



Pre-Budget Submission 2021-22

December 2020

Overview

Volunteering is essential to the nation's recovery and its ongoing wellbeing. Volunteers play vital roles in disability, health, welfare and aged care services, sports and the arts, environmental protection, and disaster resilience, response, and recovery. Volunteering supports the mental health of volunteers and builds social cohesion and community resilience which will be much needed in the coming years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on volunteering. Overall, two in three volunteers (65.9 per cent)¹ stopped volunteering during COVID-19, amounting to an estimated loss of 12.2 million hours per week of volunteer work. The capacity to recruit new volunteers, adapt volunteer programs and absorb higher operating costs (due to COVID-19 safe workplace requirements) is constraining recovery.

Volunteering was facing challenges prior to COVID-19. Volunteering participation has been declining over time. The formal volunteering rate declined from 36% in 2010 to 29% in 2019, with the decline most evident for women. Volunteers contributed nearly 600 million hours to the community in 2019; a 20% decrease since 2014².

Recommendations:

1. **A Reinvigorating Volunteering Action Plan.** The plan would enable volunteers to re-engage safely, support the adaptation of volunteer programs, and facilitate the recruitment of new volunteers to ensure services and programs can continue.
2. **A National Strategy on Volunteering.** Investment in developing a strategic and whole of government approach to volunteering will address the decline in volunteering and enable key government-funded services to be sustainable.
3. **A National Youth Volunteering Initiative.** At a time when paid jobs are scarce, this initiative could mitigate against poor mental health outcomes for young unemployed people and support pathways to paid employment.
4. **A nationally co-ordinated approach to volunteer engagement in emergencies.** As the frequency and scale of emergencies in Australia increases, a nationally co-ordinated approach will help to mobilise volunteers rapidly, safely, and effectively.
5. **Investment in the Aged Care volunteer workforce.** Sector Support and Development funding within the Commonwealth Home Support Program should be extended nationally, and investment allocated to fund the Aged Care Royal Commission's volunteering recommendations.

¹ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/research/research-briefing-the-experience-of-volunteers-during-covid-19/>

² <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release#voluntary-work-and-unpaid-work-support>

Introduction

The impact of COVID-19 on volunteering

Volunteering was hit hard by COVID-19. Volunteering Australia commissioned the Australian National University to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on volunteering. This research revealed two out of three volunteers (65.9 per cent) stopped volunteering, with this reduction in volunteering being equivalent to 12.2 million hours per week³.

This dramatic decline in volunteering had significant consequences for volunteers and the capacity to meet need in the community. The ANU analysis showed that those who had to stop volunteering during the COVID-19 had lower life satisfaction and higher psychological stress outcomes than those who were able to continue. Those who continued volunteering experienced less loneliness.

Volunteer involving organisations innovated to continue to meet community need but continue to face ongoing challenges. Many organisations do not have the capacity to recruit, induct, train, and manage new volunteers during the complex, safe return-to-work environment. Organisations are facing higher operating costs to meet COVID-19 safe workplace requirements, and many have struggled to cover these costs and to adapt.

Ongoing volunteering challenges

Volunteering participation has been declining over time. The formal volunteering rate⁴ declined from 36% in 2010 to 29% in 2019, with the decline most evident for women. Volunteers contributed nearly 600 million hours to the community in 2019; a 20% decrease since 2014⁵.

Many of the problems that are surfacing in the sector are the same long-standing issues, but amplified – weak resourcing of volunteer management, poor recognition of volunteers, and an overall lack of strategic development and investment. As identified in the most recent State of Volunteering Australia report⁶, there is a mismatch between the sectors that volunteers are interested in and the sectors that need volunteers most.

The need and opportunity to rebuild

Volunteering is essential for the social and economic recovery of the nation. Volunteering can support the mental health and wellbeing of millions of individual volunteers as the country navigates difficult economic times. Research consistently demonstrates that

³ Ibid.

