

Fact sheet: Contemporary insights about young volunteers

August 2026

Written by: Policy, Advocacy and Research Team (Volunteering Australia)



Contemporary insights about young volunteers

Introduction

To celebrate National Youth Volunteer Week and highlight young people's volunteering participation, this factsheet provides key insights about contemporary volunteering among young people.

There are multiple sources that generate information about volunteering participation and volunteering characteristics among different age cohorts in Australia such as young people.

The key source of national volunteering data is the official statistics produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics through the General Social Survey (GSS).

The most recent data available is the 2025 General Social Survey¹. The GSS is the most reliable official estimate of the number and proportion of people who volunteer formally in Australia.

For this reason, the GSS is used as a key data source for Government publications, such as the Measuring What Matters Wellbeing Framework, where it is used as an indicator for social cohesion.

This fact sheet also draws on other recent youth surveys that have included questions about volunteering, to compliment the GSS data and provide additional insights about the characteristics of young people's volunteering in contemporary Australia. These sources include the Australian Institute of Family Studies' Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children,² and Mission Australian's Youth Survey 2025.³

¹ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release>

² <https://aifs.gov.au/growing-australia/all-research/facts-and-figures/spotlight-young-australians-civic-engagement>

³ <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/evidence-impact-and-advocacy/research/youth-survey/youth-survey-reports/youth-survey-2025/>

Key takeaways:

- According to the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics General Social Survey,⁴ 9.5 million people volunteered formally or informally or both in Australia in 2025.⁵
- This is equivalent to 42.8% of the Australian population over 15 years of age.
- Volunteering rates remain steady, with more than 5 million people volunteering formally through an organisation in 2025, and 6.553 million people volunteering informally.
- We define young volunteers as youths aged 15-24 years. This group comprises a significant proportion of volunteers in Australia.
- The rate of formal volunteering among young people aged 15-24 years in 2025 was robust and no longer the lowest across all age cohorts, with more than half a million youths (562,000) volunteering formally, similar to 2020 (592,000).
- Young people demonstrate a deep commitment to volunteering, donating 40.3 million hours of their time in 2025, with 1 in 5 (19.6%) youths donating 100 or more hours.
- Recent data from the Australian Institute of Family Studies show that 67% young people aged 19-20 years and 23-24 years are volunteering regularly (weekly, fortnightly, or monthly).⁶
- Insights from Mission Australia show that beyond sports participation, engagement in volunteering is the most common way young people aged 14-19 years participate in the community outside of normal school hours.⁷
- Informal volunteering in 2025 remained steady at 29.5% (or 6.553 million people aged over 15 years).
- There were 22.9% of young people who engaged in informal volunteering in 2025, representing 784,000 youths.
- Taken together, these results highlight that young people continue to show-up, take initiative and support others through volunteering, despite facing key challenges including cost-of-living, mental health, climate change and the environment, housing and homelessness.
- It also demonstrates that many young people are eager to volunteer while navigating the challenges of secondary and tertiary education, and the legal and protective requirements for participation for those under 18 years of age.

⁴ [General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2025 | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)

⁵ Unpublished Australian Bureau of Statistics 2025 General Social Survey data, with double counting removed

⁶ https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-07/2606-Young-Australians-Civic-Engagment_1.pdf

⁷ <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/evidence-impact-and-advocacy/research/youth-survey/youth-survey-reports/youth-survey-2025/>

Formal volunteering in Australia

- Formal volunteering (volunteering through an organisation) remained stable since the COVID-19 pandemic, despite cost-of-living barriers, with 22.6% of people (5.007 million) aged 15 years and over volunteering formally in 2025.
- There was a significant increase in formal volunteering hours in 2025, with 618 million hours spent volunteering, up significantly from 490 million hours in 2020.
- 1-20 hours a year was the most common time spent volunteering formally, with 39.3% of people doing so.

Formal volunteering among young people

- Formal volunteering was robust among young people aged 15-24 years in 2025, with 16.4% youths volunteering formally, or more than half a million (562,000) and similar to 2020 when 592,000 youths volunteered formally.
- Slightly more boys volunteered formally than girls, with 15.7% and 14.1% respectively.
- There was a significant increase in formal volunteering hours in 2025, with 618 million hours spent volunteering, up significantly from 490 million hours in 2020.
- 1-20 hours a year was the most common time spent volunteering formally, with 39.3% of people doing so.
- Young people donated 40.3 million hours of their time in 2025, with 19.6% volunteering formally for 100 or more hours.
- Data from the Australian Institute of Family Studies show that in 2023/24, 67% of young people aged 19–20 and 23–24 years old volunteered formally on a regular basis (weekly, fortnightly, or monthly).
- According to Mission Australia data, beyond sports participation, 33% of young Australians aged 14-19 years engaged in volunteer work,ⁱ making it the third most common way that young people participate in the community outside of normal school hours.

