



Pre-Budget Submission 2026-27

December 2025

Overview

This Pre-Budget Submission, drafted in partnership with the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies (VPBs), sets out the investment needed in the 2026-27 Budget for volunteering to thrive. It demonstrates how targeted, strategic investment in volunteering will enable the Australian Government and the volunteering ecosystem to achieve key priorities.

Crucially, the measures sought, while updated to reflect the current needs of the sector, mirror those set out in our [2025-26 Budget Submission](#), [Election Platform](#), and [Incoming Government Brief](#). This is a deliberate posture recognising that none of the initiatives or funding increases outlined were funded, or have been funded, in the intervening months and some programs are at a critical juncture.

Volunteering in Australia

Volunteering is vital to the nation's wellbeing. Australia's communities and lifestyle are underpinned by the contributions of volunteers. Volunteers are an essential workforce, spanning major sectors, including aged care and disability care; community welfare; sports and the arts; crisis preparedness, response, and recovery; and environmental sustainability and protection. In April 2023, 32.6% of adults volunteered through organisations across the nation.¹ Millions more volunteer informally in their local communities, helping neighbours and strangers, especially in times of crisis and adversity.

However, a myriad of factors continue to impact the ability of Australians to volunteer. The COVID-19 pandemic hit formal volunteering (volunteering undertaken through an organisation or group) especially hard, and while there are signs of recovery, it has yet to fully recover.² Volunteering is not free, and current cost-of-living pressures are adding significant barriers to participation. Over the long-term, formal volunteering has been in decline in Australia. As recently noted by The Productivity Commission, the formal volunteering rate fell from 36 per cent in 2010 to 25 per cent in 2020 and has yet to recover from the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.³ However, there are also indicators that informal volunteering has increased as shown in many of the State and Territory *State of Volunteering Surveys*. We are also looking forward to the results of the Australian Bureau of Statistics General Social Survey, which included increased volunteering datapoints, and will be available in May 2026 and will provide access to recent national data.

The National Strategy for Volunteering (2023-2033)

The Australian Government is a key enabling partner in the implementation of the [National Strategy for Volunteering](#). The National Strategy for Volunteering was designed and is owned by all members of the volunteering ecosystem after more than a year of co-design. Launched in February 2023, the National Strategy provides a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia. It provides strategic direction for volunteering to be effective, inclusive and, importantly, sustainable and is strongly supported in the ecosystem.

Funding for the National Strategy for Volunteering lapsed in June 2025, putting momentum, stewardship, coordination, monitoring, evaluation and development of the next action plan at genuine risk just two years into this journey.

¹ https://polis.cass.anu.edu.au/files/docs/2025/6/Ongoing_trends_in_volunteering_in_Australia.pdf 7

² <https://csmr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/ongoing-trends-volunteering-australian>

³ <https://assets.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/philanthropy/report/philanthropy.pdf> 99

Budget Recommendations

Our recommendations are:

1. Provide volunteering cost-of-living relief through an expanded volunteer grants program
2. Continue and increase funding for the Volunteer Management Activity
3. Fund coordination, monitoring and evaluation of the National Strategy for Volunteering
4. Invest in national peak body funding
5. Develop a national volunteer passport
6. Invest in child safe volunteering

About this Submission

This submission was drafted by Volunteering Australia in collaboration with the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies. It builds on our ongoing policy and advocacy work in partnership with the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies and their extensive networks, and incorporates feedback from the Volunteering Australia 2024 Stakeholder Survey.

The measures sought mirror those set out and discussed in our [Election Platform](#) and [Incoming Government Brief](#). This is a deliberate posture as none of the initiatives or funding increases outlined in this year's Budget and in the lead-up to this year's Federal Election were funded or, despite strong positive engagement with the returned Government, have been funded in the intervening months. Several initiatives are now at a critical juncture.

