

Thursday 20 May 2021

New data suggests volunteering impacted harder by COVID-19 than paid work

New data suggests that voluntary work has been impacted harder by the COVID-19 recession than paid work. Compelling new research from Volunteering Australia and the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods shows a much greater decrease in the proportion of Australians who undertook volunteering than the decline in the proportion of Australians in paid work.

Volunteering Australia has been working in partnership with the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods (CSRSM) to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on volunteering. The new ANU CSRSM analysis, published today, explores volunteering using comparative data collected in late 2019 prior to COVID-19, data from April 2020 and data from April 2021.

The researchers behind the analysis of the survey, Professor Nicholas Biddle and Professor Matthew Gray from ANU CSRSM, say their findings present a strong argument that volunteering needs specific consideration, and potentially additional support from governments.

“An estimated 2.3 million less Australians volunteered in April 2021 than there were in late 2019. The total number of hours of volunteering is estimated to have fallen by around 293 million hours over a 12-month period since COVID. This implies that the loss in economic output due to the pandemic would be 16.1 per cent higher if volunteering was included, compared to considering paid work only,” Professor Biddle said.

Volunteering Australia CEO Mark Pearce said, “This research provides important evidence of the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 situation on volunteers and volunteering. The findings reinforce the importance of volunteering to the economic and social wellbeing of Australia and has several implications for policy and practice. Given the weak recovery in volunteering to date, there remains an important challenge ahead in reinvigorating volunteering. This will require further and sustained action by the volunteering sector and by governments.”

“Further research is needed on understanding which sectors are being worse affected by the decline in volunteering and on how specific volunteer workforces – including aged care, disability care and mental health services – are to be sustainable into the future.”

Professor Biddle said the research also explored the impact on life satisfaction and loneliness. “The data showed that volunteers had a higher level of life satisfaction prior to COVID-19 than non-volunteers. The impact of COVID-19 on life satisfaction and loneliness was affected by volunteering behaviour over the period, with those who managed to continue volunteering during COVID-19 faring much better than those who didn’t.”

“Many volunteers told us about the challenges of volunteering over the period. But many also told us about the extra meaning and social interaction that volunteering was able to bring during this most difficult of times.” Professor Biddle said.

Mark Pearce said, “This new analysis reinforces the earlier ANU CSRSM paper, and other research, that demonstrates the well-being benefits of volunteering. If we are concerned about improving the well-being of Australians and improving overall mental health, we need to be concerned about reinvigorating volunteering.”

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.

ENDS

MEDIA RELEASE



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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

Volunteering Australia has been working in partnership with the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods (CSRSM) to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on volunteering. The ANU CSRSM analysis draws on the ANUpoll which involves a regular survey of around 3000 Australians that produces nationally representative results. In May 2020, research was published into volunteering behaviour in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The headline finding was that two out of three volunteers stopped volunteering between February and April 2020.

The new ANU CSRSM analysis, published in May 2021, explores volunteering using data collected in late 2019 prior to COVID-19, data from April 2020 and data from April 2021. The April 2021 survey question asked, 'over the last 12 months, did you spend any time doing voluntary work through an organisation or group?' The full paper and results are available [here](#).