

# VOLUNTEERING IN AUSTRALIA 2022

## The Volunteer Perspective

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and Maria Jahromi*



Towards a  
National Strategy  
for Volunteering



## About the Volunteering in Australia Research

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The Volunteering in Australia research is a series of 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 Volunteering in Australia reports were commissioned by Volunteering Australia and developed by the Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods, and a consortium of researchers from Curtin University, Griffith University, and the University of Western Australia.

## About the National Strategy for Volunteering

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Volunteering Australia is leading the development of a National Strategy for Volunteering, which will be designed and owned by the volunteering ecosystem and will provide a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia.

The National Strategy for Volunteering project comes at a critical time. Environmental factors such as the changing nature of work, our ageing population, rising costs of living, and increasing digitisation all impact volunteering. These factors, and others, will have both positive and negative implications for volunteering. Despite the challenges facing volunteering, opportunities also exist to do things differently. Volunteers, organisations, and the Australian community have shown great resilience and adaptability during recent crises.

The National Strategy for Volunteering project, including the Volunteering in Australia research, provides an historic opportunity to collaboratively co-design a shared vision for the future of volunteering.

The National Strategy for Volunteering project, including the Volunteering in Australia research, was funded by the Australian Government.

## How to cite this report

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## Author Biographies

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## Glossary

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**Volunteering:** Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.

**Formal volunteering:** Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place within organisations or groups.

**Informal volunteering:** Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place outside the context of a formal organisation or group. This includes assisting people in the community, excluding one's own family members. For example, looking after children, property or pets; providing home or personal assistance; or giving someone professional advice.

**Manager/s of volunteers (also referred to as coordinator/s and leader/s of volunteers):** The person/s who are responsible for the recruitment, induction, training, supervision, and ongoing support of volunteers.

**Microvolunteering:** This describes a volunteer, or team of volunteers, completing small tasks that make up a larger project. Tasks may only take a few minutes to a few hours, and the volunteer does not make a long-term commitment.

**Virtual volunteering, remote volunteering, or online volunteering (e-volunteering):** Virtual, remote, or online volunteering allows individuals to work with organisations remotely. Volunteer tasks are completed online, and interaction is through a digital platform or via email.

**Volunteer involving organisation (VIO):** Any organisation/company/department that engages volunteers may be known as a volunteer involving organisation.

**Volunteering ecosystem:** The volunteering ecosystem is the network of organisations and people that enable and benefit from volunteering. It covers the non-profit, public and private spheres. It involves relationships between volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, Volunteering Support Services, Volunteering Australia, State and Territory Volunteering Peak Bodies, national peak bodies, community organisations, philanthropy, business, and Governments, all working for the collective viability and recognition of volunteering in Australia.

## Abbreviations

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ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACP	Australian Consumer Panel
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ANU	Australian National University
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CII	Conversation in Isolation
CSRМ	Centre for Social Research and Methods
DCJ	Department of Communities and Justice (New South Wales Government)
GSS	General Social Survey
IT	Information Technology
LGBTQI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex
LOHVE	Leaders of Health Volunteer Engagement
NSW	New South Wales
ORU	Online Research Unit
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas
SRC	Social Research Centre
VA	Volunteering Australia
VIC	Victoria

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## Executive Summary

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As part of the Volunteering in Australia research, this report provides an important contribution to the evidence base informing the National Strategy for Volunteering. The focus of this report is the volunteer perspective. We explore the characteristics of volunteers and volunteering and how this has changed over the last decade and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The research draws on several data sources, including the ANUpoll series of surveys with the most recent data collected in April 2022.

### Characteristics of volunteers

- In April 2022 about a quarter (26.7 per cent) of Australians had done formal volunteering in the previous 12 months and just under half (46.5 per cent) had undertaken informal volunteering in the previous four weeks. (Unless specified otherwise, data presented here refers to formal volunteering).
- Women are slightly more likely to volunteer than men.<sup>1</sup> In April 2022, 28.6 per cent of women had done volunteer work in the previous 12 months compared to 24.7 per cent of men.
- The volunteering rate is a little higher amongst older Australians (55 years and older) than amongst those aged under 55 years. There is very little difference in volunteering rates by age for those under 55 years of age.
- Those born overseas in a non-English speaking country were less likely to volunteer than those born in Australia or born in another English-speaking country.
- People with a higher level of education were more likely to volunteer than those with a lower level of education. Amongst those who had not completed Year 12 and had no post-school qualification, 22.0 per cent had volunteered compared to 30.3 per cent of those with a postgraduate degree.
- People living outside of a capital city had a higher volunteering rate (29.0 per cent) than people living in a capital city (24.0 per cent).
- Being in paid employment was associated with a greater likelihood to volunteer than being unemployed. However, as the number of hours of paid employment increases, the likelihood of volunteering decreases.

### Trends in volunteering and the impact of COVID-19

- Over the longer-term, rates of volunteering have been gradually declining from around one-third of adults in 2002 to around one-quarter currently. The impact of COVID-19 has resulted in a substantial decline in volunteering. The proportion of adults who had volunteered in the previous 12 months declined from 36.0 per cent

in 2019 to 26.7 per cent in April 2022. This equates to around 1.86 million fewer volunteers at the start of 2022 compared to pre-COVID. Whilst there was a slight increase in volunteering between 2021 and 2022, volunteering remains well below the pre-COVID-19 rate.

- Census data shows that there was an increase in volunteering amongst young adults (15-24 years) between 2006 to 2016, but then a big drop between 2016 and 2021, which includes the impact of COVID-19. For those over 25 years of age there were relatively small changes in the rates of volunteering between 2006 and 2016, but similar to young adults, there was a substantial decline in volunteering between 2016 and 2021.
- The two most populous states (New South Wales and Victoria), which were hit hardest by COVID-19 between 2020 and August 2021, had much larger declines in volunteering between 2016 and 2021 and people in these states were more likely to say they stopped volunteering during the pandemic.
- In addition to state/territory, areas that had a larger decline in volunteering between 2016 and 2021 were those with a higher income, as well as those with a higher percentage of people that had not completed Year 12, were a student (amongst those aged 20 to 24 years), were born overseas, spoke a language other than English, had a core-activity need for assistance, and provided unpaid assistance for someone with a disability. Those areas that had a smaller decline between 2016 and 2021 were those with a higher median age, and a higher proportion of people that did not undertake domestic work, or that owned or were purchasing their own home.
- For individuals, characteristics that were associated with being more likely to have stopped volunteering during COVID-19 were:
  - finding it difficult to manage on current income;
  - those who identified in the survey as “permanently sick or disabled”;
- those with a high level of psychological distress who were more likely to have stopped volunteering (37.4 per cent), compared to people with a medium level of psychological distress (31.7 per cent), and people with lower levels of psychological distress (23 per cent).
- In 2022, amongst those respondents in April 2020 who said that they stopped volunteering due to COVID-19:
  - 50.9 per cent of women had recommenced volunteering compared to 39.3 per cent of men;
  - 49.7 per cent of those born in Australia recommenced volunteering compared to 35.6 per cent of those born overseas in a non-English speaking country;

- 38.2 per cent of those who reported financial difficulties recommenced volunteering compared to 49.4 per cent of those who did not.

## Reasons for volunteering or not volunteering

- Two reasons stand out for undertaking formal volunteering. Just over seven-in-ten volunteers selected 'personal satisfaction / to do something worthwhile' and just over six-in-ten of volunteers selected to 'help others / the community'.
- The most common reason given for not volunteering was 'work or family commitments', given by four-in-ten, followed by 'not interested' with one-in five giving this as one of their reasons for not volunteering.
- Women were more likely than men to give work or family commitments as a reason for not volunteering (46.3 per cent of women and 35.6 per cent of men).
- Those aged 35 to 44 years were more likely to give work and family commitments as reasons for not volunteering (50.3 per cent) than those aged 18-34 years (42.2 per cent), those aged 45-64 years (44.7 per cent), and those aged 65 years and older (25.7 per cent).

## The characteristics of volunteering

- Volunteers spent an average of 180 hours doing volunteer work over the previous 12 months. Older volunteers (those aged 55 years and over) spent more time volunteering on average (263 hours) than those aged 54 years or under (123 hours).
- Over two-thirds of volunteers (69.4 per cent) undertook volunteering in person at the organisation they volunteer for, and four-in-ten (41.5 per cent) undertook volunteering in person in the field. Over the internet and over the phone were also important modes of volunteering with 30.2 per cent and 16.9 per cent respectively volunteering using these modes.
- The most common type of organisation that individuals volunteered for was sport and recreation organisations with one-quarter of volunteers (25.0 per cent) volunteering for those organisations. Other types of organisations that had at least one-fifth of volunteers undertaking volunteer work for them were community services, welfare and homelessness organisations (22.2 per cent) and religious, faith-based and spiritual organisations (20.5 per cent).
- The most common type of organisation that those who were not currently volunteering might be interested in volunteering for in the future was animal welfare organisations (29.4 per cent), followed by environmental organisations (23.0 per cent), and organisations focused on children and youth (22.7 per cent). There was a disconnect between the types of organisations people wanted to volunteer for and

the types of organisations that people currently volunteer for. This mirrors a trend found in 2016.