⁴ Formal volunteering takes places in an organisational setting.

⁵ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release#voluntary-work-and-unpaid-work-support>

⁶ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/research/stateofvolunteering/>

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volunteering can contribute to good mental health and wellbeing⁷. Volunteering also builds social cohesion and community resilience which will be much needed in the coming years.

Volunteers are a vital part of the nation's workforce. Volunteers play essential roles and enhance the care in disability, health, welfare, and aged care services. The sustainability of sports and the arts, environmental protection, and emergency management are all reliant on volunteer workforces.

Whilst there are many challenges, opportunities also exist – for example, to bring in new cohorts of volunteers and to redesign volunteer programs to be more efficient, inclusive, and responsive to future needs. The proposals in this submission seek to overcome barriers and leverage current opportunities.

We have an opportunity to do things differently. Volunteers and organisations have already shown great resilience and adaptability during recent crises. During COVID19, many informal community volunteers also emerged to support those in need. Now is the time to build on this 'community spirit', invest in the strategic adaptation of volunteering and ensure volunteering is effective, inclusive, and sustainable into the future.

About this submission

This submission was drafted by Volunteering Australia in collaboration with the State and Territory volunteering peak bodies. Several surveys of members and stakeholders have been undertaken during COVID-19 to understand better the impact on the sector and the concerns of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations. This submission draws on the results of these surveys and our collective expertise.

Budget recommendations

1. A Reinvigorating Volunteering Action Plan

Investment of \$5million per annum, plus a further \$11m per annum to return Volunteer Grants to their 2010 levels.

Reinvigorating volunteering will need to address the impact of COVID-19 and the longer-term challenges that the sector has been facing. It will require all elements of the volunteering ecosystem to play their part and work together. This includes volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, volunteer support services, volunteering peak bodies, partner organisations and governments.

⁷ See literature reviews in Kim et al (2020). *Volunteering and subsequent health and well-being in older adults: an outcome-wide longitudinal approach*. American Journal of Preventive Medicine.

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A package of measures - a national 'Reinvigorating Volunteering Action Plan' - needs to be urgently developed and implemented. This should be a partnership between the volunteering sector and the Australian Government.

Ideas for inclusion in this plan are:

- *A refresh of official information* - to ensure official information consistently refers to volunteer workers.
- *A 'good to volunteer' communications campaign* – to communicate to volunteers and organisations how volunteering can be safely undertaken, both continued and re-started, in accordance with Government directives.
- *Resources and reform to support volunteer recruitment and management* – to support the costs of recruitment, onboarding, accreditation, training, and management of new volunteers and streamline the registration process.
- *Better insurance protection for volunteers in a COVID-19 environment* – to address the risks volunteers are currently facing because of the pandemic insurance gap.⁸
- *Additional funds to support volunteer program adaptation* – to enable organisations to adapt volunteer programs digitally or in other ways to meet COVID-19 safe working practices.

On this last point, one way of distributing much needed funds would be to increase the quantum of Volunteer Grants. In the recent 2019-20 Supplementary Volunteer Grants round, 780 Australian volunteer-involving organisations received grants totally \$2.7 million. However, the grants were hugely oversubscribed. Over 5,300 community organisations across Australia submitted application requests totalling \$20.8 million.

In the last decade, the volunteering sector has seen an ongoing reduction to the quantum of Volunteer Grants. In 2010, \$21 million of Volunteer Grants was distributed. In 2020 (the 2019-20 grants round), \$12 million was distributed in total. The 2020 Budget allocated \$10 million per annum in the forward estimates.

Volunteer Grants are an effective means of stimulating volunteering in local communities and supporting the adaptation of volunteer programs. The grants, while only representing a small nominal value for the Federal Budget, make a large difference to the operation of small community and cause-based volunteer involving organisations and the volunteer workforces they engage.

We reiterate the importance of Volunteer Grants to local community organisations, note that there is widespread support for the grants and recommend that they are restored (at minimum) to 2010 levels of funding with ongoing indexation.

