

Media Release: Tuesday 30 June, 2015

## Are time poor Australians abandoning volunteering?

New ABS data shows volunteering rates in Australia are declining for the first time in almost 20 years with 75% of people surveyed saying they feel rushed or pressed for time.

Results of the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014 General Social Survey released yesterday provide a snapshot of Australia's progress on aspects of wellbeing, such as life satisfaction and community participation, and reports that volunteering in Australia has fallen since 2010.

Volunteering Australia CEO Brett Williamson said the rate of volunteering was a key indicator of healthy communities and any decline in community participation was troubling.

"It raises questions about whether our social capital is being eroded, and if it is, why is that happening and how can we reverse the trend?" Mr Williamson said.

"The ABS report shows that in 2014, 31% of Australians volunteered compared to 36% just four years ago."

"The data shows Australians are increasingly time-poor with 45% of women and 36% of men saying they are always rushed or often pressed for time. When you're time-poor, something has to give and for some people, it appears that is volunteering."

"Despite the drop in overall numbers volunteering, Australians continue to be altruistic and to want to support their communities. The good news is that 5.8 million Australians over the age of 15 years generously spent 743 million hours volunteering across diverse activities in 2014. The ABS General Social Survey results reinforce how important it is to recognise and support people who give their time to help build safer and resilient communities. This is a huge contribution to our nation's social and economic well-being."

Mr Williamson said the ABS results show the fall in volunteering mirrors a decline in community participation across the board generally, including sport and participation in special interest groups, such as politics and professional associations.

"Volunteering Australia commends the ABS for conducting this vital research and analysis on a regular basis."

"The ABS General Social Survey, in particular, is a key measure of wellbeing and community participation in Australia that does help inform Government and volunteering sector decisions and actions."

"The next steps are for Governments at all levels to work with and support the volunteering sector to help remove barriers to volunteering, and for the volunteering sector to find ways to make volunteering easier and more accessible for time-poor Australians, as well as those groups which are registering lower volunteering rates."

"The key is for all of us to work together to build our social capital through volunteering so we can learn to understand each other better, demonstrate our compassion and build a truly trusting, harmonious and cohesive Australian community."

END.

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## Media Backgrounder: Key findings: 2014 ABS General Social Survey

The ABS describes volunteering as unpaid help that is willingly given in the form of time, service or skills to a formal organisation.

- Volunteering in Australia peaked in 2010 at 36%; in 2014 that rate fell to 31%.
- Both men and women were less likely to volunteer in 2014 than they were in 2010.
- Community participation also declined in other areas
  - Sporting involvement fell by 4%
  - Political involvement fell by 5%
  - Involvement in other social groups declined by 4%
  - Providing help to others informally outside the home fell by 3%
- The report notes that GSS 2014 did not collect data on digital participation
- 45% of females and 35% of male say they feel more rushed
- Females are more likely to volunteer than males (34% versus 29%)
- People gave the reasons they volunteered as:
  - help others/community (64%);
  - personal satisfaction (57%);
  - to do something worthwhile (54%);
  - personal/family Involvement (45.%) ;
  - social contact (37% );
  - to be active (35%)
- Information on volunteering rates for 15-17 year olds was collected for the first time. These rates were the highest of all age groups at 42%. The next highest rates of volunteers is people aged 35-44 years (39%) and 65 – 74 years (35%)
- Couples with children are more likely to volunteer (38%) than couple without children (29%) or people living alone (25%)
- ACT (36.8%) has the highest volunteering rates (36.8%) followed by S (36.7%), Tasmania (36.6%), WA (34.2%), VIC (32.3%), NSW (30.6%), NT (28.7%) and QLD (26.9%).
- 70% of people who volunteered said their parents had volunteered also
- People with higher levels of education are more likely to volunteer (41% of those with a bachelor's degree vs 22% of those without)
- The highest rates of volunteering are reported in the Sport and recreation area (31%) followed by Education and Training (24%), Welfare/community (21%) and religious groups (19%)
- 63% of people volunteer for one organisation, 24% volunteer for two and 13.7% of people volunteer for three or more organisations
- Nearly half (49.6%) have volunteered for more than 10 years. Half of volunteers contributed up to 50 hours of voluntary work, and almost one fifth (19%) reported volunteering 200 hours or more in the previous 12 months.
- Despite the reported decline, the ABS found volunteering and civic participation continues to play a very important role in Australian Society.

### About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the National peak body for volunteering working to advance volunteering in the Australian community. Its role is to represent the diverse views and needs of the sector and it promotes volunteering as one of the enduring social, cultural and economic values of our society. Additionally, Volunteering Australia strives to engender recognition for volunteer effort through support and consultation with organisations dependent on volunteers. For more information visit [www.volunteeringaustralia.org](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org)