

Key facts and statistics about volunteering in Australia

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Introduction

This information sheet below provides a 'snapshot' of key facts and statistics about volunteering in Australia. The source of each fact or statistic is provided as an end note. If you are seeking additional or more specific data, we suggest you look at our companion information sheet *Key sources of information about volunteering in Australia*.

How many people volunteer?

Formal volunteering

In 2010, 36.2% of people aged 18 years and over participated in formal volunteering (6.1 million people).ⁱ

The 2011 Census rate for formal volunteering was 19.4% (see notes).ⁱⁱ

Notes about the data:

*The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) measure of formal 'volunteering' includes people who willingly gave unpaid help in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group. It does not include people who did unpaid work under some form of compulsion (e.g. work for the dole) or as part of study commitments.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Information about the rates of formal volunteering come from two ABS surveys, which provide different figures for the rates of volunteering:

- *The 2010 Voluntary Work survey (which is the source of much of the material in this information sheet) was collected via a series of questions asked by trained interviewers from a sample of volunteers.*
- *The 2011 Census data was collected via a single question on a self-completed form from all households.*

Self-reporting is considered less reliable and tends to give much lower volunteering rates than interview surveys. Despite this limitation, the Census data is very valuable for comparing volunteering rates between smaller geographic areas (e.g. regions, local government areas or suburbs). The Voluntary Work survey does not provide data at this level.^{iv}

Informal volunteering

In 2010, 20% of people aged 18 years and over provided care to someone with a disability, long-term illness or problems associated with old age. 49% of people provided informal assistance to people not living in the same household.^v

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The 2011 Census found 11.9% of Australians provided care to someone with a disability, long-term illness or problems associated with old age. 30.2% provided care to a child other than their own (see notes).^{vi}

Notes about the data:

As well as formal volunteering, there are informal ways of providing support to others in the community. Information about the rates of informal volunteering also come from two different ABS surveys (see notes above).

The 2010 Voluntary Work survey measured people who provided care to someone with a disability, long-term illness or problems associated with old age. It also measured people who provided informal assistance to someone outside their own household, but not through an organisation. This includes assistance provided to relatives in another household, friends, neighbours and others.^{vii}

The 2011 Census measured providing care to someone with a disability, long-term illness or problems associated with old age. It also measured time spent looking after a child aged under 15 years (other than their own child).^{viii}

Who volunteers?

Gender

In 2010, 38% of adult women volunteered (3.24 million women) and 34% of adult men volunteered (2.85 million men).^{ix}

Disability

In 2010, 33% of adults with a disability or long-term health condition volunteered (2.22 million people), compared with 39% for those with no disability or long-term health condition (3.86 million people). 40% of adults with a self-assessed health status of 'excellent/very good' volunteered, compared with 26% for those with a health status of 'fair/poor'.^x

Cultural and linguistic diversity

In 2010, 28% of adults born overseas volunteered (1.44 million people). 25% of adults who spoke a language other than English at home volunteered (840,000 people).^{xi}

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Age

In 2010, the volunteer rates for adults by age group were:

- 18-24 years – 27%
- 25-34 years – 30%
- 35-44 years – 42%
- 45-54 years – 44%
- 55-64 years – 43%
- 65+ years – 31%
- Overall – 36.2% of the adult population.^{xii}

Labour force status

In 2010, the volunteer rates for adults by labour force status were:

- Employed full time – 38%
- Employed part-time – 44%
- Unemployed – 20%
- Retired – 31%
- Others not in the labour force – 30%.^{xiii}

Household type

In 2010, the volunteer rates for adults by household type were:

- Partnered with dependent children – 48%
- Partnered with no dependent children – 35%
- Lone parent – 37%
- Lone person – 31%.^{xiv}

Other characteristics

Volunteering rates also vary based on other characteristics including level of education, household income and occupation.^{xv}

Where people volunteer

City / regional

In 2010, the adult volunteer rate was 34% in capital cities (3.7 million people) and 41% outside capital cities (2.4 million people).^{xvi}

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Types of organisation

In 2010, adult volunteers worked in the following types of organisations:

- Arts/heritage – 7%
- Business/professional/union – 6%
- Welfare/community – 22%
- Education and training – 18%
- Animal welfare – 5%
- Emergency services – 7%
- Environment – 7%
- Health – 9%
- Parenting, children and youth – 16%
- Religious – 22%
- Sport and recreation – 37%
- Other – 16%.^{xvii}

