



Towards a National Strategy for Volunteering

***Volunteering in Australia* Research: Early Insights from the Volunteer Perspective**

As part of the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering, Volunteering Australia is leading the *Volunteering in Australia* research project. The research project will produce 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 four reports will be based on:

1. A representative survey of the general Australian population
2. A survey of and a series of focus groups with volunteer involving organisations
3. An analysis of supply and demand for volunteers among organisations across Australia
4. A review of methods of valuing the contributions of volunteering in Australia

This paper is the first research output from the larger body of research for the *Volunteering in Australia* research project and focuses on the changes that have occurred over the COVID-19 period, bringing our understanding of the current state of volunteering up to date (to April 2022) and starting to identify the longer-term impacts of COVID-19 on volunteering. The full paper is available [here](#).

The *Volunteering in Australia* population survey included questions on the impact of volunteering, experiences of diversity and inclusion, past volunteering experiences, types of organisations and volunteering roles, reasons for volunteering and not volunteering, the people supported by volunteering, time spent volunteering, online/virtual volunteering, the future of volunteering, volunteer satisfaction, and more. This data will be explored comprehensively in the full *Volunteering in Australia* report on the volunteer perspective, which will be released later in 2022.

The survey of the general Australian population was undertaken in partnership with the Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods.

The rate of volunteering in Australia

The proportion of Australians who volunteer increased in the past year but is still well below the pre-COVID rate.

- It is estimated that in the 12 months preceding the April 2022 survey, 26.7 per cent of adults volunteered in Australia. This was a slight increase from April 2021, when it was estimated that 24.2 per cent of Australians undertook volunteer work in the preceding 12 months.
- However, rates of volunteering are still much lower than the 12 months preceding late 2019 (i.e., pre-COVID) when 36.0 per cent of adults were estimated to have volunteered.

Ongoing changes in volunteering during COVID-19

The majority of people who stopped volunteering have not yet returned.

- Of those who said they had stopped volunteering at some stage since the start of the spread of COVID-19, only 38.0 per cent had volunteered in the 12 months leading up to April 2022, with the remainder presumably not having returned. This is a very large proportion of Australians who stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 but have not yet recommenced.
- 40.0 per cent felt that their volunteering has decreased in the past 12 months; 28.4 per cent felt they increased the amount of volunteering they did; and 31.7 per cent felt the amount of volunteering they have done has not changed.
- Early analysis suggests that people who stopped volunteering during COVID-19 reported lower life satisfaction than those who continued volunteering. The results strongly suggest that the interruption in volunteering has impacted the wellbeing of those who volunteered in the past.

Demographics of volunteers

Gender, age, language, education, and employment status all affect the likelihood of volunteering formally.

- Women (28.6 per cent) volunteered at a higher rate than men (24.7 per cent).
- Older Australians (those aged 55 years and over) were more likely to have volunteered than younger Australians.
- The rate of volunteering fell between late 2019 and April 2021 for both men and women and for all age groups. For both men and women and all age groups there was either no change or a small increase in volunteering rates between April 2021 and April 2022. For none of the age groups had the rate of volunteering in April 2022 recovered to its pre COVID-19 rate of late 2019.
- Those born overseas in a non-English speaking country were less likely to volunteer formally than those born in Australia or those born overseas in another English-speaking country.

- Those who live outside of a capital city had a higher volunteering rate than those who live in a capital city.
- Education and employment status were also associated with the probability of volunteering. There were no differences in rates of volunteering by the socioeconomic characteristics of the area in which a person lives.

Time spent volunteering

Volunteers averaged 180 hours of volunteering in 2022, though many volunteered a much larger number of hours.

- The average number of weeks spent volunteering was 24.5 weeks, at an average of 6.8 hours per week. Combined, this gives 180 hours on average across the past 12 months.
- 31.3 per cent volunteered for 200 hours or more, and 10 per cent reported 450 hours or more over the previous 12 months.

Volunteering in the future

Those who had volunteered previously are much more likely than those who have never volunteered to say they are likely to volunteer in the future.

- Only 20.2 per cent of volunteers said that they are likely to volunteer less frequently, compared to more than half (53.3 per cent) of non-volunteers.
- Only 9.4% of respondents who had never volunteered indicated they were likely to commence volunteering in the future.

Volunteer satisfaction

More than nine-in-ten volunteers were satisfied with their volunteering experience.

- The vast majority of volunteers (91.0 per cent) were either satisfied (53.1 per cent) or very satisfied (37.9 per cent) with their volunteering experience.

Informal volunteering

Almost half of adults in Australia volunteer informally.

- A little under half of Australian adults (46.5 per cent) said they provided some form of informal volunteering over the previous four weeks.
- Women and older Australians were more likely to have undertaken informal volunteering than men and younger Australians respectively.
- Those with a post-graduate degree were more likely to have undertaken informal volunteering (compared to those with no post-school qualifications).
- Those who lived in a non-capital city had a higher probability of volunteering informally than those who lived in a capital city.
- Those born overseas in a non-English speaking country were more likely to have undertaken informal volunteering than those born in Australia.

About the National Strategy for Volunteering

Volunteering Australia is leading the development of Australia's first National Strategy for Volunteering in ten years. The National Strategy will be designed and owned by the volunteering ecosystem and will provide a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia.

More information on the National Strategy for Volunteering project can be found at volunteeringstrategy.org.au

Contact Details

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