- Volunteers undertook a wide range of activities. The most common activity, given by 24.6 per cent of volunteers, was fundraising, sales and events. There were also a large proportion of people who undertook teaching, instruction or providing information (24.5 per cent) as well as accounting, finance, administration, and management (22.8 per cent).
- There are substantial mismatches between the types of activities that current volunteers undertake and the types of activities that non-volunteers would consider. The most common potential future activity given is working with animals / fostering animals (28.5 per cent of non-volunteers), whereas just 4.4 per cent of current volunteers are with this type of organisation. Amongst non-volunteers, 14.3 per cent said they would consider counselling / help line / mediation as their preferred activity, whereas only 6.5 per cent of current volunteers were engaged in this type of role.

## Future volunteering

- Slightly more people said they intended to increase their future volunteering than those who said they intended to reduce their future volunteering. If these intentions accurately reflect future volunteering, there is likely to be a light increase in hours of volunteering, though it seems unlikely to lead to a return to the level of volunteering seen pre-COVID if no action is taken to support volunteering to resume.
- Amongst those who had volunteered over the previous 12 months in April 2022, individuals from the upper age groups (aged 65 to 74 years and 75 years plus) were more likely to have intentions of reducing the frequency of volunteering over the next five years (relative to those aged 35 to 44 years), whilst individuals born overseas were more likely to see themselves volunteering more frequently over the next five years (relative to individuals born in Australia).

## Out of pocket expenses

- Just over half (54 per cent) of volunteers incurred out-of-pocket expenses through their volunteering. This is similar to the 60 per cent of volunteers who incurred out-of-pocket expenses in 2016.
- Amongst volunteers who incurred out-of-pocket expenses, only 14.5 per cent were reimbursed in full and 13.0 per cent were reimbursed in part. By contrast, 41.0 per cent of volunteers who incurred out-of-pocket expenses through their volunteering role indicated that reimbursement was not available or offered. The remaining 31.5 per cent of volunteers who incurred out-of-pocket expenses did not apply for reimbursement even though it was offered.

## Informal volunteering

- A little under half of adult Australians (46.5 per cent) said that they provided some form of informal volunteering over the previous four weeks.
- Combined, over half (57 per cent) of Australians had undertaken *either* formal or informal volunteering over the relevant periods.
- The most common form of informal volunteering was providing emotional support (20.4 per cent), followed by providing transport or running errands (19.1 per cent), and domestic work, home maintenance or gardening (16.8 per cent).
- Females and older Australians were more likely to have undertaken informal volunteering than males and younger Australians, respectively. The absolute differences by sex (in particular) are much larger for informal compared to formal volunteering. Specifically, 51.3 per cent of females undertook informal volunteering in the previous four weeks compared to 41.5 per cent of males.
- Those born overseas in a non-English speaking country were more likely to have undertaken informal volunteering than those born in Australia.
- For those who did undertake informal volunteering, the average number of hours spent providing unpaid help over the previous four weeks was 10.6 hours.

## Volunteering and wellbeing

- The average life satisfaction value for Australian adults in April 2022 was 6.69 out of 10.0 (lower than prior to the pandemic, but higher than during the lockdown periods).
- For those who had volunteered in April 2022 and said they had not stopped volunteering during the COVID-19 period, average life satisfaction was 6.95.
- For those who had said they had stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 and were not volunteering as of April 2022, average life satisfaction was only 6.34. This difference of 0.61 is roughly equivalent to one-third of a standard deviation of the population in the life satisfaction measure (1.89), quite a large difference in wellbeing.

# 1. Introduction

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Volunteers make a vital contribution to Australian society, in our schools and hospitals, residential and home care settings, playing fields, and community centres. Many sectors, such as mental health, disability, food and emergency relief, arts and heritage, and sports, depend heavily on volunteer involvement. The services delivered and goods produced by volunteers is of significant social, cultural, and economic value. The services and goods, and significant value add, resulting from volunteering often would not otherwise be produced by the market or funded by government. Further, many of these services are often delivered to benefit the most vulnerable groups in society. Volunteering builds social capital and community cohesion and has a positive impact on the wellbeing of volunteers, providing a sense of meaning and satisfaction, as well as social connectedness.<sup>2</sup>

In this report, formal volunteering is defined as time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place within organisations or groups.

Informal volunteering is unpaid help that takes place outside the context of a formal organisation. It excludes help provided to other members of a person's household or to family members living outside their household.

Volunteering in Australia is undergoing significant change. COVID-19 had a major impact on volunteering, including reductions in opportunities to volunteer due to COVID-19 restrictions, decreases in the number of people volunteering, and many cutting back on the number of hours they volunteer. As will be shown later in this report, the proportion of adults who had volunteered formally in the 12 months prior to the data collection declined from 36.0 per cent in 2019 to 26.7 per cent in April 2022. This equates to around 1.86 million fewer volunteers at the start of 2022 compared to pre-COVID-19.<sup>3</sup>

The large reduction in volunteer work due to COVID-19 compounded the effects of the gradual decline in formal volunteering over the previous decade (VA 2021a). In a review article, Grotz et al. (2020) concluded that, 'The abrupt cessation of volunteering activities of and for older people because of the COVID-19 pandemic is highly likely to have negative health and wellbeing effects on older adults with long-term and far-reaching policy implications.'

While the amount of volunteer hours decreased during COVID-19, the initial economic downturn and increased social isolation being experienced by many increased the demand for certain forms of volunteering. McDermott (2021), analysing 800 responses to qualitative questions included in a nationally representative survey in October 2021

(ANUpoll) found that the ‘demand for services has increased and more volunteers are needed’.

Despite the increased reliance on volunteer delivered services, volunteers themselves also reported many positive experiences during COVID-19. McDermott (2021) found that:

‘many people enjoyed benefits, as volunteering helped them to maintain ‘a connection with others, kept them active and busy, and gave them a sense of purpose’. It also provided them with the opportunity to gain ‘new skills [and] ... understand others’, as well as reporting a ‘sense that volunteering became more accessible’.’

The longer-term effects of COVID-19 on volunteering are still to emerge as Australia, along with the rest of the world, faces ongoing challenges related to the pandemic. There are, however, real concerns about the future of volunteering. A key concern has been reengaging and retaining volunteers (e.g., Elliot et al., 2021; NSW DCJ. 2020).

Understanding how volunteering in Australia will continue to change over the coming years is of vital importance to Australian policy formulation. The 2021 Federal Government announcement of the development of a National Strategy for Volunteering, being led by Volunteering Australia, demonstrates the critical need to understand the volunteering landscape and identify evidence-based interventions to enable volunteering to be safe, supported, and sustainable in the future. The 2023 National Strategy for Volunteering is the first in over 10 years; a period in which volunteering rates were already declining, with this decline accelerating during the COVID-19 period.

This report is designed to capture the contemporary state of volunteering in Australia and to help support the design of the National Strategy for Volunteering. Specifically, the aim of the report is to utilise a range of data sources to describe the state of volunteering in Australia in 2022, including the characteristics of volunteers, the range of aspects of volunteering that they undertake, as well as measures of the impact of COVID-19 on volunteering and the volunteers themselves. While the focus is inevitably on the recent period, the impacts of COVID-19 on volunteering and volunteers themselves are placed in the context of longer-term trends.



## 2. Data Sources

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There are several sources of high-quality data on volunteers. This report draws on four main data sources which are described in this section.

### 2.1 ANUpoll surveys

The ANUpoll series of surveys collected by the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods included questions about volunteering in late-2019, April 2020, April 2021, and April 2022.<sup>4</sup> The surveys collected data from the same group of people from just prior to COVID-19 using the Life in Australia™ longitudinal panel, and thus provide detailed data on how COVID-19 has impacted upon volunteers and volunteering.<sup>5</sup> The ANUpoll is representative of the Australian population aged 18 years and older. The April 2022 survey collected data from 3,587 Australians aged 18 years and over.<sup>6</sup>

The late-2019, April 2021, and April 2022 survey waves identify formal volunteering using the question:

‘Over the last 12 months did you spend any time doing voluntary work through an organisation or group?’

The guidance to respondents in answering this question was:

‘Please include voluntary work for sporting teams, youth groups, schools, or religious organisations. Please exclude work in a family business or paid employment. Please exclude work to qualify for a government benefit or to obtain an educational qualification or due to a community / court order.’

The April 2022 ANUpoll Survey also included a question about informal volunteering. Respondents were first reminded that:

Informal volunteering is unpaid help that takes place outside the context of a formal organisation. It excludes help provided to other members of your household or to family members living outside your household. When answering these questions please exclude any volunteering you have already reported.

They were then asked:

In the last 4 weeks, did you help anyone not living with you with the following activities?

These waves of ANUpoll included a range of other questions about volunteering. The April 2022 ANUpoll was designed specifically to provide information for this report, and hence provides the main source of data. In addition, the April 2022 ANUpoll included three questions about volunteering to which respondents could provide a free text response:

1. (for volunteers) How has doing voluntary work during the last 12 months impacted your life in general? *Please give a short description of either positive and/or negative aspects of your experience.*
2. (for volunteers) What has been your experience of diversity and/or inclusion in your volunteering? *Please give a short description of either positive and/or negative aspects of your experience. You may wish to comment on whether volunteering provides an inclusive environment for people with different abilities and from diverse backgrounds, or whether you see potential barriers that may discourage people from volunteering.*
3. (for previous but not current volunteers) If you've ever volunteered in the past, what was your experience of volunteering? *Please give a short description of either positive and/or negative aspects of your experience.*

Responses to these questions are used in this report to highlight key points identified in the quantitative analysis and to include the direct voice of volunteers.

