

# MEDIA RELEASE

Monday 17 October 2022



Towards a  
**National Strategy  
for Volunteering**



## **New landmark research to guide the future of volunteering**

Volunteering Australia has today published landmark research presenting a full picture of volunteering in Australia as told by volunteers and organisations. The Volunteering in Australia 2022 reports provide insights into why volunteering is declining and how we can address the challenges facing volunteering and explore opportunities to reimagine a future where volunteering in Australia thrives.

As part of the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering, Volunteering Australia has been leading the Volunteering in Australia research project. This seminal research will serve as a core evidence base on contemporary volunteering in Australia, and will inform the development of the National Strategy.

“This major research project provides new and exciting insights into the contemporary state of volunteering in Australia,” said Mark Pearce, CEO of Volunteering Australia. “The two reports released today, undertaken by leading researchers from across Australia, are based on major surveys of individuals and organisations, and will provide rich insights that will inform the new National Strategy for Volunteering.”

“The research reveals that more is needed to help volunteering recover from the impact of COVID-19 and to reverse the long-term decline in volunteering. There are, however, grounds for optimism. This includes opportunities to get people engaged in volunteering for the first time and to support the return to volunteering for those who have participated before. The new National Strategy for Volunteering will provide the roadmap to reinvigorate volunteering into the future,” Mr Pearce said.

A concerning finding was that most organisations have recruitment challenges. Demand for volunteers was high, with most respondents (83 per cent) reporting that their organisations need more volunteers immediately or in the near future. 60 per cent of organisations reported that they expected to need more or significantly more volunteers in five years’ time, and only 8 per cent reported that fewer volunteers would be necessary.

“Our research shows that more volunteers will be needed and this anticipated increase in demand is concerning in light of the long-run decline in volunteering participation. This is an important finding for the new National Strategy for Volunteering to address as we explore opportunities to grow volunteering,” Mr Pearce said.

The new research indicates the challenges of volunteering when the cost of living increases. Amongst those who had stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 in 2020, the findings show that those people who reported financial difficulties were less likely to have recommenced volunteering compared to those who did not report financial difficulties (38.2 per cent compared to 49.4 per cent).

The research found the most common reason for not volunteering was work/family commitments, given by 40.8 per cent. However, about one-in-eight (14.7 per cent) said that they did not volunteer because there were “no suitable opportunities” and a similar proportion said it was because “nobody asked” (13.9 per cent).

“To address the decline in volunteering it is imperative to understand the reasons why people don’t volunteer and the barriers for those who have not returned. The research findings indicate there is a potential untapped pool of volunteers, which is an exciting opportunity to connect with more Australians as they start or recommence their volunteer journey,” Mr Pearce said.

The research also provides further evidence on the wellbeing effects of volunteering. Those who continued volunteering during the COVID-19 period reported higher life satisfaction than average, while those who said they had stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 and were not volunteering as of April 2022 reported lower life satisfaction than average.

“As the October Federal Budget draws closer this research further supports our advocacy for the inclusion of volunteering in wellbeing frameworks and budgets. If volunteering participation increases, there will be a wellbeing dividend. A thriving volunteering ecosystem means a better future for Australia,” Mr Pearce said.

## Volunteering in Australia 2022

- [Volunteering in Australia 2022: The Volunteer Perspective](#), by the Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods
- [Volunteering in Australia 2022: The Organisation Perspective](#), by a consortium of researchers from Curtin University, Griffith University, and the University of Western Australia

### About the Volunteering in Australia research

The Volunteering in Australia research is a series of four reports that will serve as a core evidence base on contemporary volunteering in Australia, which will inform the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering.

The Volunteering in Australia reports were developed by the Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods, and a consortium of researchers from Curtin University, Griffith University, and the University of Western Australia.

### About the National Strategy for Volunteering

Volunteering Australia is leading the development of a [National Strategy for Volunteering](#), which will be designed and owned by the volunteering ecosystem and will provide a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia.

The National Strategy for Volunteering project comes at a critical time. Environmental factors such as the changing nature of work, our ageing population, rising costs of living, and increasing digitisation all impact volunteering. These factors, and others, will have both positive and negative implications for volunteering. Despite the challenges facing volunteering, opportunities also exist to do things differently. Volunteers, organisations, and the Australian community have shown great resilience and adaptability during recent crises. The National Strategy for Volunteering project, including the Volunteering in Australia research, provides an historic opportunity to collaboratively co-design a shared vision for the future of volunteering.

### About Volunteering Australia

[Volunteering Australia](#) is the national peak body for volunteering, working to advance volunteering in the Australian community. The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies work to advance and promote volunteering in their respective jurisdictions and are Foundation Members of Volunteering Australia.

Volunteering Australia’s vision is to promote a strong, connected, and resilient Australian community through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

#### MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

Kylie Hughes

Communications Manager, Volunteering Australia

E: [media@volunteeringaustralia.org](mailto:media@volunteeringaustralia.org) | Ph: 0460 852 336

## Volunteering in Australia 2022

Volunteering Australia has today published landmark Volunteering in Australia research providing insights into the contemporary state of volunteering across the nation.

These new reports follow the early findings releases in May and August of this year and present the full picture of volunteering in Australia from the volunteer and organisation perspectives.