This pre-Budget Submission has been provided to the Australian Government via The Treasury. It has also been provided to the Department of Social Services (the Minister for Social Services and Assistant Minister have lead responsibility for volunteering), the National Office for Child Safety in the Attorney General's Department, the National Emergency Management Agency, and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Introduction

Volunteering is critical to Government priorities

Volunteers play an essential role in many Australian Government priorities, and we continue to provide comprehensive, evidence-based advice and support to Government in these priority areas. The ongoing work of Volunteering Australia and the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies is diverse and significant and supports the case for foundational investment in the volunteering ecosystem and its infrastructure. Ongoing policy work and on-the-ground sector support includes:

- Responding during emergencies and improving disaster readiness, recovery and resilience
- Child safety
- Contributing to productivity initiatives through nationally consistent worker screening in the care economy and other sectors
- Improving aged care and supporting health services
- Improving and responding to reforms and support for people with disability
- Protecting the natural environment and acting on climate change initiatives
- Community and high-performance sport
- Supporting rural and regional communities
- Protecting mental health
- Ending loneliness

- Youth engagement and employment pathways
- Strengthening charities and non-profits through initiatives such as the Not-for-Profit Sector Development Blueprint and Productivity Commission Philanthropy Inquiry

Volunteering brings social, cultural, and economic benefits to the nation. As identified during the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering, volunteering is a workforce issue.⁴

While responsibility for volunteering at the Federal level sits within the Department of Social Services, volunteers are involved across an array of sectors that fall within the remit of other Federal Government portfolios. Volunteers involved in community services, welfare, and homelessness represent only one fifth of Australia's formal volunteers.⁵

Other large sub-sectors, such as sport and recreation, and religious or faith-based each engage a similar proportion of volunteers.⁶ There are also hundreds of thousands of volunteers in environmental charities, mental health, disability and emergency services, yet the government portfolios for these domains do not have explicit responsibilities for volunteering.

In acknowledgement of this, the Australian Government has indicated its support for a more cohesive and 'joined-up' approach to volunteering policy by leading action 14 – *scope a whole of Australian Government approach to volunteering* – through the National Strategy for Volunteering Action Plan 2024-2027.

In addition, the Australian Government's 2023 Budget Statement *Measuring What Matters* aims to provide a foundation for Australia's effort to "lift living standards, boost intergenerational mobility, and create more opportunities for more people."⁷ It recognises that traditional macroeconomic indicators do not provide a holistic view of community wellbeing.

Volunteering is a uniquely good indicator for community wellbeing as it captures social connectedness, physical and mental health, sense of purpose, and connection to place.⁸ Recognising this, formal and informal volunteering were included as measures of social cohesion in the *Measuring What Matters* framework.

Measures to support volunteering are crucial to ensure the Federal Budget improves on the areas that matter to Australians and to deliver essential services that rely on volunteers. To achieve this, investment in volunteering should be considered across portfolios, underpinned by robust strategic and financial planning processes to ensure volunteering is adequately resourced.

⁴ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/National-Strategy-for-Volunteering-Discovery-Insights-Report.pdf>

⁵ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 42

⁶ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 42;

⁷ Commonwealth of Australia. (2022). *Measuring what matters*. Available online at <http://budget.gov.au/2022-23-october/content/bp1/index.htm>

⁸ Increasing the number of volunteers in Australia should be a natural outcome of the National Strategy for Volunteering if structural changes are achieved. Growing participation in volunteering cannot be progressed in isolation. Improving the volunteer experience and comprehensively valuing volunteering will pay dividends when it comes to increasing volunteer participation.

Implementing the National Strategy for Volunteering

Funded by the Department of Social Services and with development led by Volunteering Australia, the National Strategy for Volunteering is the culmination of a 12-month co-design process with individuals and organisations from across the volunteering ecosystem. This included state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies, volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, researchers and academics, volunteering support services, staff in local, state, and Federal Government departments, staff from companies with employee volunteering programs, enabling organisations, and members of the general public.

In August 2024, the first three-year Action Plan of the National Strategy was launched: Action Plan 2024-2027. It includes 22 actions from a range of stakeholders in the volunteering ecosystem, including peak bodies, government departments and agencies, and volunteer involving organisations. It also provides opportunities for individuals and groups to contribute in a manner that suits their volunteer engagement and objectives.

The National Strategy for Volunteering sets out desired outcomes for volunteering in Australia for the next decade. It provides a clear and compelling case, underpinned by robust data and evidence, for targeted and sufficient investment in volunteering and recognition of the role it plays in creating and maintaining thriving communities. Following the launch of the National Strategy for Volunteering in February 2023, a coordinated effort has seen stakeholders across the volunteering ecosystem consider how to collaborate on implementation.