## 2.2 April 2022 survey of volunteers – non-probability sample

In order to supplement the data collected in the April 2022 ANUpoll, a subset of questions included in the ANUpoll was asked of participants in Online Research Unit's (ORU's) Australian Consumer Panel (ACP). While this is a non-probability sample and therefore not as high quality as the data from the ANUpoll, it increased the number of respondents from the smaller states and territories. Data from this survey are provided in the supplementary tables which provide data at the state/territory level.

## 2.3 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) General Social Survey

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) General Social Survey (GSS) also provides data on volunteers and volunteering. Data from the GSS is primarily used in this report as a point of comparison with the ANUpoll data. The most recent (2020) GSS was conducted from June to September 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was collected online or via telephone interviewing only. Unlike previous waves of GSS data collection there was no face-to-face interviewing conducted in 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions.

For the most recent wave of GSS data collection, data was collected from approximately 5,300 households around Australia. Data was not collected from people who live in very remote parts of Australia. The survey was previously run in 2019. Prior to that, the survey was conducted once every four years from 2002 to 2014. The 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2019, and 2020 GSS surveys are used in this paper.

## 2.4 Census of Population and Housing

Data from the 2006, 2011, 2016, and 2021 Censuses of Population and Housing are used to provide information on changes in the rate of volunteering, and provide information on changes in volunteering between 2016 and 2021 for relatively small geographic areas.

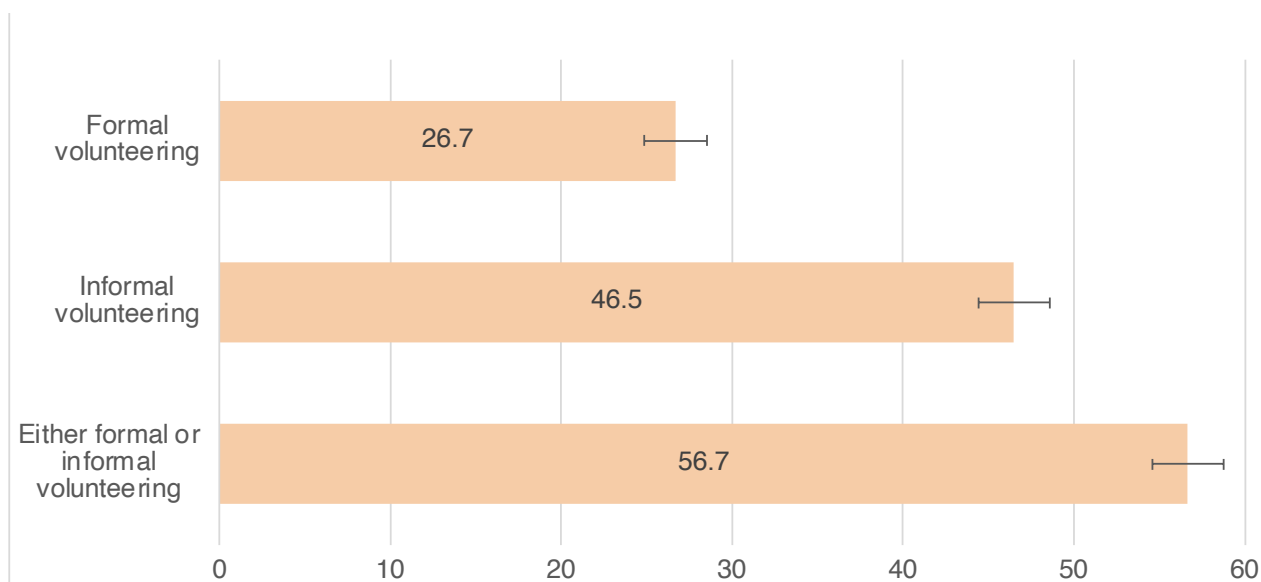
In the Census, the question about volunteering is generally completed by the household reference person for all members of the household, whereas in the ANUpoll and GSS surveys volunteering is measured using a person's own response to the question. Also, unlike the ANUpoll and GSS surveys, the Census does not prompt respondents by providing information designed to help respondents to recognise their volunteering activities.

### 3. The Characteristics of Formal Volunteers

This section provides an overview of the rates of formal volunteering in April 2022, as well as some comparisons with rates of informal volunteering. The latter is covered in more detail in a subsequent section of the paper.

In April 2022, about a quarter (26.7 per cent) of Australians had done formal volunteer work in the previous 12 months and just under half (46.5 per cent) had undertaken informal volunteering in the previous four weeks (Figure 1). Combined, over half (56.7 per cent) of Australians had undertaken *either* formal or informal volunteering over the relevant periods.

Figure 1 Per cent of Australians who undertook formal volunteering in the previous 12 months or informal volunteering in the previous four weeks, April 2022

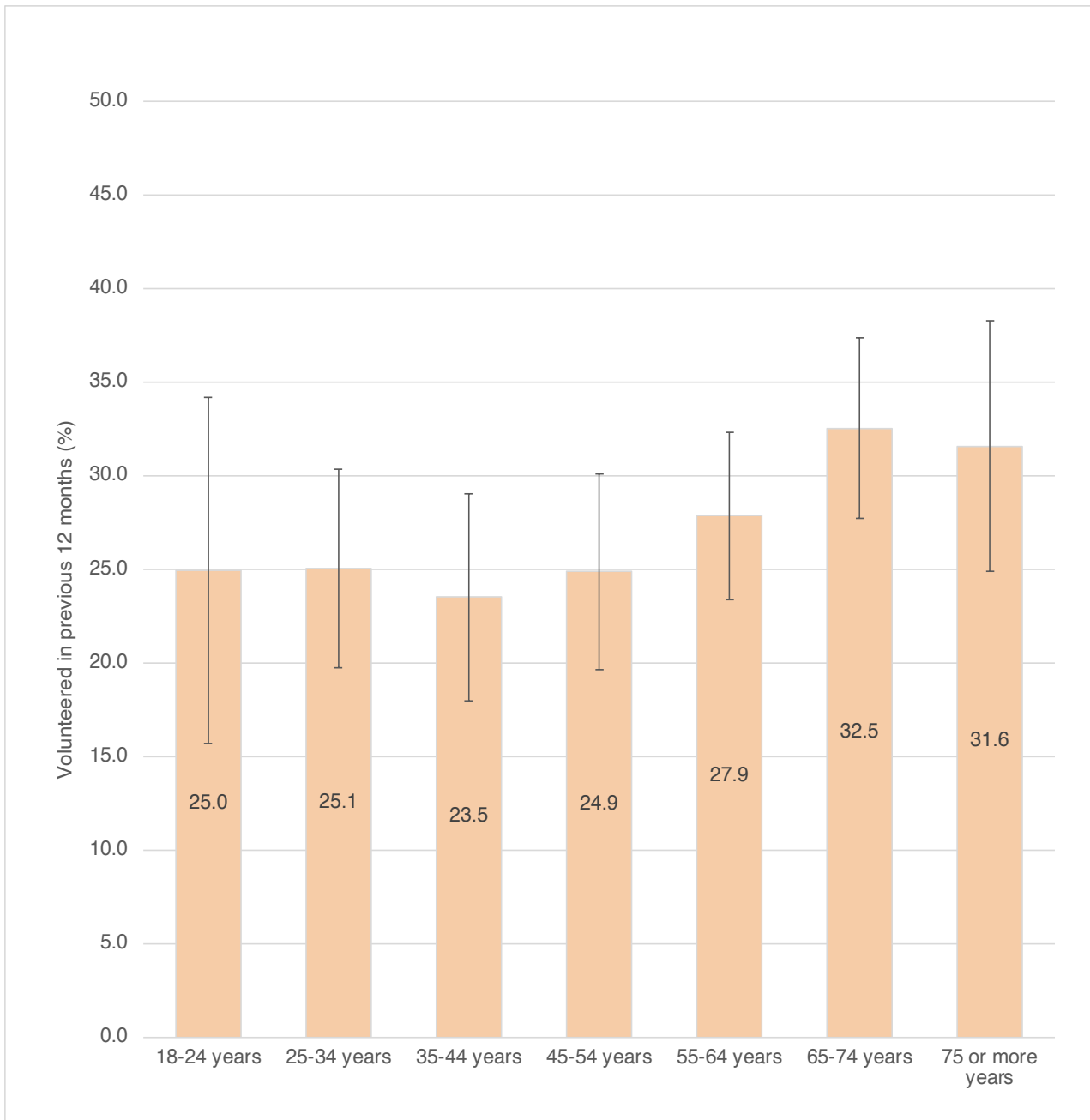


Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

For estimates in this paper that are based on survey data, what are known as 95 per cent confidence intervals are provided. These are an estimated range around each of the estimates, that take into account the uncertainty of the estimates. Estimates that come from a smaller sample (for example a very specific age group) will have larger confidence intervals.

