

Fact sheet

Volunteering and the Charities Sector

Introduction

This fact sheet summarises data from the [Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Australian Charities Report 12th Edition](#) to provide a snapshot about volunteering in the charities sector, alongside information about charity activities and operations in 2024.

Each year the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) publishes a report of charity sector data. The 12th Edition provides data from 53,641 Annual Information Statements submitted in 2024.

The Australian Charities Report 12th Edition reinforces our knowledge about volunteering in Australia and the pressure the ecosystem is experiencing.

The report underscores volunteering's critical role in service delivery and community resilience across 53,641 registered charities, despite cost-of-living pressures. The findings support the recent Australian Bureau of Statistics General Social Survey, which show that Australia's commitment to volunteering is more pronounced than five years ago (618 million hours in 2025 compared to 490 million hours in 2020), as demand for services provided by all sectors, including charities and not-for-profits, increases.

Charities engaged a record 3.9 million volunteers in 2024, the highest reported figure by the ACNC. It is important to note that this figure is not a population estimate of volunteering in Australia as produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The figure represents a charity-level count of volunteers and can be considered as episodic volunteering. This is due to individuals who volunteered for more than one charity being counted more than once, and the exclusion of volunteering for not-for-profit from the count as they are not registered charities.

Most charities (53%) had no paid staff, operating with a ratio of 2.5 volunteers for every employee, thereby relying exclusively on the dedication of volunteers. Around half of all charities have continued this remarkable reliance on volunteers since the ACNC first reported on charities sector data in 2014.

Other key findings about charities in the report included:

- 89.3% of extra small charities had no paid staff
- Only very large charities had a decrease in volunteer numbers of 1.8%
- Charities employed 11% of the Australian workforce, or 1.6 million people
- Extra small and small charities were the most common charities in the sector, with each comprising of 30.1% of all charities
- Adults aged 25 to under 65 years and young people age 15 to under 25 years were the most common beneficiaries of charity programs

- Programs were most common in the areas of religion and faith-based spirituality, human services, and education
- Revenue from Government (including grants) was most common, with 49.4% of funding coming from this source
- Australian charities range from extra small charities through to extra large charities and this determination is made based on charities annual total revenue.ⁱⁱ

Volunteering in the charities sector in 2024

- Charities continue to be dependent on the dedication of volunteers to help deliver their programs.
- Charities engaged 3.9 million volunteers in 2024, a 4.6% increase on 2023. This figure can be considered to be episodic volunteering, rather than a population estimate of volunteering in Australia as volunteers who participate in more than one charity may be counted multiple times.
- This increase was higher than the growth in Australia's population of 1.5% in 2024/25 according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.¹
- Clean Up Australia Limited engaged the largest number of volunteers with 1.1 million, followed by Surf Life Saving clubs who engaged 250,000 volunteers.
- Most charities relied exclusively on volunteers, with 53% of charities operating with no paid staff, an increase of nearly 1% since 2023.
- There was a ratio of 2.5 volunteers for every employee, a slight increase on 2023, when there were 2.4 volunteers for every employee.
- 89.3% of extra small charities operated with no paid staff and relied entirely on volunteers, up nearly 1% from 2023.
- The ratio of volunteers to paid employees in extra small charities was one employee to 33 volunteers.
- Small charities had the second highest rate of no paid staff, with 54.7% operating with no paid staff, or one employee to 21 volunteers.
- Only very large charities reported a decrease in volunteers, of 1.8% or 10,947 fewer volunteers since 2023.

The charity workforce in 2024

- Charities employed 1.6 million people or 11% of the Australian workforce in 2024, an increase of 10.7% since 2023.

ⁱⁱ Extra small charities (less than \$500,000)

Small charities (\$50,000 or more but less than \$500,000)

Medium charities (\$500,000 or more but less than \$3 million)

Large charities (\$3 million or more but less than \$10 million)

Very large charities (\$10 million or more but less than \$100 million)

Extra large charities (\$100 million or more)

¹ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/latest-release>

- Extra small charities had the highest decline in the number of employees, with 15% or 1,319 fewer employees in 2024 compared to 2023.
- Extra large charities had the highest increase of employees, up 8.5% or 64,530 employees in 2024.
- Paid staff were more likely to be full-time employees (37.3%) or part-time employees (36.7%).

Key program areas and where charities operate

- Charities engage in programs across 19 different areas, and this highlights the breadth of volunteer involvement and their impact on program delivery.
- The most common programs were in religion and faith-based spirituality (19.8%), followed by human services (15.6%), and education (15%).
- The majority of charities (92%) operated in one state or territory, while a small percentage (7.6%) operated in more than one jurisdiction.
- The highest proportion of charities were in New South Wales (30.8%), followed by Victoria (23.6%) and Queensland (15.4%).

Who charities help

- The beneficiaries of charity programs span both individual and multiple groups in the community.
- Adults aged 25 to 65 years were the most common beneficiaries (8.1%), followed by youths aged 15 to 25 years (7.8%).
- Adults aged 65 and over entered the top three as the third most common beneficiary group at 6.9%, replacing families who were the third most common beneficiary in 2023.
- This is noteworthy given Australia's changing demographic and the need to reshape the workforce to support an ageing population.
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) show that between 2000 and 2020, the number of people aged 65 and over increased from 12.4% to 16.3%. The ABS projects this figure to rise during the current decade.

Charity expenses

- Charity expenses outpaced revenue in 2024, as they increasingly responded to need and supported more people in the community who turned to charities for assistance due to cost-of-living.
- Charities generated a record \$239 billion in revenue, a rise of 7.5% on 2023.
- However, total sector expenses outpaced the 7.5% increase in revenue, rising by 8.6% to \$231 billion in 2024.
- This was a reversal of 2023, when revenue was higher than expenses.
- Operating costs for wages, insurance and utilities contributed to the increase in total expenses.

- Employee expenses were most common, making up 55.7% or \$128 billion of all expenses.

Revenue sources

- Charities are particularly reliant on Government funding, with 49.4% of the charity sector revenue, or \$118 billion, coming from Government (including grants).
- Revenue from goods and services was the next most common (34.6%), or \$14.8 billion.
- While extra large charities represented only 0.6% of the sector, they accounted for 57% of total sector revenue, or \$136 billion.
- Despite extra small charities making up about one third of the sector they contributed only 0.1% of total revenue, or \$237,000 million.
- Small charities were more likely to receive revenue from donations and bequests or goods and services.
- As charity size increased, revenue sources became more oriented towards Government grants or goods and services.

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