The Australian Government is a key stakeholder in the volunteering ecosystem and an essential enabler of the National Strategy for Volunteering. Support has been received through funding to develop the National Strategy for Volunteering, as well as through government departments and agencies making commitments to implement the National Strategy Action Plan 2024-2027. A small targeted grant to ensure inclusion of at-risk communities, through tailored resources was welcomed in late 2024.

This Pre-Budget submission sets out proposals for how the Australian Government can support the implementation of the National Strategy going forward and what is already at risk due to lapsed coordination funding.

Budget Recommendations

1. Provide volunteering cost-of-living relief through an expanded volunteer grants program

To help address increased cost-of-living pressures, the Australian Government should adapt and expand eligibility for the Volunteer Grants program to reach the broader community, better reflecting the true costs of volunteering and the barrier to participation they impose. It is recommended the next round of volunteer grants allocates increased funding to directly target the cost-of-living burden felt by volunteers and volunteer involving organisations.

Investment: increase from \$10 million to \$11 million per annum plus indexation

It is recommended that the Volunteer Grants program is adapted to explicitly target cost-of-living pressures, with a commensurate increase in the amount of funding available, noting the program is not currently indexed and has not grown for over a decade. Adaptations made to the Volunteer Grants program could include:

- More categories of operational costs being eligible, including rent, necessary equipment and consumables, volunteer management salaries, licenses and certificates, and more forms of volunteer reimbursement
- Demonstrable, like-for-like increases in expenses to be made eligible. For example, allowing a volunteer involving organisation to apply Volunteer Grants funding to cover the increase in insurance premiums or rent, thereby removing that inflationary rise from their operating expenses.

While the funding envelope was not increased, we acknowledge and welcome that the 2024-25 program has been widened since our previous pre-Budget submission to allow insurance costs and a wider range of communication items, such as internet services and software to be eligible for funding.

Across Australia, volunteers are at the frontline of community responses to multiple crises including isolation, hunger and homelessness. Volunteers, and the organisations they support, help many navigate the challenges imposed by increased cost-of-living pressures. The Productivity Commission *Future Foundations for Giving* report noted that organisations engaging volunteers can achieve “better and more valued outcomes at lower cost compared with government provision”.⁹ However, volunteers, managers of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations often face the same pressures as the individuals and communities they serve. This can simultaneously lead to lower participation of volunteers yet higher demand for volunteer services.

An expanded Volunteer Grants program would further demonstrate the Australian Government’s commitment to addressing negative cost-of living and inflationary impacts felt across Australian communities. By providing direct support to volunteers and organisations, this funding could efficiently strengthen Australians’ resilience, wellbeing, and connectedness while helping bolster volunteer participation and retention.

Cost-of-living remains elevated and inflation is currently increasing again. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported increases in living costs for all household types for the June 2025 quarter. Households with government payments as their main source of income saw the largest rises in living costs. While the annual rise in living costs across all household types slowed in the June quarter

⁹ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/philanthropy/report/philanthropy.pdf>, 5

compared to the March 2025 quarter, all household types except self-funded retirees continued to experience rises in living costs that were higher than the increase in the Consumer Price Index.¹⁰ Cost-of-living and housing pressures increase the demand for many volunteer-driven services while also having a negative impact on the availability and capacity of volunteers.¹¹

While volunteering involves giving time freely for the common good, it is not without cost. Recent data from some State of Volunteering reports highlight the costs borne by volunteers. The latest research from NSW showed that in 2025, the average out-of-pocket cost of volunteering was \$15.45 per hour for volunteers in NSW, up 5.2% from \$14.68 in 2023.¹² The most common expenses volunteers incurred were costs for food and drink while volunteering, and transport, travel, and vehicle expenses. Other common costs included memberships, licences, and mandatory checks; tools, equipment, and technology; overnight accommodation; self-education and training; childcare; and uniforms and clothing.¹³

With half of all registered charities being entirely volunteer-run, not all volunteers are able to seek reimbursement for costs incurred while volunteering.¹⁴ Just over half (54 per cent) of all volunteers surveyed in April 2022 incurred out-of-pocket expenses through their volunteering role. Of these, only 14.5 per cent were reimbursed in full and 13.0 per cent were reimbursed in part, while 41.0 per cent indicated that reimbursement was not available or offered.¹⁵ Volunteers face competing priorities for their time, and many are forced to reduce or discontinue their volunteering in light of these expenses. Similarly, volunteer involving organisations have incurred elevated costs to recruit, onboard and coordinate volunteers at the same time as experiencing increased demand for volunteer services.

