

Social Policy Compendium

Introduction

The Social Policy Compendium is a series of position statements of Volunteering Australia's stance on particular volunteering related issues, to provide stakeholders with information and practical assistance in the formation of their own policy statements, and to support the sector.

The Social Policy Compendium aims to communicate the principles that underpin the work of Volunteering Australia. These position statements are evidence-based and reflect best-practice in volunteering. Evidence is drawn from local, national and international sources, as well as feedback from extensive consultation.

The position statements will be reviewed regularly in accordance with Volunteering Australia's Strategic Plan 2017-2020.

About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering. We work to advance volunteering in the Australian community.

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

We work collectively with the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies to deliver national, state/territory and local volunteering programs and initiatives in accordance with the Government's priorities.

Definition of Volunteering

Volunteering Australia reviewed the definition of volunteering in 2015, in consultation with the key stakeholders. The review considered the evolution of volunteering to include both formal and informal volunteering. The old definition excluded volunteering activities such as informal caring and corporate volunteering. It also accounted for the data gap with emergency services personnel, sport, and other informal volunteers excluded from non-profit organisations or projects, but still classified as volunteers. The current Volunteering Australia definition is more closely aligned with the United Nations definition of volunteering, which is much broader in scope:

"Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain."ⁱ

National Standards for Volunteer Involvement (2015)

The *National Standards for Volunteer Involvement* are recognised in Australia as the best-practice guide for volunteer participation. The National Standards have been developed in consultation with the volunteering sector to support the involvement of volunteers and act as a resource for organisations in which volunteers are involved. They are a best-practice framework for organisations to consider the role of volunteers within their organisations and cover the impact effective volunteer involvement can have on achieving strategic goals.

The advice provided by the *National Standards for Volunteer Involvement* state that volunteers should be given information about how to make a complaint or raise a concern within an organisation and to relevant external bodies.

In addition, the standards advise that grievances from volunteers should be managed consistently, transparently, equitably and in line with the principles of natural justice.

The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement are the intellectual property of Volunteering Australia. As the owners of the Standards, Volunteering Australia has endorsed its Foundation Members, the State and Territory Peak Bodies for Volunteering, as being the sole organisations authorised to deliver training and develop resources on the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement. Any unauthorised use of the Standards or commercial exploitation is strictly prohibited.

What is the economic contribution of volunteers to Australian society?

Volunteering plays a critical role in Australia's national identity. Dr Lisel O'Dwyer of Flinders University has estimated the annual economic and social contribution of volunteering in Australia at \$290 billion.ⁱⁱ Volunteering continues to engage many Australians in increasingly diverse and significant ways in society. Recent data also indicates there are 5.8 million Australians, or 31 per cent of the population who engage in formal volunteering activities and programs.ⁱⁱⁱ

Replacing Paid Staff with Volunteers

It is against Fair Work regulations to deploy a volunteer in a position that should be undertaken by a paid staff member. In addition, any work that exceeds the definition of "time willingly given, for the common good and without financial gain", would contradict the definition of a voluntary role.

How many hours should an individual volunteer per week?

No voluntary role should exceed 16 hours per week, unless the individual volunteer opts to undertake more than this.

Insurance

Volunteers, unlike paid employees, are not covered by award conditions or workplace agreements. However volunteers deserve the same support and protection provided to paid employees. Volunteers are protected by a mix of legislation and insurance coverage, and the onus is on Volunteer Involving Organisations to provide adequate and appropriate cover to protect all parties involved in the management and delivery of services, including volunteers, paid employees, boards and management committees, and clients.

It is the view of Volunteering Australia that all Volunteer Involving Organisations should have appropriate and adequate insurance cover for their volunteers, including public liability and volunteer personal accident insurance. Organisations should ensure that exposure to liability for all parties is limited.

Volunteering Australia also believes that volunteers have a right to know what insurance cover is provided by the organisation's insurance policies and recommends that organisations make this information freely available.

Code of Practice

Volunteering Australia recommends the provision of a Code of Practice in Volunteer Involving Organisations as good practice. A Code of Practice should clearly outline the organisation's relationship with and commitment to its volunteers.

Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC)

The ACNC plays an important role in improving the public's awareness and understanding of the charities and not-for-profits sector, and also plays a critical role in reducing the red tape and unnecessary regulatory obligations in the sector.

Aged Care

Volunteers make up a substantial portion of the aged care workforce, delivering frontline services and ancillary support in aged care and residential settings.

The social capital derived from volunteer engagement in residential settings is similarly of great benefit. Volunteering Australia stresses that volunteers can assist people in residential settings by developing meaningful relationships, and reducing isolation.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

It is important to recognise the critical role the volunteer workforce plays in the delivery of key NDIS programs, supports, and services. Volunteering Australia believes that to ensure that the NDIS adequately recognises and resources Volunteer Involving Organisations, Volunteering Support Services and volunteers.

Education

Volunteering Australia emphasises that volunteering can improve educational outcomes for young people, provide a pathway toward educational success and a means to prepare for employment, and therefore should be embedded in the Australian Curriculum.

Employment

Volunteering Australia believes volunteering encourages economic participation, builds work skills, and is a genuine pathway to employment.

