

Publication date: 7.00am Tuesday 16 February 2021

A long recovery journey ahead for hard hit volunteering sector

New Volunteering Australia data shows volunteering is not ‘snapping back,’ even as COVID restrictions lift, with nearly three quarters (72%) of respondents surveyed saying their volunteer programs were not fully operational.ⁱ During the height of the COVID pandemic in 2020, two out of three volunteers (65.9%) stopped volunteering, equating to an estimated loss of 12.2 million hours per weekⁱⁱ.

Volunteering Australia’s *[‘Re-engaging Volunteers and COVID-19’](#)* survey, received nearly 600 responses over December 2020 and January 2021, highlighting some worrying statistics. Although COVID restrictions have eased considerably across Australia, over half of the 600 respondents surveyed (56%), said their organisations needed more volunteers, with four out of ten (41%) finding it difficult to re-engage or recruit volunteers. A similar number of respondents (43%) have seen an increase in demand for the services their organisations offer. Overall, 42% of respondents are not confident that they will achieve pre-COVID levels of volunteering activity in the next six months.

These results are particularly concerning, as recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data shows that pre-COVID, the rate of Australians volunteering and the time they give, continue to decline. In 2019, 7% less Australians volunteered for an organisation compared to 2010ⁱⁱⁱ, with the decline most evident for women (-10%). The data shows Australians are time-poor with 40% of people saying they feel rushed or pressed for time, which seems to have had a troubling impact on the number of hours Australians’ volunteer. Although the almost six million Australians who volunteered in 2019 contributed almost 600 million hours to the community, this is a 20% decrease from 2014 (743.3 million hours).

Volunteering Australia CEO Mark Pearce said that volunteers make a huge contribution to Australia’s social and economic well-being and are now needed more than ever to ensure stability and recovery in the wake of COVID-19. “Volunteering is time freely given, but enabling volunteering is not free. Volunteers need induction, training and ongoing management and support. The role of volunteers in Australia needs to be recognised, supported and resourced.”

According to the Volunteering Australia survey, the biggest challenge preventing organisations from re-engaging or recruiting more volunteers was that their volunteers tended to be older or in vulnerable groups, with 70% of respondents highlighting this concern. Other barriers to re-engaging or recruiting more volunteers included volunteers being ‘more time-poor and harder to engage’ (24%) and ‘less interested in regular, formal or longer-term volunteering commitments’ (30%). However, the challenges facing volunteering are not only about getting more Australians to volunteer; 23% of organisations reported that their capacity to recruit volunteers was limited.

Mr Pearce said this survey provides evidence of how the volunteering sector is still struggling with the impact of COVID-19. “The next steps are for Governments, at all levels, to engage with the volunteering sector, to find ways to make volunteering easier and more accessible for time-poor or vulnerable Australians. It is vital for all of us to work together and take a holistic approach to support Australia’s diverse and invaluable volunteers. I’m calling on policymakers to commit to partnering with the volunteering sector to reinvigorate volunteering.”

Volunteering Australia has set out [proposals](#) for how the Australian Government can invest in a Reinvigorating Volunteering Action Plan and a whole of Government National Volunteering Strategy.

ENDS

MEDIA RELEASE



Publication date: 7.00am Tuesday 16 February 2021

MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

Fiona Doyle, Volunteering Australia

E: media@volunteeringaustralia.org

Office Ph: 0431 672 274

About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering, working 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.

About the Re-engaging Volunteers and COVID-19 Survey

Over December 2020 and January 2021, Volunteering Australia asked the volunteering community about their experiences re-engaging volunteers and COVID-19. We received 584 responses mainly from volunteer involving organisations but also volunteers and other individuals or organisations with an interest in volunteering. In 2020 Volunteering Australia commissioned the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods at the Australian National University to undertake an analysis of the experience of volunteers during the lockdown period in April and May. This survey was a follow-up to this 2020 research, to see how the sector was re-engaging volunteers and is part of Volunteering Australia's [Reinvigorating Volunteering](#) campaign.

See the '[Re-engaging Volunteers and COVID-19](#)' report.

ⁱ Volunteering Australia, February 2021, '[Re-engaging Volunteers and COVID-19](#)'. Survey of 584 volunteer involving organisations on their experience engaging volunteers in the wake of COVID-19.

ⁱⁱ The Australian National University, ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods (commissioned by Volunteering Australia), May 2020, [The Experience of Volunteers during COVID-19](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), September 2020, [General Social Survey](#). The ABS estimated that, for people aged 18 years and over, the rate of volunteering has declined from 36.2% in 2010 to 28.8% in 2019.