Volunteer grants are an effective means of stimulating volunteering in local communities and supporting the adaptation of volunteering programs. The existing Volunteer Grants program has been recently supplemented by the Strong and Resilient Communities Community Support – Small Grants for Volunteer Involving Organisations. Both measures provide welcome relief to volunteer involving organisations, however, there remains an opportunity to adapt and expand the Volunteer Grants program to specifically target cost-of-living pressures and acknowledge the true cost of volunteering more broadly.

Both programs focus on building capacity, providing training and expanding the scope of volunteering activities. These are extremely valuable outcomes and should be continued and improved, however there is a challenge when applicants have limited opportunity to apply grant funding for operational costs, volunteer reimbursements, professional volunteer management or increased expenses for necessary equipment and consumables. Volunteer involving organisations who are struggling to meet costs or demand may, paradoxically, have their capacity reduced if the work required to deliver new capacity-building initiatives takes focus away from daily operations.

¹⁰ <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/living-costs-rise-all-household-types> published 8 August 2025

¹¹ For example, the ACTCOSS 2025 State of the ACT Community Sector Survey found that 83% of community Organisations reported an increase in demand – up from 67% in 2022. <https://actcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/ACTCOSS-Factsheet-Demand-for-ACT-Community-Services-2025.pdf>

¹² NSW State of Volunteering report 2025 <https://www.volunteering.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/04278-NSW-State-of-Volunteering-REPORT-ONLINE.pdf> 50

¹³ *Ibid* 49

¹⁴ <https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/reports/australian-charities-report-11th-edition19>

¹⁵ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>

2. Continue and increase funding for the Volunteer Management Activity

The Australian Government should continue to fund, expand and support the Volunteer Management Activity, with a commitment to a further five-year program.

Investment: increase from \$6.6 million per annum to \$7.2 million per annum plus indexation

The Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) aims to increase opportunities for people to participate in the social and economic life of their broader community through volunteering. The program focuses on the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies developing and implementing strategies to build the capacity of volunteer involving organisations, through online volunteer management services, and breaking down barriers to volunteering for identified priority groups. VMA's recent successes are wide ranging across all states and territories from delivering national volunteering infrastructure, such as the refresh of the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, to programs focused on cultural safety and connected communities. In 2025, national VMA results have been documented by the volunteering sector in [a brochure explaining the impact of the VMA](#).

Volunteering Peak Bodies welcomed the inclusion of funding indexation for the Volunteer Management Activity in the 2019-20 Budget and remains committed to the program's continuation. The 2021-22 Budget allocated funding for the VMA at circa \$6 million p.a. plus indexation to 2024-25 (\$33.5 million over five years).¹⁶ However, additional priority target groups were added to the program in 2023 without additional funding. It is therefore imperative that further funding is allocated to enable effective engagement with the additional priority population cohorts.

A review of the VMA was completed in 2021. From 1 July 2021, the Australian Government commenced the distribution of up to \$33.5 million (excluding GST) over five years under the new Volunteer Management Activity to state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies across Australia.

Most recently, in 2025, there has been a full review of the VMA and its performance with a view to further building on the opportunity the program provides to the ecosystem. The Volunteering Peak Bodies welcome this report and stand ready to work with the Government on future delivery models and options that will ensure this essential funding stream continues to deliver for the ecosystem Australia-wide.