Other ways people volunteer

Spontaneous volunteering

Potential ‘spontaneous volunteers’ are people who seek or are invited to contribute their assistance during and/or after a disaster, and who are not affiliated with recognised volunteer agencies, and may or may not have relevant training, skills or experience. Following Victoria’s 2009 Black Saturday bushfires, more than 22,000 potential spontaneous volunteers offered their help online, via the Go Volunteer website, and by a phone hotline managed by the Victorian Government.^{xviii}

Employee volunteering

‘Employee volunteering’ (sometimes called corporate volunteering) is defined as allowing staff to engage in unpaid work for a community organisation during work hours for a wider societal benefit, and for the possible benefit of the volunteer and for the corporation.^{xix} An Australia survey in 2011 found 24% of volunteers worked for an employer that had an employee volunteer program.^{xx}

How often people volunteer

Number of organisations

In 2010, the number of organisations that volunteers worked for was:

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- One – 58%
- Two – 23%
- Three – 10%
- Four or more – 10%.^{xxi}

Frequency

In 2010, the frequency of work done by volunteers was:

- At least once a week – 35%
- At least once a fortnight – 11%
- At least once a month – 16%
- Several times per year – 24%
- Less regularly – 14%.^{xxii}

Number of hours

In 2006, there was a wide variation in the number of hours of work done by volunteers. Close to half (46%) of volunteers contributed less than 50 hours per year, while a small number (8%) contributed more than 400 hours. As a result, the 'average' hours spent volunteering (136 hours per year or 2.6 hours per week) was well above the 'median' hours (56 hours per year or 1.1 hours per week). In situations where the distribution is skewed like this, the median is commonly taken as the preferred comparative measure because it is less affected by people who worked unusually long hours.^{xxiii}

In 2006, Australian volunteers worked a total of 713 million hours. The median number of hours worked by each volunteer, broken down by age and gender was:

- 18-24 years – 48 hours per year
- 25-34 years – 38 hours per year
- 35-44 years – 48 hours per year
- 45-54 years – 64 hours per year
- 55-64 years – 80 hours per year
- 65-74 years – 104 hours per year
- 75-84 years – 104 hours per year
- 85 + years – figure considered unreliable
- Total for men – 52 hours per year
- Total for women – 60 hours per year
- Total for all people – 56 hours per year (or 1.1 hours per week).^{xxiv}

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Why people volunteer

In 2006, the reasons why people volunteered were:

- Help others/community – 57%
- Personal satisfaction – 44%
- Personal/family involvement – 37%
- To do something worthwhile – 36%
- Social contact – 22%
- Use skills/experience – 16%
- To be active – 16%
- Religious beliefs – 15%
- Other – 20%.^{xxv}

Barriers to volunteering

In 2010, Canadian statistics showed the most common reasons for not volunteering were:

- Did not have time – 67%
- Unable to make a long-term commitment – 62%
- Gave enough time already – 17%
- Preferred to give money instead of time – 52%
- No one asked – 45%
- Had no interest – 27%
- Health problems of physically unable – 26%
- Did not know how to become involved – 22%
- Financial cost of volunteering – 17%
- Dissatisfied with a previous experience – 7%.^{xxvi}

Volunteering in sport

In 2010, the sport and physical recreation sector attracted the largest number of volunteers (14% of the adult population or 2.3 million people).^{xxvii} Of these:

- Males were more likely to volunteer for sport and physical recreation organisations (15% or 1.2 million men) than women (12% or 1 million women).^{xxviii}
- People in capital cities were more likely to volunteer (8% or almost 1.4 million people) than people in the rest of the country (6% or 0.9 million people).^{xxix}
- People in couple families with children under 15 years of age were more likely to volunteer (23%), than other family types (11-14%).^{xxx}
- People who volunteered for sport and physical recreation organisations had higher rates of participation in physical activity for exercise or recreation (90%), compared to other volunteers (80%) and non-volunteers (65%).^{xxxi}

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- The rate of sport volunteering by age group was:
 - 18-24 years – 8%
 - 25-34 years – 11%
 - 35-44 years – 20%
 - 45-54 years – 20%
 - 55-64 years – 14%
 - 65+ years – 6%
 - Total – 14% of the adult population.^{xxxii}

The economic value of volunteering

Estimates of the economic value of volunteering vary significantly depending on the valuation method used. The most common method is the monetary value of volunteers' time based on a notional hourly wage rate. However, different figures may be used for the amount of voluntary work being done, the hourly wage rate, and projections of future growth in volunteering. There is also a broader debate about how to calculate a dollar figure for the social value of volunteering (see section below for qualitative data).