Women were slightly more likely to volunteer than men. In April 2022, 28.6 per cent of women had done volunteer work in the previous 12 months compared to 24.7 per cent of men. The volunteering rate was a little higher amongst older Australians (55 years and older) than amongst those aged under 55 years (Figure 2). There was very little difference in volunteering rates by age for those under 55 years of age.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 2 Per cent of Australians who undertook volunteering in the previous 12 months by age, April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

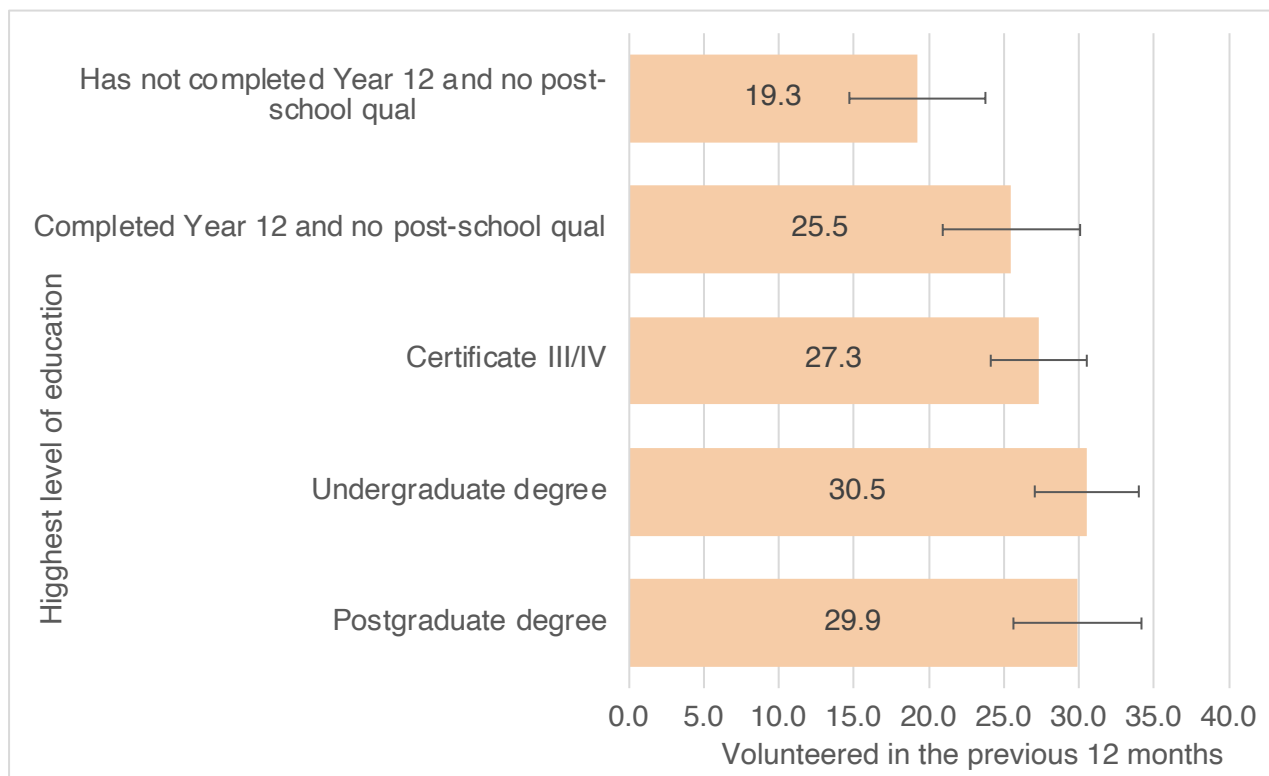
Amongst those born in Australia 27.8 per cent were volunteers and amongst those born overseas in another English-speaking country 26.7 per cent were volunteers. Amongst those born overseas in a non-English speaking country 22.6 per cent were volunteers, lower than those born in Australia or another English-speaking country. As will be shown later in the paper, however, those born in a non-English speaking country had higher rates of informal volunteering.

People with a higher level of education were more likely to volunteer than those with a lower level of education (Figure 3). Amongst those who had not completed Year 12 and had no post-school qualification, 22.0 per cent had volunteered compared to 30.3 per cent of those with a postgraduate degree.

Those with high levels of education reported using their skills and qualifications in their volunteer work. A respondent to the April 2022 ANUpoll with a postgraduate degree stated that:

*“I volunteered in a community legal clinic providing legal advice to ... people who could not afford private lawyers.”*

Figure 3 Per cent of Australians who undertook volunteering in the previous 12 months by highest level of education, April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

People living outside of a capital city had a higher volunteering rate (29.0 per cent) than people living in a capital city (24.0 per cent). One respondent who lived outside a capital city stated that volunteering was:

*“Always positive as we have a country town empathy for each other.”*

There are challenges in some regional and rural towns though, with one respondent noting that:

*“In our community, there’s little scope for people from diverse backgrounds, however occasionally we do come into contact with newcomers from diverse backgrounds and they are welcomed and encouraged to feel part of the group/ community like everyone else, in my experience.”*

There were no differences in rates of volunteering by the socioeconomic characteristics of the area in which a person lived. The rate of volunteering was also similar among people with disability or who are permanently sick, of whom 28.7 per cent volunteered in the previous 12 months, and people without disability, of whom 26.5 per cent had volunteered in the previous 12 months.<sup>8</sup>

A more sophisticated approach to understanding the factors associated with volunteering is to use regression modelling. This allows the effects of individual’s characteristics on the likelihood of them being a volunteer to be estimated holding constant the impacts of other variables.

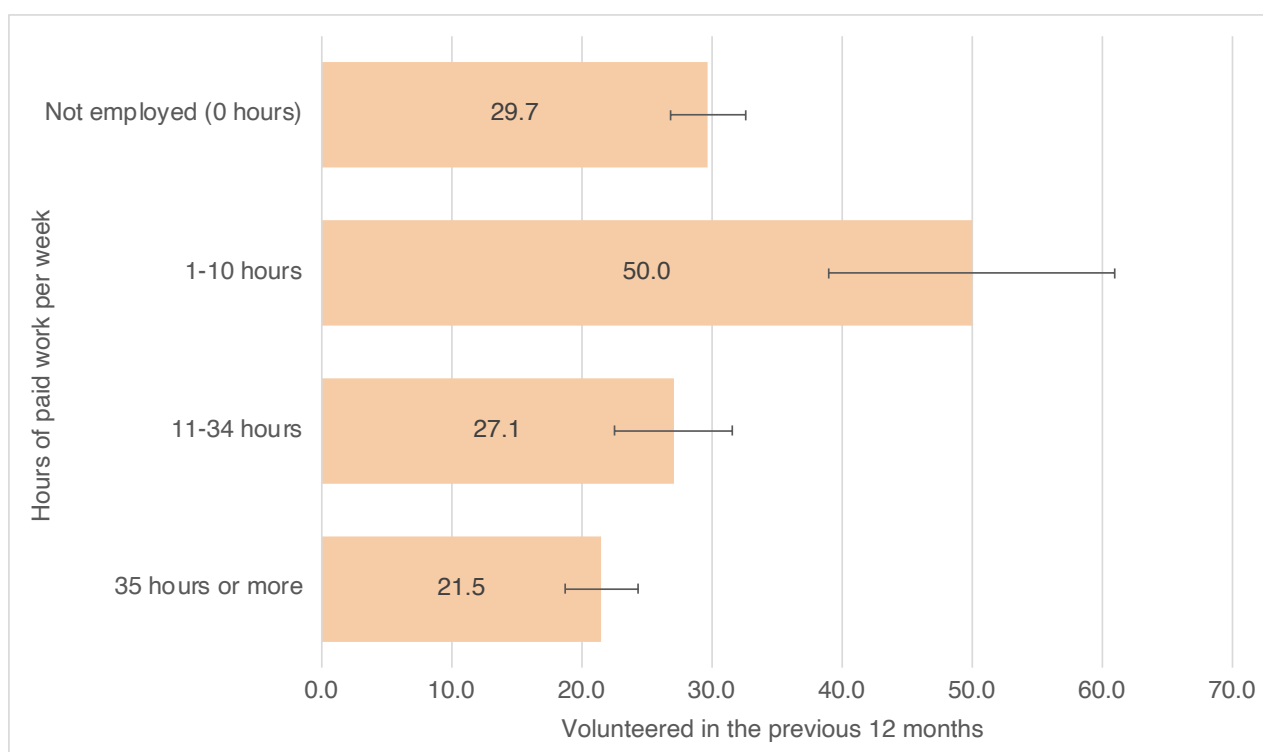
The results of this regression model, reported in the online Appendix, shows that there are significant differences between the following characteristics and the likelihood of being a volunteer: sex; age; whether born in Australia, born outside of Australia in another English-speaking country, or born outside of Australia in a non-English speaking country; highest level of educational attainment; and whether living in a capital city or outside.

A second regression model is focused on estimating the relationship between paid employment and number of hours of paid work on the likelihood of being a volunteer. This model includes variables measuring whether the respondent is in paid employment and the number of hours in paid employment (with a quadratic specification in order to allow for a non-linear relationship) in addition to all of the explanatory variables included in Model 1.

The detailed regression results are available in the online Appendix.

It is estimated that being in paid employment was associated with a greater likelihood to volunteer than people who were not in paid employment. However, as the number of hours of paid employment increases the likelihood of volunteering decreases. For people who were not in paid employment in April 2022, 29.7 per cent had volunteered in the previous 12 months (Figure 4). For those who worked 1 to 10 hours per week 50.0 per cent had volunteered, for those working 11-34 hours per week, 27.1 per cent had volunteered, and for those working 35 hours or more per week (i.e., full-time), only 21.4 per cent had volunteered.

Figure 4 Per cent of Australians who undertook volunteering in the previous 12 months by employment status and hours worked, April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.