The VMA funding stream should be increased to address acute and ongoing cost-of-living challenges for the volunteering ecosystem and to support the vital contributions of the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies to implement urgent, nationally significant changes. Feedback from the sector on the Government's election commitment to a stronger, more diverse and independent community sector called on the Government to "support capacity building for community service organisations in grant management, data management, measurement and evaluation, reporting, sector leadership, finance, cybersecurity, digital and technology skills, and responding to climate change."¹⁷

¹⁶ Note: not all S/Ts have Volunteer Support Services/Resource Centres and so did not receive additional funding that was introduced in 2023 (Tasmania and ACT).

¹⁷ <https://engage.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/summary-reportfinal23-april-2024.pdf>, 17

3. Fund coordination, monitoring and evaluation of the National Strategy for Volunteering

Funding for the coordination and monitoring of the National Strategy for Volunteering lapsed in June 2025. Funding is sought for the continued coordination of the National Strategy for Volunteering, with ceased investment putting momentum, stewardship, coordination, monitoring, evaluation and development of the next action plan at risk just two years into the 10-year journey.

Investment: \$2 million over 3 years to fund coordination and key initiatives over the remainder of the first 3-year action plan and develop the second 3-year action plan

Launched in February 2023, the [National Strategy](#) provides a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia. The National Strategy sets out the desired outcomes for volunteering in Australia for the next decade. It provides a clear and compelling case, underpinned by robust data and evidence, for targeted and sufficient investment in volunteering and celebration of the role it plays in creating thriving communities. The National Strategy was designed and is owned by members across the volunteering ecosystem.

The Australian Government has a key enabling role in ensuring the delivery of the National Strategy and the imprimatur and support of Government at a strategic level gives the 10-year plan legitimacy. The implementation of the first three-year Action Plan: Action Plan 2024-2027 is underway. However, key aspects of this process are severely limited by lapsed funding. This action plan contains a suite of 22 actions co-designed to progress the National Strategy throughout its first Action Plan phase.

While engagement with the returned Government on this matter has been positive, in reality the National Strategy is at a critical juncture and is losing the momentum gained since its launch and the development of the first three-year Action Plan. To ensure progress towards the National Strategy's Strategic Objectives and the effective delivery of Action Plan 2024-2027, a coordination role is necessary. Throughout the development and establishment phases, this role has been fulfilled by Volunteering Australia. Coordination activities currently at risk or being ceased while funding avenues are progressed include:

- **Governance:** Providing secretariat to Governance and Advisory bodies, such as the NSV Council
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Tracking the delivery of the Action Plan through enacting the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
- **Awareness Raising:** Continuing to build awareness and engagement with the National Strategy
- **Communication:** Ensuring information relating to the implementation of the National Strategy is communicated across and beyond the volunteering ecosystem
- **Stewardship and Supporting Participation:** Encouraging others to implement the National Strategy and contribute to Action Plan 2024-2027
- **Review and Development:** Conducting the first review of the National Strategy and developing the second three-year Action Plan (based on the outcomes of the first).

The National Strategy is currently losing the momentum gained since its launch and the development of the first three-year Action Plan. To ensure the vision of the National Strategy can be achieved, and the investment to-date realised for Australia's volunteer involving organisations and volunteers, Volunteering Australia recommends urgently funding ongoing coordination.

4. Invest in national peak body funding

The Australian Government should invest in national peak body funding for volunteering. This requires broadening the funding base for Volunteering Australia beyond the Department of Social Services, which has Federal responsibility for volunteering, to other portfolios where intense advocacy, stakeholder access, evidence and advice at the national level are required to progress major reforms, sometimes over periods of months and years.

Investment: \$250k per annum per key portfolio partner

A national peak body with a policy remit as broad as Volunteering Australia requires commensurate resourcing to adequately support and represent the volunteering ecosystem.

While we welcome the returned Government's focus on relational contracting and more secure five-year funding cycles for community services and not-for-profits, Volunteering Australia continues to seek enabling resourcing from portfolios, other than the Department of Social Services, where policy, advice, coordination and ecosystem access is protracted and complex or cannot occur due to current limited capacity.

A key strategic objective of the National Strategy for Volunteering is to work towards a whole of Government approach to volunteering policy, consideration and engagement. While the Department of Social Services has Federal responsibility for volunteering and provides welcome peak body funding, volunteers are critical across an array of sectors that fall within other Federal Government portfolios. There is an increasing need to improve the financial stability of the not-for-profit sector and to fund sector peaks to support policy research and related advocacy in priority areas as informed by their stakeholders, particularly where issues are cross-cutting. Short-term project funding does not allow for organisational stability, growth and talent retention and, while helpful, it can divert energy away from core business and proactive advocacy.