- [\*\*Volunteering in Australia 2022: The Volunteer Perspective\*\*](#), by the Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods
- [\*\*Volunteering in Australia 2022: The Organisation Perspective\*\*](#), by a consortium of researchers from Curtin University, Griffith University, and the University of Western Australia

### Key findings:

- **COVID-19 is having a lasting impact on volunteering.** The proportion of adults who volunteered through an organisation or group (formal volunteering) declined from 36.0 per cent in 2019 to 26.7 per cent in April 2022. Whilst there was a small increase in volunteering rates in the last year, the decline equates to around **1.86 million fewer volunteers** at the start of 2022 compared to pre-COVID-19.
- **Volunteering was declining well before COVID-19 hit.** Rates of formal volunteering have been gradually declining from around one-third of adults in 2002 to around one-quarter currently. Notably, the rate of youth volunteering had been gradually increasing – with an increase in volunteering amongst young people (15-24 years) between 2006 to 2016. However, participation rates for this age group suffered a big drop between 2016 and 2021, which includes the impact of COVID-19.
- **COVID-19 is having a lasting impact on volunteer involving organisations.** In 2022, the challenges associated with COVID-19 remain persistent for most organisations with 88 percent of survey respondents reporting that COVID-19 was a significant driver of change.
- **Organisations face ongoing challenges.** Other important drivers of change that were significant for organisations included shifts in volunteering styles (with 27 per cent reporting this was a driver of change), population changes (26 per cent), and technological changes (23 per cent).
- **Volunteering rates differ depending on where you live.** There are large geographical differences in volunteering. Analysis of Census data, which allows for detailed geographic analysis, reveals large differences in volunteering rates between areas. In 2016, the lowest volunteering rate was 7.9 per cent and the highest was 53.3 per cent. In 2021, the lowest volunteering rate was 5.1 per cent and the highest was 45.6 per cent.
- **The research reveals more about the nature and prevalence of ‘informal volunteering’** (volunteering that takes place outside of organisations). Those born overseas in a non-English speaking country were more likely to have undertaken informal volunteering than those born in Australia. Females and older Australians were more likely to have undertaken informal volunteering than males and younger Australians, respectively. For example, 51.3 per cent of females had undertaken informal volunteering compared to 41.5 per cent of males in the four weeks preceding the data collection period. Combined, over half (57 per cent) of Australians had undertaken either formal or informal volunteering over the relevant periods as of April 2022.
- **Who has returned to volunteering after COVID-19 restrictions varies.** Amongst those who had stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 in 2020 women were more likely than men to have recommenced

volunteering in 2022 (50.9 per cent compared to 39.3 per cent); those born overseas in a non-English speaking country were less likely to have recommenced volunteering compared to those born in Australia (35.6 per cent compared to 49.7 per cent); and those who reported financial difficulties were less likely to have recommenced volunteering compared to those who did not report financial difficulties (38.2 per cent compared to 49.4 per cent), indicating the challenges of posed by the increased cost of living in 2022.

- **People have a variety of reasons for not volunteering.** The most common reason for not volunteering was work/family commitments, given by 40.8 per cent of respondents. However, about one-in-eight (14.7 per cent) said that they did not volunteer because there were “no suitable opportunities” and a similar proportion said it was because “nobody asked” (13.9 per cent). This is indicative of a potential untapped pool of volunteers.
- **The research provides further evidence on the wellbeing effects of volunteering.** Those who continued volunteering during the COVID-19 period reported higher life satisfaction than average, while those who said they had stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 and were not volunteering as of April 2022 reported lower life satisfaction than average. If volunteering participation increases, there will be a wellbeing dividend.
- **Many people intend to increase their volunteering in the future.** More people (29.1 per cent) say they intend to increase their future volunteering than who say that intend to reduce their future volunteering (20.1 per cent). If these intentions accurately reflect future volunteering, there is likely to be an increase in hours of volunteering, but the number of hours are still likely to be below pre-COVID levels.
- **Volunteering costs most people money.** Just over half (54 per cent) of volunteers incurred out-of-pocket expenses through their volunteering role. Amongst volunteers who incurred expenses, only 14.5 per cent were reimbursed in full and 13.0 per cent were reimbursed in part. By contrast, 41.0 per cent of volunteers who incurred expenses through their volunteering role indicated that reimbursement was not available or offered. The remaining 31.5 per cent of volunteers who incurred expenses did not apply for reimbursement even though it was offered.
- **Volunteering is mainly undertaken face-to-face, but online volunteering is also prevalent.** Over two-thirds (69.4 per cent) undertook volunteering in person at the organisation they volunteer for, and four-in-ten (41.5 per cent) undertook volunteering in person in the field. Over the internet and over the phone were also quite prevalent modes of volunteering with 30.2 per cent and 16.9 per cent respectively volunteering using these modes.
- **There is a disconnect between the level of commitment that volunteers prefer compared to the commitment that organisations require.** Most organisations reported that they still require volunteers on an ongoing, regular basis whilst also acknowledging that volunteers are committing less time. Organisations overwhelmingly (92 per cent) indicated that they involved volunteers in ongoing roles performed regularly (e.g., weekly, fortnightly). However, a large number of organisations engaged volunteers in episodic roles for specific events or activities that occur once or infrequently (63 per cent), or in microvolunteering roles (28 per cent).
- **Most organisations have recruitment challenges.** Demand for volunteers was high, with most respondents (83 per cent) reporting that their organisations need more volunteers immediately or in the near future. 60 per cent of organisations reported that they expected to need more or significantly more volunteers in five years’ time. Only 8 per cent of organisations reported that fewer volunteers would be necessary. This anticipated increase in demand is concerning in light of the long-run decline in volunteering participation.

#### **MEDIA ENQUIRIES:**

Kylie Hughes

Communications Manager, Volunteering Australia

E: [media@volunteeringaustralia.org](mailto:media@volunteeringaustralia.org) | Ph: 0460 852 336