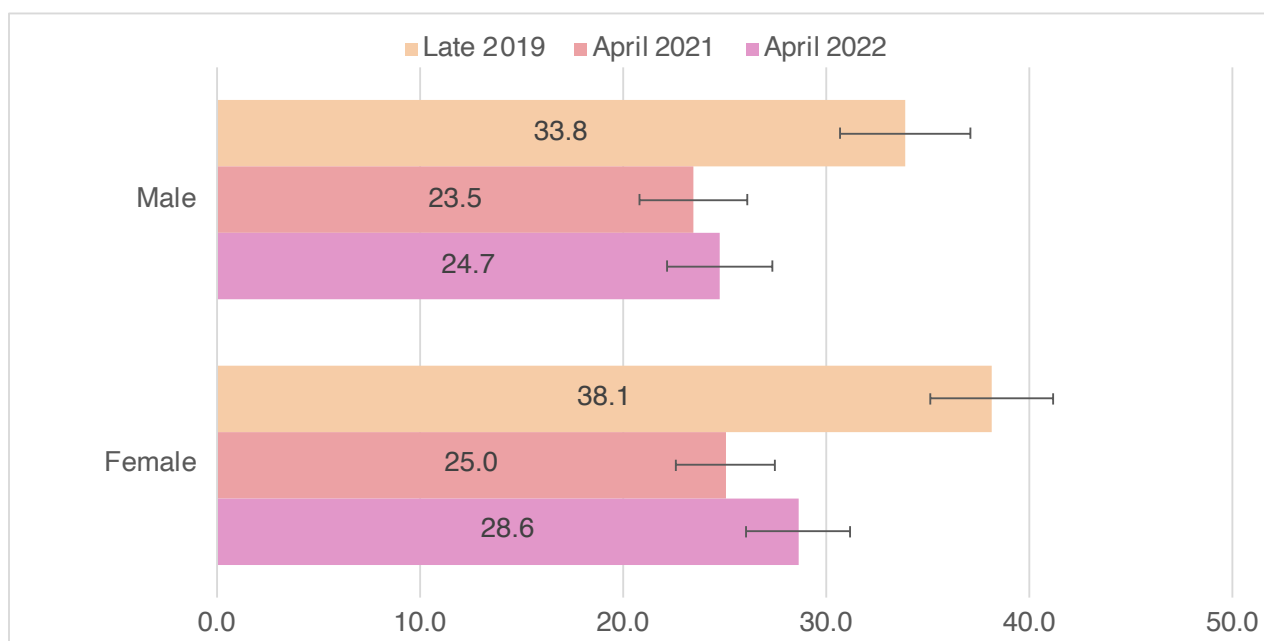
## 4. Declines in Volunteering During COVID-19

In late 2019, just prior to COVID-19, 36.0 per cent of adults had undertaken volunteer work in the previous 12 months. By April 2021, this had plunged to 24.2 per cent, and volunteering rates have remained at around this level with a volunteering rate of 26.7 per cent in April 2022 (Figure 5).<sup>9</sup>

Amongst people who were doing volunteer work in the 12 months prior to April 2022, just over one-quarter (28.4 per cent) said they had increased the amount of volunteering they did, 31.7 per cent reported no change, and 40.0 per cent said their volunteering had decreased.<sup>10</sup>

The volunteering rate of both women and men fell during the COVID-19 period. For women it fell from 38.1 per cent in late 2019 to 28.6 per cent in April 2022 and for men it fell from 33.8 per cent to 24.7 per cent.

Figure 5 Per cent of Australians who undertook volunteering in the previous 12 months by sex, late 2019, April 2021, and April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate. Population aged 18-years and older.

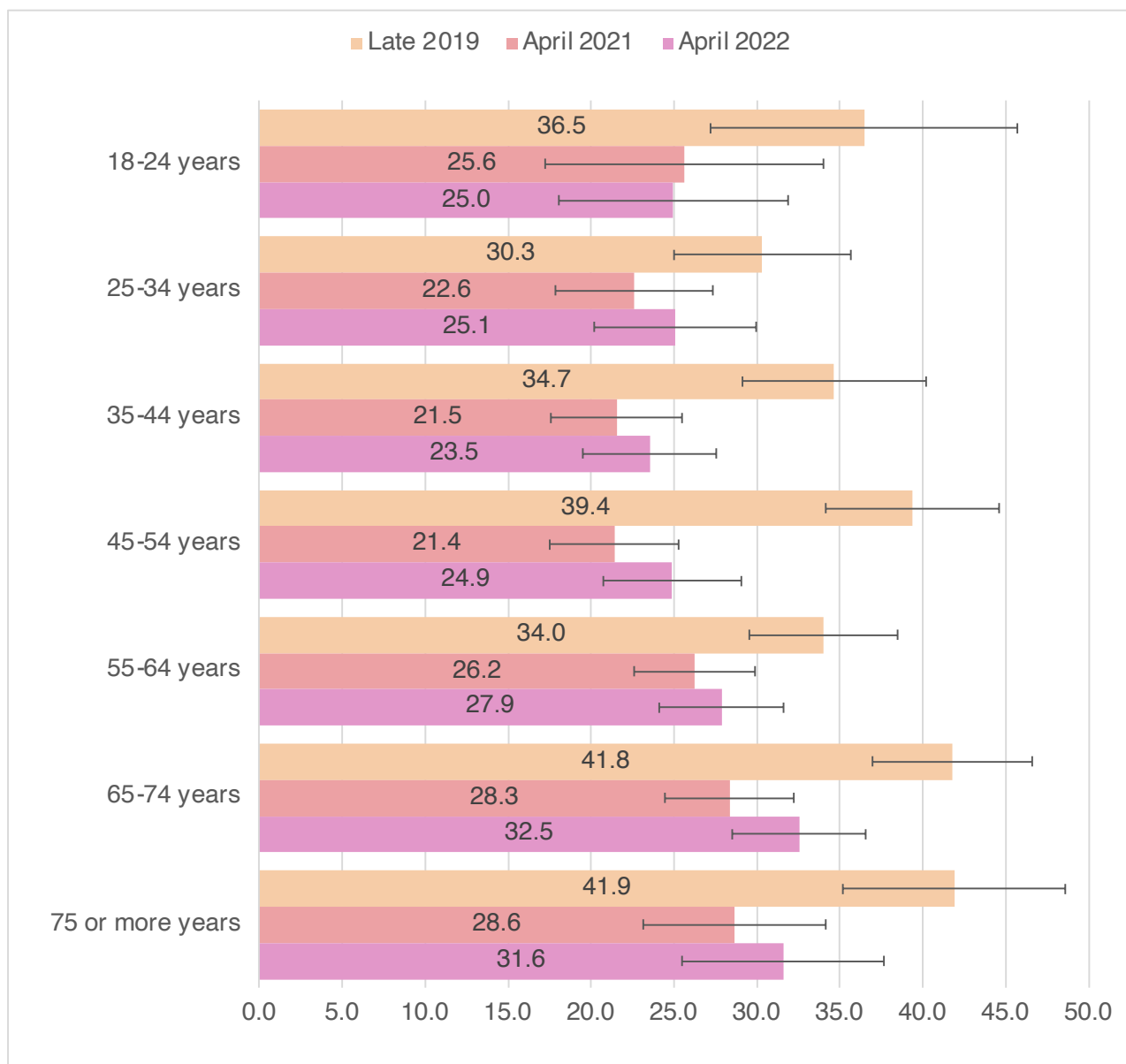
Source: ANUpoll, April 2020, April 2021, and April 2022.

The rate of volunteering fell between late 2019 and April 2021 for all age groups (Figure 6). The biggest decline was amongst those aged 45 to 54 years, with an almost halving of the rate of volunteering for this age group (a drop from 39.4 to 21.4 per cent). Between April 2021 and April 2022 for all age groups there was either no change or a small

increase in volunteering rates. The rate of volunteering in April 2022 was lower than the pre-COVID-19 rate for all age groups.

Despite younger people being less likely to volunteer than those aged 55 years and over, there were a number of respondents in that age group who reported positive experiences, including a woman aged 18 to 24 years who stated that, *“It’s a really good way to gain experience in your area of study, meet people with shared interests and do a job you wouldn’t usually have the chance to do.”*

Figure 6 Per cent of Australians who undertook volunteering in the previous 12 months by age, late 2019, April 2021, and April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate. Population aged 18-years and older.

Source: ANUpoll, April 2020, April 2021, and April 2022.

Other respondents indicated that their volunteering was negatively impacted by COVID-19. A former volunteer in the April 2022 ANUpoll noted that, *“I enjoyed volunteering at [Large Zoo], I would still be doing it but for COVID-19 restrictions.”* Another stated that *“Most of my work is voluntary. COVID-19 [sic] has made working in the community harder however the need for volunteers & connections in the community now feel greater.”* Both respondents clearly wished to continue volunteering but had not been able to do so.

#### 4.1 Other research on volunteering rates during the pandemic

The State of Volunteering in Victoria 2020 report found that from 2019 to 2020 ‘the volunteering participation rate declined by 50.2 per cent’, and ‘there was a net decline in volunteering hours of 64.1 per cent’ (Ellis et al. 2020).<sup>11</sup>

Data from the ABS Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey suggests that in March 2021, ‘36% of respondents did not undertake unpaid voluntary work because of COVID-19 restrictions’ (AIHW, 2021). This survey also showed that the reasons for not volunteering included that ‘... people could not participate in person, were not sure how to volunteer, and their previous volunteering group had stopped or reduced their operations due to COVID-19’ (AIHW 2021).