⁸ For further information, see https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19_Volunteer_Protection_Joint_Policy_Statement_final_19Aug2020.pdf

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This submission focuses on volunteering activity. As recent research has demonstrated⁹, the wider charitable and not-for-profit sector is facing many other challenges. We support the budget proposals of the Community Council of Australia which seek to strengthen the not-for-profit sector in the coming years.

2. A National Strategy on Volunteering.

Investment of \$600,000 would enable thorough consultation with the volunteering sector and support the development of a comprehensive evidence base (a State of Volunteering Australia report) to inform the strategy.

Investment in developing a strategic and whole of government approach in volunteering will address the decline in volunteering and enable key government-funded services to be sustainable.

We have long argued that the Australian Government should take a more strategic and whole of government approach to volunteering, articulated through a National Volunteering Strategy. This should include formal recognition of the contribution that volunteers make to our organisations, communities, economies, and government programs. Lead responsibility for volunteering at the federal level sits with the Department of Social Services yet volunteers contribute to public policy concerns across government and are part of the workforces in a range of publicly funded services including disability, health and aged care services.

A commitment from the Australian Government to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the volunteering workforce and to supporting the sector through major transitions is much needed. This includes sector reforms led by government (as in the aged care and disability sectors), demographic shifts and the changing nature of work, and future crises such as pandemics and bushfire seasons. In addition to raising the supply of volunteers, a strategic approach needs to examine the demand for volunteers and explore the roles that are appropriate for a volunteer workforce compared to paid employees.

Volunteer involving organisations and governments alike benefit from a consistent evidence base of the value of volunteering (including the return on investment) for budget allocations, grant applications and developing business cases. In some state and territories, governments and volunteering peak bodies have produced reports on the state of volunteering. Recently, this has included State of Volunteering Tasmania 2019 and State of Volunteering Victoria 2020, with a State of Volunteering Queensland in the pipeline. However, the national picture has not been updated since 2016.

A State of Volunteering Australia report would provide the evidence base for a National Volunteering Strategy and could include:

⁹ <https://www.socialventures.com.au/work/charities-covid-19-financial-health-check/>

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- A population-based survey to explore the characteristics of volunteers and volunteering.
- A survey of volunteer involving organisations across all sectors to understand the characteristics of organisations.
- Modelling to determine the value of volunteering to the nation.

3. A National Youth Volunteering Initiative

Investment of \$10million.

We know that young people will be particularly badly affected in the coming years experiencing higher levels of unemployment and subsequent risks to their mental health and to their future wellbeing. Research tells us that volunteering can help protect against poor mental health¹⁰. Particularly when paid jobs are not available, volunteering can provide meaningful activity and help develop skills and capabilities that can support a pathway to paid employment.

We also know that it is likely there will be a high demand for volunteers in some sectors – those that typically have an increase in demand for services during recessions (such as emergency relief and homelessness services) as well as those that are reliant on volunteers from high risks groups (such as older people) and who may decide or may not be able to return to volunteering in a COVID-19 context. There is an ongoing and high demand for volunteering in other sectors, such as environmental conservation.

A national volunteering youth initiative¹¹ could aim to:

- Provide meaningful volunteer opportunities for young unemployed people (18-25 years)
- Target young people who are at particularly high risk of long-term unemployment or who are from disadvantaged groups and areas
- Focus on providing opportunities in sectors that have high demand for volunteers

The wider goal of this initiative would be an important early intervention and preventative mental health initiative.

Developing this initiative would require a scoping exercise with partners from the volunteering sector, youth organisations, mental health organisations, governments, and others to determine how best to operationalise the program.

¹⁰ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report>

¹¹ The Group of Eight Universities 'Roadmap to Recovery' report made a similar proposal – the establishment of a funded national service program for young people. The 'Aussies All Together' program was described as an inclusive volunteering program to provide 'meaning, purpose and social connectedness' to those involved.