Volunteers involved in community services, welfare, and homelessness represent only one fifth of Australia's formal volunteers. Other large sub-sectors, such as sport and recreation, and religious or faith-based each engage a similar proportion of volunteers. There are also hundreds of thousands of volunteers in environmental charities, mental health, disability and emergency services, yet the government portfolios for these domains do not have explicit responsibilities for volunteering.¹⁸ Data also reveals sizeable volunteer workforces in mental health (4.4 per cent of formal volunteers), aged care (8.8 per cent), and disability (4.7 per cent).¹⁹ This means that key government initiatives, such as *A Matter of Care: Australia's Aged Care Workforce Strategy*, *Australia's Disability Strategy*, and the *National Mental Health Workforce Strategy*, need to plan for the involvement of volunteers and consider how underpinning initiatives will affect volunteering to avoid unintended consequences to those volunteer workforces and sectors, and the people they aim to assist.

The private sector and philanthropic sector also engage volunteers, and it is acknowledged that investment can also be sought from these sectors. Volunteering Australia is pursuing these avenues. However, the magnitude and breadth of Australian Government policy at the national level means greater focus, including on dispersed funding at the whole-of-government level, is required in this space.

¹⁸ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 42

¹⁹ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 43

5. Develop a national volunteer passport

The Australian Government should fund the development of a national volunteer passport. This platform would aim to increase volunteer mobility in Australia and enable better planning through improved data collection. It should build on current initiatives already underway at the state/territory level, using a scalable approach, ultimately seeking a national solution.

Investment: \$1million to support engagement and coordination in the volunteering ecosystem

The Australian Government is exploring national screening and credentialing in a range of different sectors, from emergency management to current proposals by The Productivity Commission and The Treasury to create nationally consistent screening in the care economy (including volunteers). The challenge is to ensure that separate programs are not duplicative or incompatible and that ultimately other volunteer sectors can “bolt on.”

The Volunteer Passport measure was included in Volunteering Australia’s 2024-25 and 2025-26 Pre-Budget Submissions. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and Volunteering Australia have consulted on this measure over time and the NEMA is now working on a national emergency volunteering strategy in which this may feature. However, work on the passport component has stalled, and we reinforce our continued support for a single national volunteer passport or similar mechanism which has the potential to be expanded to other sectors, such as the care economy or, at a minimum, be compatible with other sectors and scalable in the future.

The case for a national volunteer passport is clear: onboarding of volunteers is often delayed or complicated by duplicative training requirements and worker screening processes, which are often not portable between jurisdictions. This can be a significant burden for organisations, particularly national organisations that engage volunteers in multiple states and territories. Improved data management and portability of volunteer clearances and skills are needed to improve the onboarding experience, increase efficiency, and better plan for volunteer involvement.

In our submission to [The Treasury](#) and [The Productivity Commission](#) on a national approach worker screening in the care economy, we propose using existing secure and largely accessible infrastructure, such as MyGov, for the volunteer passport. Many Australians use MyGov on a regular basis, and volunteering information and credentials could be accessed and managed in the same way information is currently uploaded, updated or shared via the MyGov NDIS portal or through the MyGov Medicare equivalent.

The development of a national credentialing process was supported in several submissions to the recent National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army) inquiry, and an additional recommendation by the Jackie Lambie Network, called for “a nationally recognised credentialing system to provide portable qualifications in disaster response, safety and leadership, with recognition across education and employment sectors.”²⁰

In addition, the National Strategy for Volunteering Action Plan 2024-2027 also includes an action to develop a national volunteer passport, a secure national online platform that supports volunteer engagement by hosting personal details, credentials and volunteering contributions.

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[https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/RB000689/toc_pdf/NationalVolunteerIncentiveScheme\(ClimateArmy\).pdf](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/RB000689/toc_pdf/NationalVolunteerIncentiveScheme(ClimateArmy).pdf) 55

A national volunteer passport should also be developed in consideration of existing state and territory solutions in this space. These existing and emerging projects can assist at a foundational level towards a national solution.

