

EMBARGOED UNTIL: Monday 17 May 2021

## Reimagining volunteering for the future

- New official data reveals the severe impact COVID-19 has had on volunteering with nearly one in ten Australians having not returned to volunteering in the past year
- This National Volunteer Week (17th – 23rd May), Volunteering Australia is urging Australians to recognise, reconnect and reimagine volunteering, as the national peak leads the way to reinvigorating volunteering
- Volunteering Australia is calling on everyone to ‘wave your appreciation’ for volunteers and recognise the vital role they play in our lives each and every day

Each year Australian volunteers dedicate over 600 million hours to help others; however, compelling new research reveals the severe and ongoing impact of COVID-19 on the sector.

The rate of volunteering through an organisation was already declining over time, from 36% in 2010, to just 29% in 2019 and now new ABS data shows nearly one in ten Australians have not returned to volunteering in the past year.

This comes as three quarters (72%) report their organisation’s volunteer program was not fully operational whilst 42% were not confident that they will achieve pre-COVID levels of volunteering activity in the next six months.

At the height of the pandemic in Australia, two thirds of volunteers (66%) stopped volunteering altogether, equating to an estimated loss of 12.2 million hours per week.

Mark Pearce is the CEO of Volunteering Australia and is confident the sector can recover after a tumultuous year.

“This year’s National Volunteer Week theme acknowledges that it is time to recognise, reconnect and reimagine volunteering in Australia. By recognising volunteers, reconnecting by giving our time and reimagining how we better support volunteers, I believe Australia can reinvigorate volunteering for the future.”

“We are working hard to engage with decision-makers and influencers inside and outside of government, to build an understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on volunteering and its role in Australia’s recovery. It is vital for all of us to work together, share our collective knowledge and reimagine how we can better support Australia’s diverse, dedicated and invaluable volunteers. With COVID-19 providing many challenges, it is more important than ever that we thank and recognise volunteers this National Volunteer Week,” Mark says.

Despite 43% of organisations experiencing an increase in demand for services, further data from the ABS reveals that in the last 12 months, only 3.6% Australians started to take part in unpaid voluntary work, while just under one in five (17%) volunteers have continued donating their time.

“This National Volunteer Week, we will celebrate the significant contribution made by almost six million Australians. This includes community sport coaches and managers, volunteer programs across hospitals and aged care, and volunteers supporting disaster response and recovery. We encourage everyone to reconnect with what is important by giving our time to help others and ourselves. To get involved and find a volunteer opportunity that suits you, visit [GoVolunteer.com.au](https://www.govolunteer.com.au) or contact your local State or Territory volunteering peak body.” Mark says.

# MEDIA RELEASE



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National Volunteer Week is supported again in 2021 by Aon Australia. Gavin Deadman, Client Director Not-for-Profit at Aon Australia, "Aon is delighted to be the exclusive sponsor of National Volunteer Week as part of its more than 20-year partnership with Volunteering Australia. During the recent challenging times, volunteers again proved how supportive and resilient they are by giving back to the community in so many ways. Aon is proud to support the roles not for profits and volunteers play in creating stronger, safer and more connected communities, adding immeasurable value to society."

This National Volunteer Week (17th – 23rd May), Volunteering Australia is recognising that volunteers make our communities stronger, especially during times of need, crisis or isolation. Volunteering Australia is calling on all Australians to 'wave your appreciation' and share a photo of themselves waving their hand of thanks and using the hashtags #NVW2021 and #waveforvolunteers.

ENDS

## **MEDIA ENQUIRIES:**

Kylie Hughes, Volunteering Australia

E: [media@volunteeringaustralia.org](mailto:media@volunteeringaustralia.org)

P: 0402 497 138

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## **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 strong, connected communities through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, promote and celebrate volunteering in Australia. We work collectively with the seven State/Territory volunteering peak bodies to deliver national, state/territory and local volunteering programs and initiatives in accordance with the Government's priorities.

## **About the Research & Citations**

The Re-engaging Volunteers and COVID-19 survey was active from 11 December 2020 to 22 January 2021. In total, 584 responses were received. Most respondents were volunteer managers, co-ordinators or leaders (79%), followed by volunteers (16%) and other (5%). The survey provides a snapshot of the experiences of engaged stakeholders of Volunteering Australia. Organisations of all sizes participated in the survey. Organisations with 150+ volunteers were most strongly represented, making up a third (34%) of all respondents. Organisations from a highly diverse range of sectors responded. However, sport, recreation and religious organisations were under-represented. Response rates broadly correlated with State or Territory population size, except for Queensland which had a low response rate given its population.

<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021.02.08-Re-engaging-Volunteers-and-COVID-19-Report.pdf>

The Australian Bureau of Statistics Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey is a longitudinal survey which collects information from the same panel each month. The March 2021 survey was run between 12 and 21 March 2021 via online forms and telephone interviews, with a panel of 3,922 people.

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/household-impacts-covid-19-survey/march-2021#voluntary-work-and-unpaid-help>