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In addition, we should be ensuring that the skills and experience that young people are gaining through volunteering are formally recognised and therefore better support a pathway to paid employment. This would need to include governments and the volunteering sector working with industry groups, unions, and employers to support and accreditation scheme for volunteering.

This relates to the idea of a 'My Volunteer Year' which would allow young volunteers to record and receive certification for their volunteering achievements.

4. A nationally co-ordinated emergency management approach
Investment of \$3million.

Lack of coordination of the volunteering response

The final report of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements recommended (Rec: 21.3) that the Australian Government convene regular forums for charities and volunteer groups to improve coordination of recovery support. The Australian Government has supported this recommendation and announced the establishment of a new, dedicated National Resilience, Relief and Recovery Agency.

In response to COVID-19, the Government activated the National Coordination Mechanism and convened National Cabinet. There was little engagement of the volunteering sector in the national emergency management response to COVID-19 despite volunteers typically being a key resource for surge capacity during emergencies. The interplay of national mechanisms with State/Territory government measures creates significant complexity in the operating environment of volunteer involving organisations.

The increasing frequency and scale of emergencies in Australia is creating the need for an effective, coordinated approach for the involvement of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations in disasters.

A nationally coordinated approach to volunteer engagement in emergencies

An approach is needed that aligns with both individual State and Territory and national disaster arrangements. This would provide greater clarity to rapidly, safely, and effectively mobilise both volunteers and volunteer involving organisations. A nationally coordinated approach should include:

- Establishment of a national forum, with similar forums at State/Territory level, to bring together and coordinate volunteer organisations that play a role in planning, responding to and recovery from emergencies.
- A joined-up approach to emergency volunteer platforms which can facilitate effective registration, management, and deployment of prospective spontaneous volunteers.

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An Australia-wide integrated network of co-ordinating forums (at national and State/Territory levels) would be made up of volunteer involving organisations active in disasters and include those working across disaster prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery activities. This approach could strengthen the contributions of volunteerism to increase community resilience across all phases of disasters by:

- Establishing guiding principles, best practice and resources for volunteer involving organisations working in disasters.
- Ensuring collaboration between volunteer involving organisations working in disasters, particularly when working across State and Territory jurisdictions.
- Recognising that local volunteerism is a fundamental resilience and recovery strategy and attribute of a resilient community that has the capability and will lead its own recovery process.
- Influencing a more planned approach to surge requirements in large and catastrophic events.

The development of an Australia-wide network (of co-ordinating forums at national and State/Territory levels) would be an effective, efficient and impactful solution to how volunteer organisations active in disasters can work together to best engage volunteers and provide positive outcomes for communities and governments.

The development of a nationally coordinated approach should be informed by the national principles for disaster recovery¹², the current Australian Disaster Preparedness Framework¹³ and best practice volunteer management.¹⁴ It should be aligned with individual State and Territory and national disaster arrangements.

5. Investment in the Aged Care volunteer workforce.

Funds required as per the Commonwealth Home Support Program Sector Support and Development funding model.

Volunteers are a vital part of the aged care workforce. The 2016 National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey¹⁵ estimated that volunteers are engaged extensively across aged care, with 83 per cent of residential facilities and 51 per cent of home care and home support outlets engaging the services of volunteers. Some services, such as Meals on Wheels¹⁶, are delivered primarily by volunteers.

Volunteers are not 'discretionary' – they provide care and support that is essential to the wellbeing of older people. Volunteers contribute in a qualitatively distinct way that cannot always be

¹² <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/national-principles-disaster-recovery>

¹³ <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/australian-disaster-preparedness-framework.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/national-standards-and-supporting-material>

¹⁵ <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/work-res>

¹⁶ <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/submission/AWF.660.00126.0001.pdf>

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replicated by paid staff, contributing through activities such as respite care assistance, planned group activity assistance, companionship and befriending.

