

MEDIA RELEASE



Monday 16 May 2022

Volunteers: Australia's backbone in times of crisis

- A new [report](#) reveals volunteers are essential to Australia's crisis resilience.
- This National Volunteer Week (16th – 22nd May), Volunteering Australia is urging Australians to celebrate the power of volunteering to bring people together, build communities and create a better society for everyone.
- Volunteering Australia is calling on everyone to 'wave your appreciation' for volunteers and thank the millions of volunteers around Australia.

With flooding, fires and the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, the past few years have undoubtedly been tough for all Australians. Holding us up in these times of crisis are over one million volunteers supporting Australia's crisis resilience, of which more than 400,000 work directly in emergency response and relief. Our nation's volunteers are the country's backbone during crisis and emergency.

A new [report](#) reveals volunteers are essential to Australia's crisis resilience. The Volunteering Australia research examines the volume and breadth of volunteers playing crucial roles in communities during natural disasters and COVID-19 outbreaks. This resilient and skilled workforce includes over 200,000 volunteers in fire services organisations and around 25,000 volunteers in State and Territory Emergency Service.

A further 200,000 volunteers are engaged in over 1,000 registered emergency and relief charities. On top of this, many thousands of often 'invisible' volunteers help informally and spontaneously to support communities before and after crises.

Mark Pearce is the CEO of Volunteering Australia and acknowledges how instrumental volunteers have been throughout the events of the last few years.

"This year's National Volunteer Week theme is 'better together'. Our communities have taken a big hit in recent times and yet volunteers are always there when we need them. Volunteers across the country have stepped up to help their communities through bushfires, floods, and the COVID-19 pandemic in a most practical demonstration of Australian community spirit. Volunteers contribute significantly across crisis prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery in many key roles.

"The aftermath and the impact of disasters are felt long after an event has taken place. Volunteers provide support to those affected by crises, including in mental health and suicide prevention services, which typically experience a surge in demand during and after disasters," Mr Pearce says.

Mental health and suicide prevention services are especially critical during major emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Lifeline engages 10,000 volunteers across Australia. In 2018, these volunteers answered 739,481 calls and initiated 5,840 emergency interventions for Australians in need of crisis support.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

Kylie Hughes, Volunteering Australia

E: media@volunteeringaustralia.org

M: 0460 852 336

MEDIA RELEASE



Monday 16 May 2022

The volunteer hours that have supported Lifeline’s crisis helpline increased from just under 20,000 per month in 2019 to around 24,000 per month in 2021, peaking at 25,682 in August 2021. These numbers illustrate the crucial role volunteers have played in supporting the mental health of Australians during the pandemic.

“Volunteering builds social connections and makes communities more resilient so that, when disasters hit, the community copes better. Furthermore, volunteering reduces social isolation, bringing people together and creating support networks where the foundation is based on looking after each other,” Mr Pearce says.

“Volunteers are essential to Australia’s crisis resilience, including in responding to and supporting recovery following natural disasters and ensuring essential service provision is maintained. As the frequency and scale of emergencies in Australia increases, a nationally co-ordinated approach to volunteer involvement during and after crises is becoming more pressing. This will help to mobilise volunteers rapidly, safely, and effectively.

“This National Volunteer Week, we celebrate the significant contribution made by all of the five million volunteers across Australia. Volunteering brings people together; it builds communities and creates a better society for everyone. Together, through volunteering, we are changing communities for the better.

“We encourage everyone to come together and support their communities by offering your time and skills to help others. To get involved and find a volunteer opportunity that suits you, visit GoVolunteer.com.au or contact your local State or Territory volunteering peak body,” Mr Pearce says.

National Volunteer Week (16th – 22nd May) is Australia’s largest annual celebration of volunteering. This year Volunteering Australia is recognising the volunteers that make our communities stronger, especially during times of need, crisis or isolation. Volunteering Australia is calling on all Australians to ‘wave your appreciation’ and share a photo of themselves waving their hand of thanks and using the hashtags #NVW2022 and #waveforvolunteers.

See the [Volunteering and Australia’s crisis resilience](#) report.

ENDS

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 to create a strong, connected and resilient community through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen 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.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

Kylie Hughes, Volunteering Australia

E: media@volunteeringaustralia.org

M: 0460 852 336