

27 February 2017

**Re: Volunteering Australia's Campaign to Save Volunteer Support Services**

Recently Volunteering Australia had the opportunity to bring together volunteer support services from across Australia, drawing attention to the work they do in local communities like yours as part of a bipartisan parliamentary morning tea, 'Share the Love for Volunteer Support Services' at Parliament House, Canberra.

We thought we would follow up this event with a short letter to outline our concerns with the Department of Social Services' proposed Strong and Resilient Communities Grants redesign, which is planned to take effect from 1 January 2018.

This letter provides a short overview of what the current grants fund, what the recommended changes entail, and why the volunteering sector is concerned that these changes will result in catastrophic flow on effects for the community groups and not-for-profits that rely on a coordinated and supported volunteering system.

- 5.8 million Australian volunteers contribute an estimated \$290 billion in economic value to our local communities each year. But they don't do this alone. Their work is empowered by local community-based organisations called **volunteer support services** who source, place, train and manage volunteers to ensure their work is effective, professional and safe.
- The work of volunteer support services directly intersects with major Commonwealth programs including the NDIS, aged care, workforce participation, emergency management, multicultural participation, sport and the arts.
- In 2014, the Federal Government made the decision to move responsibility for volunteering from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to the Department of Social Services, a move the sector opposed.
- Since that time, volunteer support services have been funded through their own allocated pool of Volunteer Management funding under the Strengthening Communities Grants. The Strengthening Communities Grants currently provide around \$18 million per year to local community projects which address disadvantage and social cohesion; of that amount, between \$6 and \$7.5 million per year is currently allocated to Volunteer Management.
- From 1 January 2018, the Department of Social Services proposes to abolish the specific Volunteer Management category of funding, forcing volunteer support services to compete alongside an incredibly diverse pool of deserving community services under vague grant titles such as "Inclusive Communities". This removes any certainty for volunteer support services, whose work by its nature is limited in its ability to attract other sources of revenue. For many of these services, these federal grants are their primary or sole income.

It is important that the Volunteer Management component of the Strengthening Communities grants be held as quite distinct from the Volunteer Grants, which we are aware remain unchanged at a budget of \$10 million in 2018. The Volunteer Grants provide small one-off pockets of up to \$5000 in funding to support volunteers through minor infrastructure upgrades, uniform provision, and so forth. In comparison, the Volunteer Management grants provide funding of up to \$100,000 per year to sustain innovative community-based programs that coordinate, lead and manage volunteers.

Following our parliamentary event, on 16 February 2017 Shadow Assistant Minister for Social Services Senator Louise Pratt and crossbench Senator Jacqui Lambie presented a motion that:

- i. congratulated community-based volunteer support services for the work that they do to support strong, healthy and resilient Australian communities through an effective and professional volunteer workforce
- ii. recognised the importance of funding volunteer management services and Volunteering Australia's campaign to retain funding for volunteer management as part of the Federal Budget.

This motion recognises that the funding currently provided by the Department of Social Services is being put to effective and immediate use in communities across Australia to deliver successful volunteering programs. Without this guaranteed level of funding, we will see the heart ripped out of the organisations that support and maintain Australia's local communities. (Senator Pratt and Senator Lambie's full motion is attached.)

As the Federal Budget 2017-18 approaches, we will continue to work alongside volunteer support services across Australia to advocate for the retention of a specific pool of funding for volunteer management. We are asking Parliamentarians to support our campaign by rejecting the proposal to abolish a specific pool of funding for volunteer management as part of the Strong and Resilient Communities redesign.

We would be delighted to have the opportunity to speak with you further about our campaign, either over the phone or in person. We invite your office to correspond with Ms Rebecca Rowland, Administration Officer at Volunteering Australia at [admin@volunteeringaustralia.org](mailto:admin@volunteeringaustralia.org) or (02) 6251 4060 to discuss any of the other matters raised above.

Yours sincerely



Ms Adrienne Picone  
Chief Executive Officer  
Volunteering Australia



Tim Jackson  
President  
Volunteering Australia

Senators Lambie and Pratt: To move—That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

- i. pursuant to a decision of the 2016-17 Federal Budget, the Department of Social Services is currently undertaking a redesign of the Strengthening Communities Grants, to be known as the Strong and Resilient Communities Grants from 1 January 2018,
- ii. the Strengthening Communities Grants currently provide around \$18 million per year to projects which address disadvantage and build opportunity in communities around Australia,
- iii. under the current Grants program, there is a specific funding stream for volunteer management programs, which in 2017 will fund volunteer support services in local communities to a total of around \$7.4 million,
- iv. the Department of Social Services has proposed that this volunteer management stream of grants funding will be abolished from 1 January 2018, meaning volunteer support services will be forced to compete with other worthwhile community services and removing any guarantee that they will be funded at all,
- v. this is the latest reduction in funding allocated to volunteer management since the decision was made to transfer responsibility for volunteering from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to the Department of Social Services in 2014, a move which volunteering peak bodies and representatives opposed,
- vi. the national peak body for volunteering, Volunteering Australia, states that this move will “rip the heart out of local volunteer support services”, organisations which play an important role in Australian communities by leading, enabling and building capacity to recruit and retain volunteers in a wide variety of organisations and services, from the human services and the arts to environmental, animal welfare and sporting groups,
- vii. approximately 5.8 million Australians, or 31 per cent of the population, volunteer, with Dr Lisel O’Dwyer of Flinders University estimating their annual contribution to Australia as \$290 billion,
- viii. volunteering plays an important role in delivering the priorities of the Government, with volunteers contributing many thousands of hours per year to the aged care workforce, the disability services, schools and hospitals, art galleries, libraries and sporting clubs, and with volunteering often acting as a driver in bolstering economic participation, mitigating isolation and loneliness and increasing social inclusion and participation,
- ix. while volunteering is defined as “time willingly given, for the common good and without financial gain”, it does not happen free, and requires the investment of resources in volunteer support services in order to maintain a professional, responsive and efficient volunteer workforce,
- x. the withdrawal of funding to volunteer management services will threaten the viability of the thousands of volunteering organisations and will have a huge impact on the community; and

(b) calls on the Government to:

- i. congratulate community-based volunteer support services for the work that they do to support strong, healthy and resilient Australian communities through an effective and professional volunteer workforce, and
- ii. recognise the importance of funding volunteer management services and Volunteering Australia’s campaign to retain funding for volunteer management as part of the Federal Budget.