Volunteering Australia's *State of Volunteering in Australia 2016* report identified that there needs to be more recognition of the "economic impact of the contribution of volunteering".^{iv}

Mutual Obligation

While Volunteering Australia is pleased to see more people engaged in the volunteering sector, volunteering should be an end unto itself. Those engaged in volunteering ideally should be doing so of their own free will, rather than being forced to as part of an activity requirement.

Volunteering Australia is pleased to see that volunteering has been included as a recommended activity, providing people with the *option* to volunteer and satisfy their activity requirements. The flow on effects will be positive for Volunteer Involving Organisations. However, we reiterate that volunteering should be done out of free will.

Work for the Dole

Volunteering Australia emphasises that making people engage in programs such as Work for the Dole, does little to improve future job prospects. Furthermore, forcing people to engage in programs under some form of compulsion do not meet the definition of "time willingly given, for the common good and without financial gain".

People with Disability

Volunteering is critically important for people with disability, to engage people with barriers more inclusively into society, either through volunteering as an end unto itself, or as a pathway to employment. Including people with disability in volunteering activities is essential to building social capital and allowing for community inclusion. Volunteers with disability are unique in that they can provide an extra social connection, genuine relationships and the value of lived experiences. Volunteering can also provide an opportunity for people with disability, who may be precluded from certain activities, to become more engaged with the community.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities

Volunteerism has profound social and cultural effects for local communities, and can assist with the integration and settlement of new migrants. It contributes toward the inclusion of migrant communities by fostering community

engagement. Volunteering encourages groups to stay active, improve English language skills, connect with their local communities, and provides an important step toward improving multicultural engagement. For people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, forming relationships with people from a similar cultural background can also be of profound benefit, and volunteering is an opportune way to do this.

Older Volunteers

Volunteering can provide additional linkages for older Australians to engage with their local community, thereby reducing social isolation.

Volunteering can also be an effective way for older Australians to engage in society, acting as a pathway back to employment, and a way to keep people healthy and active.

Mental Health Consumers

Volunteering can provide additional linkages for mental health consumers to engage with their local community, thereby reducing social isolation.

Spontaneous emergency volunteers

These are people who seek or are invited to contribute their assistance before, during and/or after an emergency. They are encouraged to do so through an affiliated existing, recognised response or recovery agency, who can assist in the areas of training, and building skills and experience.

Voluntourism

Voluntourism is a combination of volunteering and tourism, and can be a popular form of international travel that allows individuals to engage in volunteering abroad. While volunteering is “time willingly given”, many Australians volunteering overseas may unknowingly be contributing to child exploitation or modern day slavery. It is integral that Australian volunteers conduct thorough research prior to considering international volunteering opportunities, or when considering volunteering in Australia (e.g. for environmental causes).

Volunteering Australia urges the use of the *National Standards for Volunteer Involvement* as a best-practice guide for volunteer participation, and to conduct volunteer programs.

Corporate Volunteering

Volunteering Australia encourages corporates to administer volunteering programs, where the corporate staff member is able to engage in unpaid work for a community organisation during work hours for a wider societal benefit, the benefit of the volunteer and for the corporation. Corporate volunteering is a great way for the volunteer to build skills, engage in team work and for the company to bolster their reputation within the local community.

Volunteering as a preventative health measure

Volunteers gain valuable skills and develop personally and professionally from their involvement in volunteering activities, with research indicating that those who volunteer are happier and healthier individuals. Recent studies have indicated that 96 per cent of volunteers say that engaging in volunteering “makes people happier”^v, while 95 per cent of volunteers say that volunteering is related to feelings of wellbeing.^{vi}

A few hours of volunteer work has an impact on an individual’s happiness and mood,^{vii} and sustained volunteering is associated with better mental health.^{viii} Furthermore, the experience of helping others provides meaning, a sense of self-worth, a social role and health enhancement.^{ix}

Volunteering for the Common Good

Volunteers have also identified personal benefits from their involvement in volunteering activities including, “improved wellbeing and a community connection, and (they) believe they have made a notable contribution to common good.”^x

To be reviewed six-monthly (August 2018).

ⁱ Volunteering Australia (2015) ‘Definition of Volunteering’, <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/policy-andbest-practise/definition-of-volunteering/>

ⁱⁱ Flinders University (31 October 2014) ‘Volunteering worth \$290 billion a year’, <http://blogs.flinders.edu.au/flinders-news/2014/10/31/volunteering-worth-290-billion-a-year>

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) ‘General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2014’, available online at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4159.0>.

^{iv} Volunteering Australia and PwC (2016) 2016 State of Volunteering in Australia, <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/State-of-Volunteering-in-Australia-full-report.pdf>, p16.

^v Post, S. G. 2011, ‘It’s good to be good: 2011 5th annual scientific report on health, happiness and helping others’, *The International Journal of Person Centred Medicine*, vol. 1, no. 4, p814.

^{vi} Volunteering ACT, 2013, ‘Selfless Service: The State of Volunteering Report in the ACT 2013’, p6.

^{vii} Post, S. G. 2011, *op. cit.*, p816.

^{viii} Musick, M. A. and Wilson, J. 2003, ‘Volunteering and depression: the role of psychological and social resources in different age groups’, *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 56, p267.

^{ix} Post, S. G. 2011, *op. cit.*, p814.

^x Volunteering Australia and PwC (2016) 2016 State of Volunteering in Australia, <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/State-of-Volunteering-in-Australia-full-report.pdf>, p32.