While volunteers are an important part of the aged care workforce, the management of volunteers is a specialised form of management and is not equivalent to the management of paid staff. Ongoing sector development and capacity building is required to ensure best practices in volunteer management are being used. This is one of the many reasons for why it is essential to ensure the right policy settings and funding arrangements are in place, which do not overlook the role of volunteering into the future.

Currently Volunteering SA&NT and Volunteering Tasmania provide sector capacity building and support to Volunteer Involving Organisations, funded by the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP). This funding enables these volunteering peak bodies to support managers of volunteers and other staff involved in volunteer programs in service provider organisations, with volunteer management training using the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement as a framework. This is one of the best means of ensuring safe and effective volunteer management practices are adopted.

We recommend that volunteering support be covered nationally in the CHSP Sector Support and Development Funding, and that this funding flow to each of the State-based Volunteering Peak Bodies, who are the experts in volunteering to ensure the highest quality of aged care is available in all communities in Australia.

Funds as determined by the Aged Care Royal Commission.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety is due to report by 26 February 2021. Volunteering Australia, with the State and Territory peak volunteering bodies, made a submission¹⁷ to the Royal Commission to highlight the importance of volunteers to the aged care workforce. The draft report¹⁸ of the Royal Commission included a recommendation (Recommendation 51) on the role of volunteers.

Recommendation 51: Volunteers and Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme

From 1 July 2021, the Australian Government (and, from 1 July 2023, the Australian Aged Care Commission) should promote volunteers and volunteering in aged care to support older people to live a meaningful and dignified life and supplement the support and care provided to them through the aged care system, whether in their own home or in a residential care home, by:

- a) *increasing the funding to the Volunteer Grants under the Families and Communities Program – Volunteer Grants Activity in 2021–22 to support organisations and*

¹⁷ https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Volunteering-Australia-submission-to-the-Aged-Care-Royal-Commission_Jul-2020.pdf

¹⁸ <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-10/RCD.9999.0540.0001.pdf>

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community groups to recruit, train and support volunteers who provide assistance to older people

- b) requiring, as a condition of approval and continuing approval of all approved providers, that all aged care services, which use volunteers to deliver in-house co-ordinated and supervised volunteer programs, must:

 - i) assign the role of volunteer coordination to a designated staff member*
 - ii) provide induction training to volunteers and regular ongoing training, to volunteers in caring for and supporting older people, complaints management and the reporting of abuse and neglect*
 - iii) retain evidence of provision of such training**
- c) providing additional funding, and expanding the Community Visitor Scheme and changing its name to the Aged Care Volunteer Visitor Scheme, to provide extended support for older people receiving aged care who are at risk of social isolation.*

Funding should be allocated for the Aged Care Royal Commission's volunteering recommendations in Budget 2021-22.

Other priority issues

This submission articulates five recommendations for consideration in the 2021-22 Federal Budget. A number of other issues are important for the sustainability of volunteering into the future and merit highlighting here.

Volunteer Management Activity

At the time of writing, the sector is awaiting the outcome of the Volunteer Management Activity review and consultation.

Volunteering Australia welcomed the inclusion of funding indexation for the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) in the 2019-20 budget, and a commitment to the program's continuation.

The 2020-21 Budget included a commitment from the Government to continue to fund Volunteering Support Services into the forward estimates (\$6.301 million for 2021-22, \$6.358 million for 2022-23 and \$6.440 million for 2023-24). Funding in the 2021-22 Budget should extend this into forward estimates through to 2024-25.

Equal Remuneration Order/Social and Community Services Supplementation

We understand there is a commitment across government to fund the ERO/SACS supplementation for grants ongoing. In our previous Pre-Budget Submission (December 2019) and in other advocacy work, Volunteering Australia has called on the Australian Government to address this looming funding shortfall facing the community sector.

In the 2020-21 Budget, from 1 July 2021 \$44 million a year has been allocated to top up the base funding for grant programs impacted by the cessation of the Social and Community Services Pay Equity Special Account. The funding will go to support more than 460

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organisations, under around 720 grant agreements, delivering services to around one million people across Australia.