The GSS showed that, ‘for people aged 18 years and over, the rate of formal volunteering has declined from 36.2 per cent in 2010 to 28.8 per cent in 2019’ (VA 2021a). In 2019, the ABS recorded that ‘volunteers contributed 596.2 million hours’ while in 2014 they contributed 743.3 hours, which represents a 20 per cent decline’ (VA 2021a).

According to the 2020 GSS, ‘in 2020, 31 per cent of people aged 40-54 years participated in unpaid voluntary work through an organisation, compared to 19 per cent of those aged 15-24 years’ (ABS 2020).

A NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) 2020 survey of volunteer involving organisations showed that there was both a loss of volunteers and volunteer capacity during COVID-19 and a survey commissioned by the Leaders of Health Volunteer Engagement (LOHVE) Network and undertaken by Bendigo Health of 67 health agencies (in Australia and one in New Zealand) found that 90 per cent had experienced a decrease in volunteers (Bendigo Health 2021).

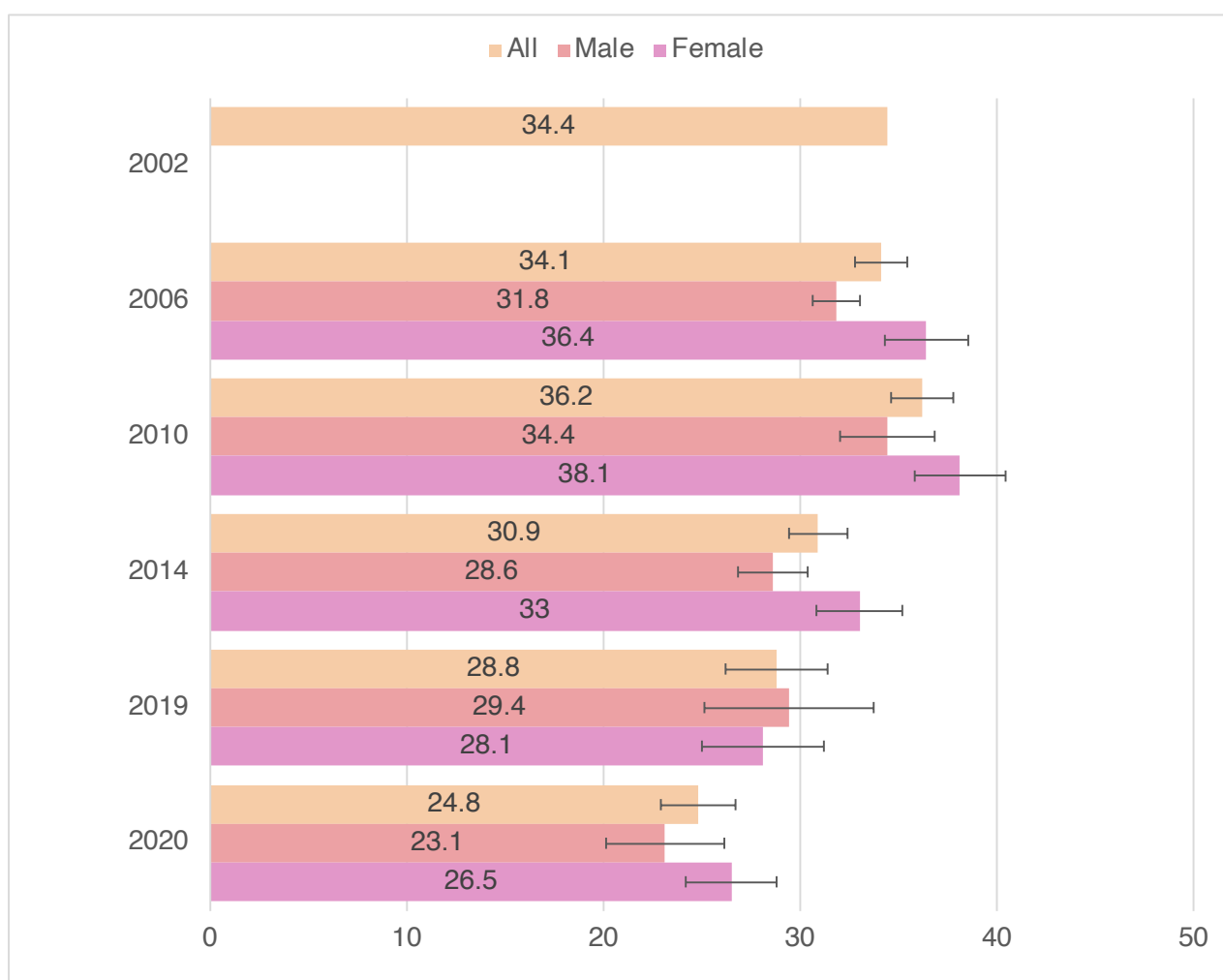
While demand for volunteers was increasing for some organisations, others faced having to reduce their number of volunteers due to COVID-19. Volunteering Australia (2021a) conducted stakeholders survey with almost 600 responses in 2021, which concluded that ‘over 80 per cent of respondents reported having stood down volunteers because of the COVID-19 situation, with around three quarters of these reporting that they had stood down all or at least half of their volunteers’.

## 5. Longer-term Changes in Volunteering Rates

The longer-term trends in the volunteering rate can be measured using either the Census or the GSS. While the ABS (2012) considers that the GSS provides a better-quality estimate of the rate of volunteering, the Census data has some advantages related to the fact that it covers the entire population and can therefore be used to provide estimates for smaller population sub-groups or relatively small geographic areas.

Figure 7 shows the rates of volunteering for the period 2002 to 2020. According to the GSS data, just over a third of Australian adults were volunteers between 2002 and 2010. These figures drop slightly around 2014 and 2019 to 30.9 per cent and 28.8 per cent respectively. There has been an even larger decline in volunteering rates to 24.8 per cent since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Figure 7 Volunteering rates by gender, 2002 to 2020 (%)



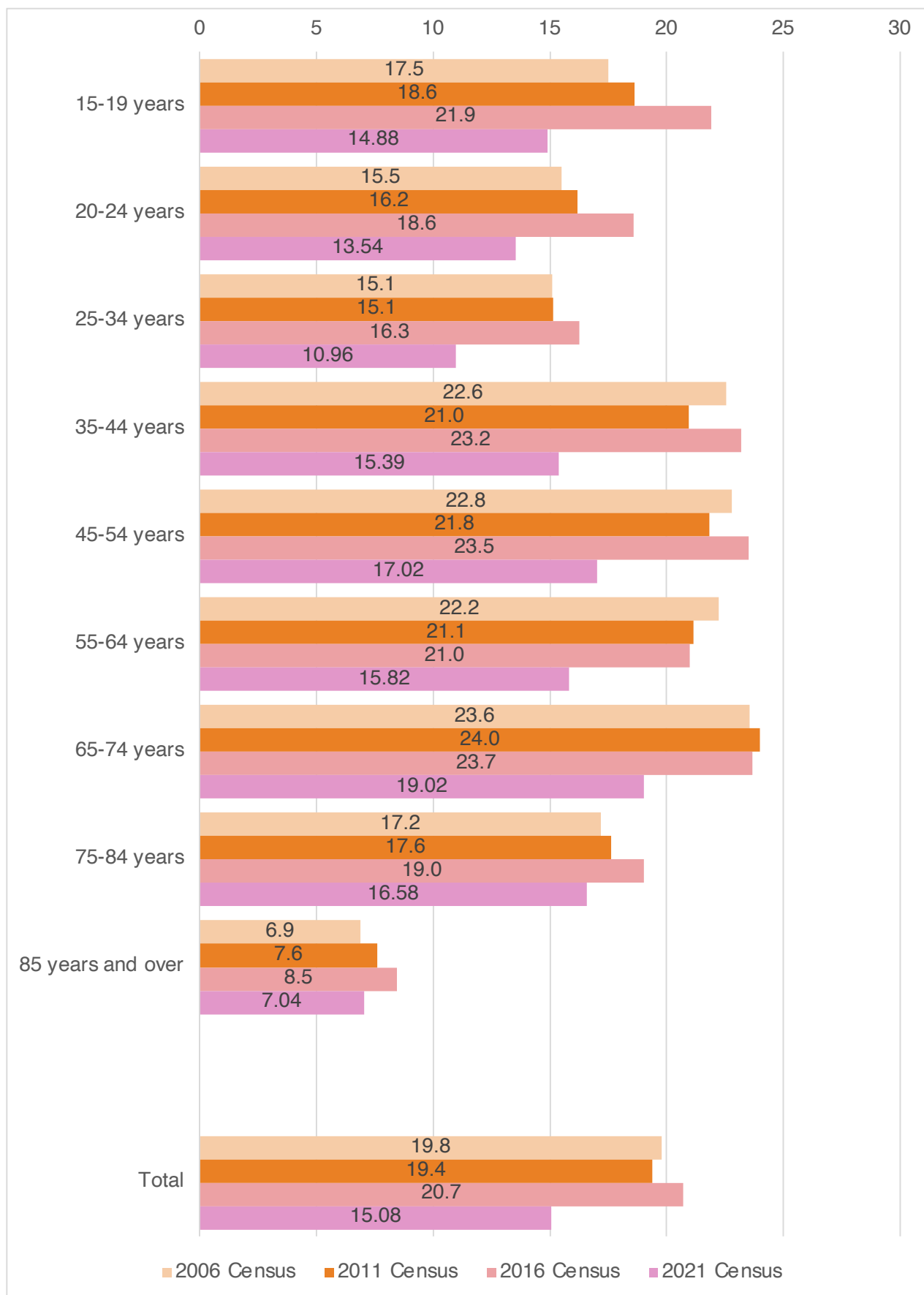
Note: GSS-based estimates do not include confidence intervals for 2002. Population aged 18-years and older. The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate (not available in 2002).