ABS Satellite Accounts 2006-07

The contribution of the volunteer workforce was estimated in the Australian Bureau of Statistics *Non-profit Institutions Satellite Account* to provide over **\$14.6 billion** of unpaid labour to not-for-profit organisations in 2006-07. A revised national figure for the economic contribution of volunteers has not yet been released.^{xxxiii}

The Real Value of Volunteering 2013

Dr Lisel O'Dwyer (University of Adelaide) estimated the dollar value of the contributions made by Australian volunteers in 2006 and 2010, based on the average annual number of hours worked multiplied by the average wage rate. She estimated that:

- in 2006, formal volunteering (excluding travel) was worth **\$19.4 billion** to the Australian economy.
- in 2010, formal volunteering (excluding travel) was worth **\$25.4 billion** to the Australian economy.

Notes on adjusted value:

*Dr O'Dwyer also argued that because the value of volunteering is attached to a multiplicity of outcomes, one hour of a volunteer's time should be valued not just once, but several times (to account for other entities that benefit from the volunteer's time). Based on this reasoning, she estimated an **adjusted total value** of volunteering in 2010 at around **\$200 billion** (using a multiplier of 25% of the average hourly rate multiplied by four entities).*

Dr O'Dwyer has recently re-evaluated her findings and revised her calculations. [More information coming soon.](#)

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Value of volunteering in Australia 2010

Hourly wage rate 2010	\$27.45
<u>Volunteer time inputs</u> (\$ millions)	
• Formal volunteering	\$22,547
• Informal volunteering	\$52,609
• Travel time	<u>\$13,528</u>
• Total value of time	\$111,230
<u>Other volunteer inputs (use of car, phone etc.)</u>	
• Formal volunteering	\$2,863
• Informal volunteering	\$6,681
• Travel (other inputs)	<u>\$1,718</u>
• Total value of other inputs	\$11,263
<u>Total volunteer inputs</u>	
• Formal volunteering	\$25,410 (\$25.4 billion)
• Informal volunteering	\$59,290 (\$59.3 billion)
• Travel time & inputs	<u>\$15,246</u>
Total value of volunteering	\$99,946 (\$100,000 billion) ^{xxxiv}
Adjusted total (see notes)	\$200,000 (\$200 billion)

The social value of volunteering

Community involvement by volunteers

In 2010, volunteers were much more likely to be involved in other aspects of community life than non-volunteers. This is demonstrated in the following measures:

- Volunteers (82%) were more likely than non-volunteers (55%) to have attended a community event recently.^{xxxv}
- Volunteers (44%) were much more likely than non-volunteers (15%) to have ever provided a service or activity in their local area.^{xxxvi}
- 62% of volunteers agreed (either strongly or somewhat) that most people could be trusted, compared with 50% of non-volunteers.^{xxxvii}
- 82% of volunteers were delighted, pleased or mostly satisfied with their lives, compared to 75% of non-volunteers.^{xxxviii}
- People who volunteered through an organisation (64%) were more likely to provide informal assistance to someone outside their own household than non-volunteers (41%).^{xxxix}

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Level of satisfaction with volunteering

In 2011, the level of satisfaction among volunteers was:

- Very satisfied – 47%
- Satisfied – 45%
- Unsatisfied – 5%
- Very unsatisfied – 3%
- Not sure – 1%.^{xi}

Volunteering and happiness

Volunteering Australia has compiled the following facts about volunteering and happiness:^{xii}

- Volunteers are happier, healthier and sleep better than those who don't volunteer – doctors should recommend it.^{xiii}
- 96% of volunteers say that it “makes people happier.”^{xliii}
- 95% of volunteers say that volunteering is related to feelings of wellbeing.^{xliiv}
- Volunteering results in a “helper's high,” a powerful physical and emotional feeling experienced when directly helping others.^{xliiv}
- Just a few hours of volunteer work makes a difference in happiness and mood.^{xlivi}
- Sustained volunteering is associated with better mental health.^{xliivii}
- Altruistic emotions and behaviours are associated with greater well-being, health, and longevity.^{xliiviii}
- A strong correlation exists between the well-being, happiness, health, and longevity of people who are emotionally kind and compassionate in their charitable helping activities.^{xliix}
- The experience of helping others provides meaning, a sense of self-worth, a social role and health enhancement.ⁱ
- Volunteering is highly associated with greater health and happiness.^{li}

