

MEDIA RELEASE

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Welfare Reform proposal overlooks Australia's voluntary contributions

Volunteering Australia appeared before the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into the *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare Reform) Bill 2017* in Melbourne today, where we voiced strong opposition to the proposed change to Annual Activity Requirements for people on income support aged 55 to 59.

The proposed amendment seeks to force people aged 55 to 59 on income support to cease half of their activity requirement currently met through volunteering, in favour of job search or another job-related activity, like Work for the Dole.

Volunteering Australia is concerned that the proposed tightening of the activity requirements in Schedule 9 of the Bill could move people away from volunteering positions, which will have a profound impact on the volunteering sector.

Volunteering Australia CEO Adrienne Picone said, "The tightening of the activity requirements will do little to improve the job prospects of older Australians, who are an already disadvantaged and discriminated group in the labour market. The barriers to employment are multiplied if you are an older jobseeker with a disability, from a CALD background, are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or have a mental illness."

Volunteer Sharon Pellas, who appeared at the hearing via teleconference, described her experience of applying for over 60 jobs unsuccessfully, as part of Mutual Obligation requirements, due to her age.

Issues currently subsist around a lack of genuine jobs available, particularly for those in rural and regional areas, with data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) indicating that there is only 1 job available for every 10 jobseekers looking for paid work.ⁱ Volunteering can be an effective way to engage in society, acting as a pathway to employment, encouraging economic participation, building key work skills, and keeping people healthy and active.

"We are incredibly concerned that this punitive legislative amendment may move people away from crucial volunteering positions, that will not only have a detrimental impact on the volunteering sector, but the Australian economy", said Ms Picone.

Volunteering makes an estimated \$290 billion social and economic contribution to Australia annually. The reduced focus on volunteering proposed in Schedule 9 of the Bill, diminishes this contribution and will affect the service provision, workforce capacity, and long-term financial viability of Volunteering Support Services and Volunteer Involving Organisations, who provide essential services to the community.

Volunteering Australia reiterates our opposition to this Bill, and emphasises that there must be adequate recognition of the value of Australia's essential voluntary contributions, and that this input is regarded equally to that of paid workers.

Read [Volunteering Australia's submission on the Social Services Legislation Amendment \(Welfare Reform\) Bill 2017 here](#).

ⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017), Job Vacancies, Australia, February 2017, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6354.0Main+Features1Feb%202017?OpenDocument>, Labour Force, Australia, March 2017.

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