Source: 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2019 and 2020 ABS General Social Survey.

Figure 8 shows the rates of volunteering estimates from the Census for the period 2006 to 2021 by age group. Although the levels are somewhat different to the GSS, because of the availability of the full population, it is possible to look at long-term changes in volunteering for small age groups. According to the Census data, about one-in-five people in Australia were volunteers in 2006, 2011, and 2016, with virtually no change year to year. However, the impacts of COVID-19 are apparent with the rate falling from 20.7 per cent in 2016 to 15.1 per cent in 2021.

There was an increase in volunteering amongst young adults aged 15-19 years and 20-24 years from 2006 to 2016, but then a big drop between 2016 and 2021. For those over 25 years of age there were relatively small changes in the rates of volunteering between 2006 and 2016, but, similar to young adults, there was a substantial decline in volunteering between 2016 and 2021, with COVID-19 contributing significantly to this decline.

Figure 8 Census-based estimate of volunteering rates, 2006 to 2021 (%)



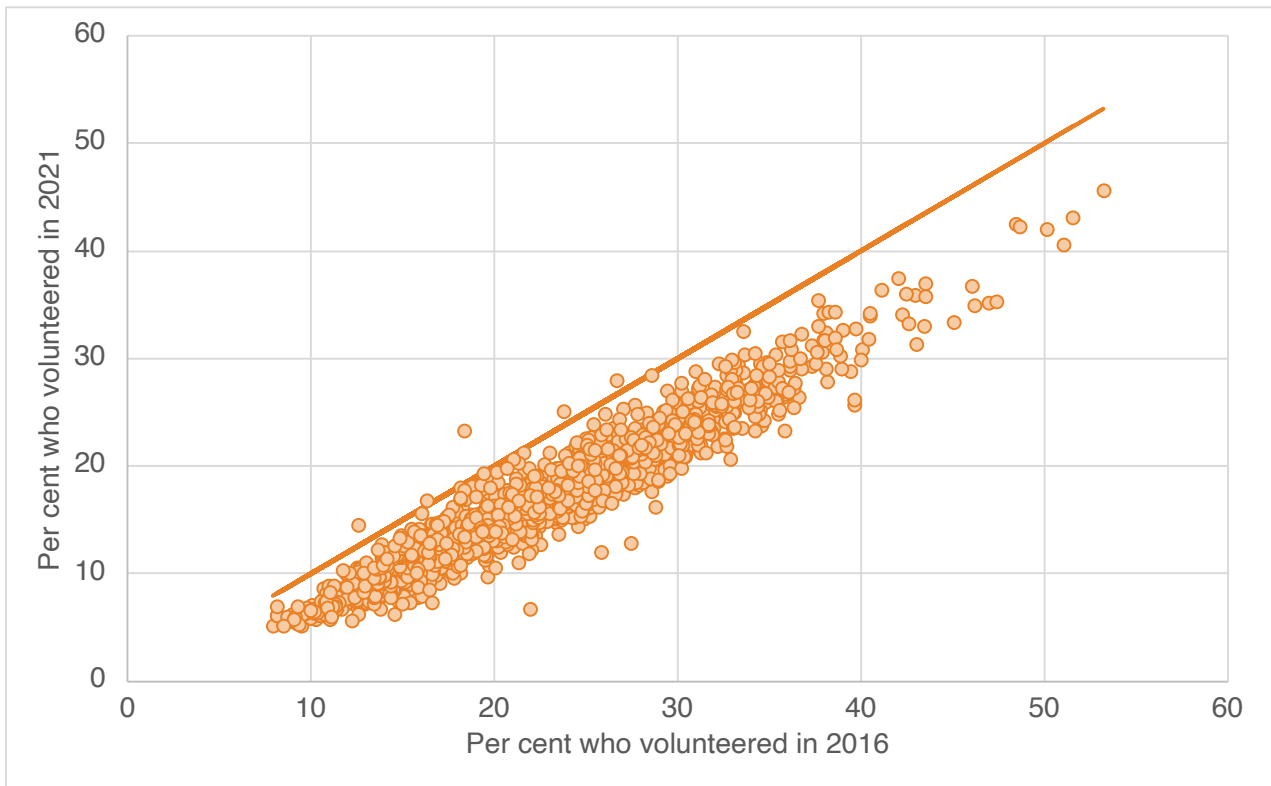
Note: Census-based estimates do not include confidence intervals. Population aged 15-years and older. Source: 2006, 2011, 2016, and 2021 Censuses of Population and Housing.

## 5.1 Geographic differences in volunteering and change between 2016 and 2021

This section describes patterns of volunteering and changes in rates of volunteering between 2016 and 2021 using a medium-sized geographic area that represents a community that interacts together socially and economically (Statistical Areas 2 level).<sup>12</sup> The sample sizes in the ANUpoll and GSS are too small to allow a detailed geographic analysis and therefore Census data is used. It should be noted that data from the April 2022 ANUpoll summarised previously shows that volunteering rates are higher for people living outside of capital cities than for people living within capital cities.

Figure 9 shows the percentage of those aged 15 years and over in each Statistical Area 2 in Australia who volunteered in 2016 (along the horizontal axis) and the percentage of those aged 15 years and over in the same areas in 2021 who volunteered in 2021. There are 2,318 regions in the figure. A dot below the red line indicates that there was a decline in volunteering in that geographic area between 2016 and 2021, a dot on the red line indicates no change in volunteering for that area, and a dot above the red line indicates an increase in volunteering in that area.

Figure 9 Per cent of Australians aged 15 years and over who undertook volunteering in 2016 and 2021, by Statistical Area 2



Notes: Population aged 15 years and older. Areas with a less than 1,000 people aged 15 years and over in 2021 are excluded. Also excluded are areas which represent people who did not give a usual residence. Area-based concordances have been used in order to take into account changes in region boundaries. This results in 2,317 areas included in the figure.

Source: 2016 and 2021 Censuses of Population and Housing.

There are three key points to take from Figure 9. These are:

- There are big differences in volunteering rates between areas. In 2016, the lowest volunteering rate was 7.9 per cent and the highest was 53.3 per cent. In 2021, the lowest volunteering rate was 5.1 per cent and the highest was 45.6 per cent.
- There is a strong correlation across years at the area-level, with areas with high volunteering rates in one year likely to have high volunteering rates in a subsequent year.<sup>13</sup>
- In virtually all geographic areas the rates of volunteering declined between 2016 and 2021, with only a handful of areas experiencing no change or an increase in volunteering rates.

Understanding the factors that predict variation in volunteering rates at the area level and the factors associated with change is interesting for the same reason as factors at the individual level – it tells us something about who volunteers and whose volunteering rates are changing. However, there is an arguably more important reason for understanding area-level variation, and that is that it tells us something about the supply of volunteers in a geographic area.

Victorian areas had, on average, the lowest rate of formal volunteering, followed by Queensland and New South Wales (which were not statistically significantly different from each other). The highest rates of volunteering were in Western Australia, with the other states and territories (South Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory, and the Australian Capital Territory) in between, but still much higher than in Victoria, Queensland, and New South Wales.

Two models of the factors associated with area-level volunteering have been estimated. The first model includes 2021 area-level characteristics to explain variation in the proportion of the 2021 population (aged 15 years and over) that volunteered in that area. Explanatory variables include demographic, socioeconomic, health, and education-related variables, as well as state/territory. The second model analyses the factors associated with the changes in the area level volunteering rates between 2016 and 2021. With the exception of the proportion of people with a long-term health condition (which was not available in the 2016 Census) Model 2 includes the explanatory variables included in Model 1 as well as the baseline level of volunteering. This is included in order to control for the way in which prior volunteering rates constrain the level of movement up or down over time.



Geographic areas that tended to have high rates of formal volunteering were those that had a higher: median age of the population; proportion of the population who spoke a language other than English; and proportion of the population who were carers (provided unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, health condition, or due to old age).

Geographic areas that had lower rates of formal volunteering were those that had a higher proportion of the population who: had not completed Year 12; were Australian citizens; identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; did not report a religion; had a long-term health condition; did not undertake any domestic work; and did not provide unpaid care for a child. Areas in which there was a higher average number of people per bedroom and areas with a higher median household income also had lower rates of volunteering.

