends that an accompanying document is created, that clearly articulates the purpose of the Charter, the role, responsibilities, rights and obligations of each of the stakeholders pertaining to the Charter, and also conveys consumer responsibilities. This could be similar to the section that is in the existing Charter of Care Recipients Rights and Responsibilities.

Volunteering Australia is cognisant of the specialised role that volunteers can play in supporting the diverse needs of older people. For people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, forming relationships with people from a similar cultural background can be of profound benefit. Consumers should be able to connect with people of their own age, gender, and from a shared culture. Volunteers can play a

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key role in building social capital, and provide a vital link in cultivating social connections. We highlight that the draft Charter employs much simpler language than the existing Charters and will be far easier to translate into community languages. Translation, access and equity should also be a key consideration for Government when forming the Charter.

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Summary of Recommendations

- Volunteering Australia supports the notion of a single Charter across aged care to clear up confusion for consumers, irrespective of the care they receive.
- An accompanying document to the Charter is created, that clearly articulates the purpose of the Charter, the role, responsibilities, rights and obligations of each of the stakeholders pertaining to the Charter, and also conveys consumer responsibilities.
- Any reference to service providers in the Charter must explicitly state volunteers as a distinct group.
- Translation, access and equity should also be a key consideration for Government when forming the Charter.

Conclusion

Volunteering Australia thanks the Department of Health for the opportunity to provide feedback. As demonstrated, the volunteering sector are a key stakeholder in aged care and the views of the sector are vital in the formation of the Charter. 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.
- VIOs** Volunteer-involving organisations are organisations that utilise volunteers as part of their workforce.
- VSSs** Volunteer 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 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015), General Social Survey, Summary Results, Australia, 2014, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4159.0>.

ⁱⁱ Volunteering Western Australia (2015), The Economic, Social, and Cultural Value of Volunteering to Western Australia, https://volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa_report%20book_web.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

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

^v The Senate (2017), Future of Australia's aged care sector workforce, Community Affairs References Committee, p13.

^{vi} Volunteering SA&NT Inc (2017), *Committee Hansard*, p34.

^{vii} Flinders University (2017), *Committee Hansard*, National Institute of Labour Studies, Table 4.21, p26.

^{viii} The Senate (2017), Future of Australia's aged care sector workforce, Community Affairs References Committee, p36.