The volunteer passport initiative would aim to:

- Develop a volunteer passport and supporting app with consideration of existing infrastructure, such as MyGov, as a base platform.
- Improve mobility of volunteers: Irrespective of the platform, there is a need for a national portal or system to allow volunteers to upload and manage their credentials and share these with registered volunteer involving organisations across Australia in the same way information is currently uploaded, updated or shared via the MyGov NDIS portal or through the MyGov Medicare equivalent for vaccination status.
- The national volunteer passport should be developed in consultation with the volunteering ecosystem, including Volunteering Australia and the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies, to ensure the passport meets the needs of the ecosystem and interfaces effectively with existing and emerging federal platforms and state and territory-based solutions.
- Any solution to enhance volunteering credentialing should be fit for purpose for all volunteering sectors over time.

6. Invest in child safe volunteering

The Australian Government should invest in the roll-out of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations across the volunteering ecosystem; and list child safe volunteering in its next three-year action plan.

Investment: \$1.5 million over three years for the volunteering ecosystem

Child Safety is currently an extremely high-profile issue in the public domain, with a number of catastrophic failings in various systems, such as childcare. We have been advocating for consideration and inclusion of volunteering in the next action plan, as well as related risk mitigation and education for several years.

The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations set out a nationally consistent approach to promoting a culture of child safety and wellbeing within organisations. The ten principles give effect to the child safe standards recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and bring attention to general child safety and wellbeing issues.²¹

In 2022, 32.5 per cent of formal volunteers identified that their volunteering primarily aimed to assist children and youth.²²

Principle 7 emphasises the importance of information, ongoing education and training for staff and volunteers.²³

²¹ https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_recommendations.pdf

²² <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 46

²³ <https://www.childsafety.gov.au/system/files/2024-04/national-principles-for-child-safe-organisations.PDF>

“Staff and volunteers build on their knowledge and skills and evidence-based practice tools through professional seminars and memberships, supervised peer discussions, team training days and access to research and publications. This ensures staff and volunteers develop awareness and insights into their attitudes towards children and young people, and have a contemporary understanding of child development, safety and wellbeing. They can identify indicators of child harm, respond effectively to children and young people and their families and support their colleagues.”²⁴

Volunteering Australia works closely with the National Office for Child Safety (NoCS) within the Attorney-General’s Department on this issue and through membership of its Child Safe Sectors Leadership Group and related fora.

The importance of considering volunteering in the work of NoCS as it implements the principles should not be underestimated and Child Safe Volunteering should be listed as a separate and funded action in the next three-year action plan.

Conclusion

This Pre-Budget submission sets out the investment needed in the 2026-27 Budget to chart the course for volunteering to thrive in the future. It demonstrates how targeted strategic investment in volunteering will enable the Government to meet its key priorities. The measures sought, mirror those set out in our previous [2025-26 Budget Submission](#), [Election Platform](#) and [Incoming Government Brief](#).

Again, this is a deliberate posture recognising that none of the initiatives or funding increases previously outlined were funded, or have been funded, in the intervening months and some programs are at a critical juncture.

Our recommendations are:

1. Provide volunteering cost-of-living relief through an expanded volunteer grants program
2. Continue and increase funding for the Volunteer Management Activity
3. Fund coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of the National Strategy for Volunteering
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²⁴ <https://www.childsafety.gov.au/system/files/2024-04/national-principles-for-child-safe-organisations.PDF>, 15

Authorisation

This submission has been authorised by the Chief Executive Officer of Volunteering Australia.



Mr Mark Pearce

Chief Executive Officer

Endorsements

This position statement has been endorsed by the seven state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies.



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 mission is to support a thriving volunteering ecosystem in Australia by promoting and advocating for volunteering and providing leadership at a national level.

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The Centre for Volunteering (NSW)
www.volunteering.com.au
02 9261 3600
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Volunteering Victoria
www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au
03 9052 4524
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Volunteering Queensland
www.volunteeringqld.org.au
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Volunteering WA
www.volunteeringwa.org.au
08 9482 4333
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Volunteering SA&NT
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