ⁱ Items in the survey for volunteer work related to a sports club, charity, religious organisation, school.

Informal volunteering

- Informal volunteering remained stable since COVID-19, with 29.5% (or 6.553 million) people aged 15 and over volunteering informally in 2025.
- 22.9% of young people aged 15-24 years volunteered informally in 2025, or 784,000 youths.
- Girls were more likely to volunteer informally than boys, with 26.7% and 19.7% respectively.

Where young people volunteer

- Most Australians volunteered for at least one organisation in 2025 (66.2%), volunteered in person (95%), and through organisations in sport and recreation (33.3%), religious, faith-based or spiritual (22.9%), and community and cultural groups (17.6%).
- Recent data from the Australian Institute of Family Studies show that in 2023/24, young people aged 19-20 years and 23-24 years volunteered in sport (38%), church or religious groups (20%), youth services (13%), and community organisations (13%).
- Young people engage in volunteering through traditional modes and increasingly via digitally platforms.⁸

The reasons why young people volunteer

- Young people are among the many other age cohorts in Australia who are motivated to volunteer for altruistic reasons to help others or community, with the General Social Survey showing that 65.2% of Australians volunteered for this reason.
- Young people's volunteering is often caused-based and part of civic engagement to respond to social issues and to help positively shape their community into the future.⁹

The wellbeing benefits of volunteering for young people

- The recent findings from Ending Loneliness Together report about social connection shows that volunteering is a powerful facilitator of social connection among Australians including young people.¹⁰
- Young people who volunteer formally or informally are among the other age cohorts in Australia who are 62% less likely to experience loneliness and social isolation.¹¹

⁸ https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-07/2606-Young-Australians-Civic-Engagment_1.pdf

⁹ https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-07/2606-Young-Australians-Civic-Engagment_1.pdf

¹⁰ https://lonelinessawarenessweek.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/ELT_SOTN_2026.pdf

¹¹ https://lonelinessawarenessweek.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/ELT_SOTN_2026.pdf

- Volunteering can also improve young people's wellbeing as it provides purpose, fosters community connections and beliefs in making a difference, and builds professional skills and experience.¹²¹³

Barriers and challenges that may impact on youth volunteering

- Young people face many challenges that can impact on their participation in volunteering, such as cost-of-living, mental health and homelessness or housing instability.¹⁴¹⁵
- Young people aged 18-25 years of age are particularly likely to experience social disconnection, with 1 in 5 experiencing loneliness.¹⁶
- There are legal and protective requirements that organisations must meet to engage young volunteers under 18 years of age.
- Young people actively participate in volunteering while also navigating the challenges of secondary and tertiary education.

The recent volunteering trend among young people and impact of COVID-19

- The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 had a significant impact on young people's formal volunteering participation. The rate of formal volunteering among young people prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 was 28.8%, or 852,000 youths. The participation rate fell to 19.4%, or 592,000 youths in 2020 due to the pandemic. However, the 2025 data indicate stability in formal numbers over the intervening years, with 16.4%, or 562,000 million of youth volunteering formally.
- Informal volunteering rates have tended to be higher than formal volunteering, since this was first surveyed in the General Social Survey in 2019, and were less impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The General Social Survey showed that in 2019, 1.081 million young people volunteered informally, or 36.5%. This rate fell 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic to 27.2% of youths, or 830,000. In 2025, informally volunteering among young people was steady 22.9%, or 784,000 youths. -ENDS-

¹² <https://aifs.gov.au/growing-australia/all-research/facts-and-figures/spotlight-young-australians-civic-engagement>

¹³ <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/evidence-impact-and-advocacy/research/youth-survey/youth-survey-reports/youth-survey-2025/>

¹⁴ <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/evidence-impact-and-advocacy/research/youth-survey/youth-survey-reports/youth-survey-2025/>

¹⁵ <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/evidence-impact-and-advocacy/research/reports/an-unequal-foundation/>

¹⁶ https://lonelinessawarenessweek.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/ELT_SOTN_2026.pdf