There was also funding in the Attorney-General's portfolio of around \$29 million a year for ongoing base funding to be increased to replace the supplementation for family law services funded under the Family Relationship Services Program.

Before the Budget, supplementation funding was also included for disability services transitioning through to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (estimated at \$330 million a year) as part of the NDIS pricing structure, as well as in funding agreements for community legal centres and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services under the National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreements. It is vital that in the 2021-22 Budget, this funding is maintained.

Employment Services

The Commonwealth Government has committed to reforming employment services to ensure they deliver better services to job seekers and employers and a better system for providers. The transition to the New Employment Service Model will take place from July 2022. The Department of Education, Skills and Employment are currently consulting on the 'Enhanced Services payment model.'

We have argued in our consultation response to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment that they should urgently review the extent and cost of the placement services currently provided by Volunteering Support Services but attributed to jobactive providers.

Volunteering Support Services play a vital role in assisting many people to satisfy their mutual obligation requirements through helping them to find a volunteer role with pre-approved Volunteer Involving Organisations. However, Volunteering Support Services receive no funding for performing this function.

The New Employment Service Model, and the new employment service payment model, should delineate the responsibilities of Volunteering Support Services and jobactive providers and ensure each is remunerated for the services provided.

Disability Services

Volunteers play a vital role in disability services and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Volunteering is time freely given, but enabling volunteering is not free. Like paid workers, volunteers need induction, training and ongoing management. Volunteers need to be considered strategically in workforce planning if disability services are to meet the needs and aspirations of people with disability. In our submission¹⁹ to the National Disability Strategy, we argued that volunteers need to be considered strategically in

¹⁹ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Submission-to-the-National-Disability-Strategy-FINAL.pdf>

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workforce planning if disability services are to meet the needs and aspirations of people with disability. In the interim report²⁰ of the Disability Royal Commission (Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability), the commission has heard evidence about the involvement of volunteers in services and support to people with disability.

It is imperative that the role of volunteers in the disability services workforce is recognised and resourced in this and future Budgets, in the National Disability Strategy and in the Government's response to the Disability Royal Commission.

Conclusion

Volunteers are the often-invisible workforce that supports the nation every day and through challenging times. But volunteering is struggling; because of the ongoing impact of COVID19 and longer-term trends which are seeing formal volunteering rates in decline. We need to reinvigorate volunteering for the nation's social and economic recovery. Governments have a distinct and vital role to play in this, through providing strategic leadership and investing in initiatives and infrastructure that will enable volunteering to thrive. The 2020 federal Budget should invest in:

1. **A Reinvigorating Volunteering Action Plan.** The plan would enable volunteers to re-engage safely, support the adaptation of volunteer programs, and facilitate the recruitment of new volunteers to ensure services and programs can continue.
2. **A National Strategy on Volunteering.** Investment in developing a strategic and whole of government approach in volunteering will address the decline in volunteering and enable key government-funded services to be sustainable.
3. **A National Youth Volunteering Initiative.** At a time when paid jobs are scarce, this initiative could mitigate against poor mental health outcomes for young unemployed people and support pathways to paid employment.
4. **A nationally co-ordinated approach to volunteer engagement in emergencies.** As the frequency and scale of emergencies in Australia increases, a nationally co-ordinated approach will help to mobilise volunteers rapidly, safely, and effectively.
5. **Investment in the Aged Care volunteer workforce.** Sector Support and Development funding within the Commonwealth Home Support Program should be extended nationally, and investment allocated to fund the Aged Care Royal Commission's volunteer recommendations.

²⁰ <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2020-10/Interim%20Report.pdf>

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Authorisation

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



Mr Mark Pearce
Chief Executive Officer

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 vision is to promote strong, connected communities through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, promote and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

Endorsements

This position statement has been endorsed by the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies.



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