

MEDIA RELEASE



Wednesday 30 March 2022

Missed Budget opportunity to invest in volunteering during emergencies

Volunteering is central to Australia's economic and social resilience. As the ongoing flood crisis in New South Wales and Queensland highlights, the contribution of volunteers is essential to emergency response and recovery. Yet, the 2022-23 Federal Budget overlooks investment that would enable volunteering during emergencies and in their aftermath. Without explicit recognition of and greater strategic planning for volunteering, the resourcing announced in the Budget will be insufficient to achieve its aims.

Volunteering plays a vital role in crisis response and recovery. Volunteers and volunteer involving organisations have played a crucial role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, contributing to skills and employment, supporting mental health, improving the lives of people with disability, and providing quality care to older Australians. However, volunteering has not been strategically considered in response to recent crises, including in the development of coordinated, national natural disaster arrangements and throughout the Australian Government's response to COVID-19.

Chief Executive Officer of Volunteering Australia, Mark Pearce said, "Despite their importance to emergency management in Australia, volunteers are overlooked in planning and resourcing for the sector. This is part of a broader issue surrounding the omission of volunteering in workforce planning. It is also still unclear whether the announced skills and employment package will include measures for the volunteer workforce."

Volunteering Australia's Pre-Budget submission called on the Australian Government to invest in a nationally coordinated approach to volunteer involvement in emergencies. However, no new funding was committed to this endeavour in the 2022-23 Budget. A nationally coordinated approach that mobilises volunteers rapidly, safely, and effectively, would greatly improve Australia's response to future crises.

As part of this process, volunteering must be clearly highlighted as a policy responsibility in all relevant portfolios to ensure that measures to include and plan for volunteer involvement are comprehensive and consistent across government in future crises.

The Budget outlines some funding which will help support the volunteering ecosystem. Volunteering Australia welcomes the allocation of \$52.3 million over 4 years for Lifeline Australia to provide mental health supports as part of the implementation of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan. We also welcome funding to improve the availability of mental health services and treatment to people impacted by natural disasters and other emergency response events, including \$4.0 million to the Black Dog Institute to establish a new National Mental Health Service for Emergency Service Workers and Volunteers.

Volunteering Australia also called upon the Government to support a reinvigoration of volunteering in Australia. Figures from the Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS) show the proportion of Australians who volunteer through an organisation or group has been declining steadily since 2010. Volunteering has been badly impacted by COVID-19,

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with a 2021 study from the Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods finding that only slightly more than half (56.4 per cent) of those who stopped volunteering in 2020 resumed in the 12 months leading up to April 2021, despite the easing of lockdowns and social distancing restrictions in many jurisdictions at that time.

In last year's Budget, Volunteering Australia was allocated funds to design a new [National Strategy for Volunteering](#) in partnership with the volunteering ecosystem. In future Budgets, funds must be allocated to enable its implementation.

"Preserving the vital contributions of volunteering to Australia's community resilience increasingly depends on a strategic, whole-of-ecosystem approach to resourcing and planning. Targeted, coordinated, and sustained investment in the volunteering ecosystem is needed as a matter of urgency," said Mark Pearce.

[Volunteering Australia's – Highlights of the 2022-23 Federal Budget Measures](#)

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