Importance of volunteering to the not-for-profit sector

There are approximately 600,000 not-for-profit organisations (NFPs) in Australia. The majority (440,000) are small unincorporated organisations.^{liii} In 2006-07, over 4.6 million Australians volunteered with the NFP sector (out of a total of 5.2 million volunteers).^{liiii} Around two-thirds of these volunteers worked for small NFPs that do not have paid employees.^{liiv} Volunteers provided 623 million hours of work to the NFP sector (equivalent to 317,000 full-time positions).^{liiv}

Role in community strengthening

This 2011 Victorian Government report highlights that:

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- Volunteering is a form of civic participation that creates ‘bridging networks’ (i.e. broad networks of loose connections to people from diverse backgrounds), which generate positive social practices that strengthen communities (by fostering positive social norms; spreading information and innovation; and providing the mechanism for collective problem solving).^{lvi}
- Volunteering mediates the negative psychological effect of disadvantage, with volunteers from disadvantaged backgrounds having similar levels of psychological well-being as professional, educated non-volunteers.^{lvii}
- Volunteering is important for connecting people to career paths and labour markets that are better paid and more stable.^{lviii}
- Volunteering builds collective efficacy by bestowing a sense of altruism and citizenship; developing political and negotiation skills; and inspiring people to work together to solve problems and take action to improve community life.^{lix}

Trends in volunteering

In 2011, the *National Volunteering Strategy* identified the following trends:^{lx}

- More people are volunteering but for less time than in the past. The number of adult volunteers almost doubled from 3.2 million in 1995 to 6.1 million in 2010. However, the median number of hours per volunteer has reduced by almost a quarter from 74 hours per year in 1995 to 56 hours per year in 2010.

Year	Number of adult volunteers	Rate of volunteering	Total volunteer hours per year	Median hours per person per year
1995	3.2 million	24%	512 million	74
2000	4.4 million	32%	704 million	72
2006	5.2 million	34%	713 million	56
2010	6.1 million	36%	Not collected	Not collected

- Growth in volunteering is uneven. Rates of volunteering have grown in sport, religion and education but have declined in community services and emergency management.
- More volunteers want roles that are flexible, or require shorter hours or a shorter term commitment.
- People are increasingly time poor and volunteering competes with greater work and caring responsibilities
- People are more mobile than in the past so volunteers are less likely to stay for many years in a single role.
- The frequency of natural disasters requires a ready supply of skilled emergency volunteers.

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In 2012, the *State of Volunteering in Australia* report identified the following additional trends:^{lxi}

- More volunteers are needed by the majority of organisations to meet the increasing demand for their current programs
- While the rate of volunteering among young adults remains lower than for other age groups, the rate for 18-24 year olds increased from 16% in 1995 to 27.1% in 2010.
- Senior Australians contributed the highest number of volunteer hours. By 2050, almost a quarter of the population will be aged over 65 compared to 14% in 2012. However Australians now live longer than they did in previous generations. These demographic changes present both challenges and opportunities for volunteering.

Volunteer Support Organisations

Volunteer Support Organisations (VSOs) undertake the following activities:

- provide information to individuals about volunteering
- provide a referral service that is responsive to the needs of volunteers, potential volunteers and volunteer involving organisations
- provide support to not-for-profit organisations and community groups in the recruitment and management of volunteers
- promote volunteering and volunteering opportunities
- provide these services beyond the agency's own activities.

You can search for VSOs by postcode on the Volunteering Australia website:

<http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/contact-us/volunteer-resource-centres/>

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- ^v *Voluntary Work Australia 2010*, op. cit., p.7.
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- ^{xiii} *Voluntary Work Australia 2010*, op. cit., p.14
- ^{xiv} *Voluntary Work Australia 2010*, op. cit., p.10
- ^{xv} *Voluntary Work Australia 2010*, op. cit., p.14 & 22
- ^{xvi} *Voluntary Work Australia 2010*, op. cit., p.18-19
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