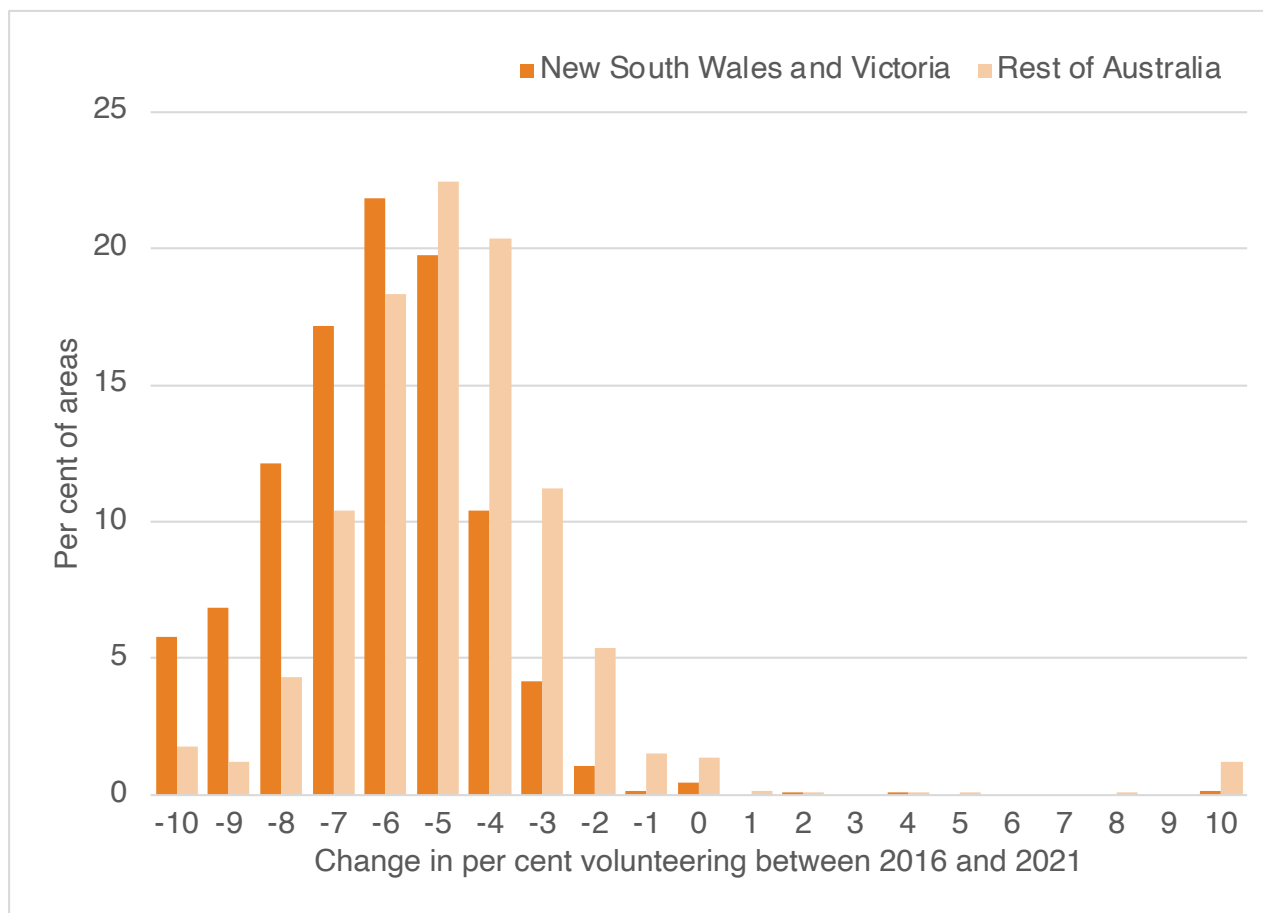
There was no association between the rate of volunteering in a geographic area and:

- the proportion of the population (aged 15 years plus) who are students.
- the proportion of the population who need assistance with day-to-day activities due to disability or old age.
- the proportion of households in the area that own or are purchasing their own home.

Some but not all of the factors that predicted the level of volunteering in 2021 were also associated with predicting change between 2016 and 2021 (holding constant the area level volunteering rate in 2016). Areas in Victoria experienced a larger drop in volunteering than areas in New South Wales, with all other areas in Australia having a smaller decline. These differences are apparent in Figure 10, which groups areas by the change in volunteering rates between 2016 and 2021, rounded to the nearest whole percentage point.

The black bars for New South Wales and Victoria show that the two most populous states, which were hit hardest by COVID-19 between 2020 and August 2021, had much larger declines in volunteering over the period, with an average decline across areas of 6.5 percentage points, and 41.9 per cent of areas declining by 7 percentage points or more. For the other states and territories, on the other hand, the average decline was only 4.6 percentage points, with only 17.7 per cent of areas having a decline of 7 percentage points or more.

Figure 10 Change in the per cent of Australians aged 15 years and over who undertook volunteering between 2016 and 2021, by Statistical Area 2, New South Wales and Victoria and rest of Australia



Source: 2016 and 2021 Censuses of Population and Housing.

In addition, but controlling for state/territory, there were other characteristics of the area in 2016 that predicted change through time in the percentage of people in an area who volunteered. Areas that had a larger decline were those with a higher income, as well as those with a higher percentage of people that had not completed Year 12, were a student (amongst those aged 20 to 24 years), were born overseas, spoke a language other than English, had a core-activity need for assistance, and provided unpaid assistance for someone with a disability. Those areas that had a smaller decline between 2016 and 2021 were those with a higher median age, a higher proportion of people that did not undertake domestic work, or that owned or were purchasing their own home.

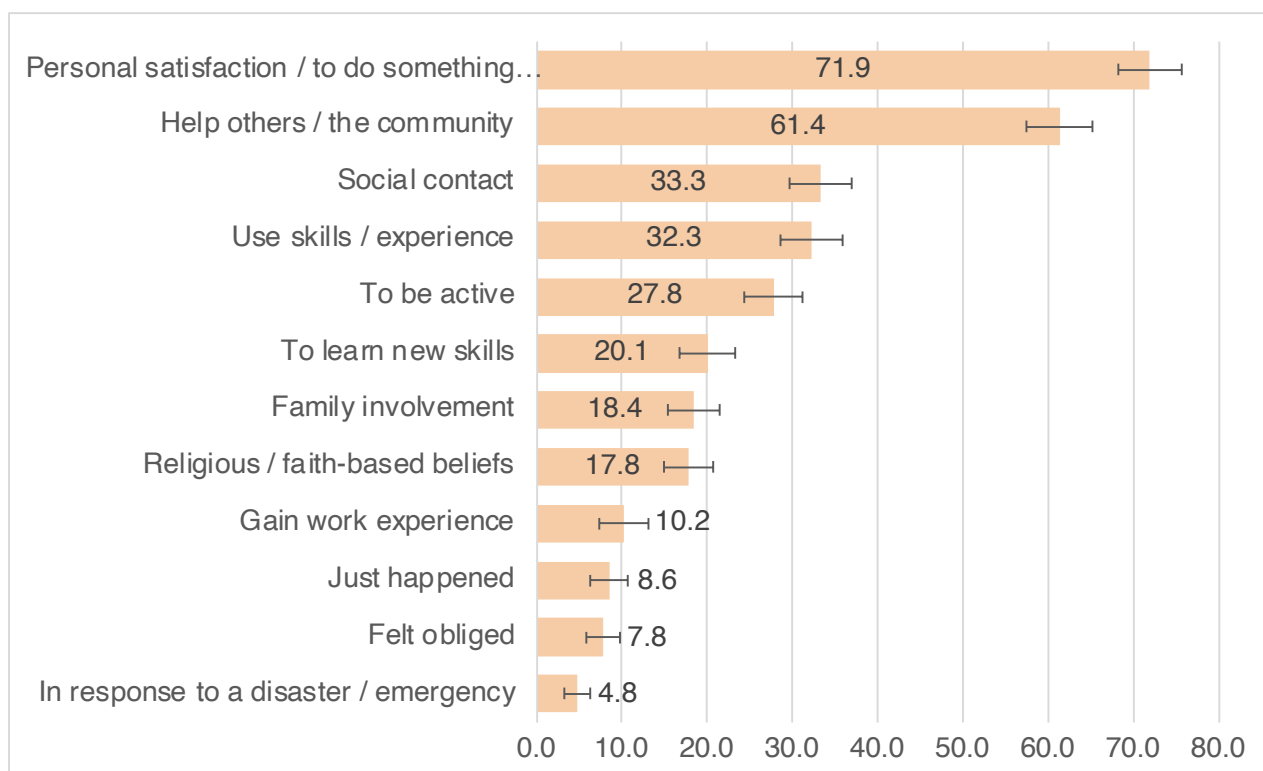
## 6. Reasons for Volunteering or Not Volunteering

Understanding the reasons why people do or do not volunteer is important for a myriad of reasons, including volunteer recruitment and retention, public policy, and identifying resourcing requirements.

The qualitative responses to the survey highlighted a diversity of motivations for volunteering, with one respondent stating that, *“It gives my life meaning and improves my self-value”* and another saying that they, *“Felt like I was helping, giving something back to society, making someone’s life a little happier.”*

The April 2022 ANUpoll asked people who had volunteered in the previous 12 months ‘What were your reasons for being a volunteer?’ Two reasons stand out. Just over seven-in-ten (71.9 per cent) selected ‘personal satisfaction / to do something worthwhile’ and just over six-in-ten (61.4 per cent) selected to ‘help others / the community’ (Figure 11). Other common reasons given for volunteering include ‘social contact’ (33.3 per cent), ‘use skills / experience’ (32.3 per cent) and ‘to be active’ (27.8 per cent).

Figure 11 Reasons for volunteering, April 2022 (%)

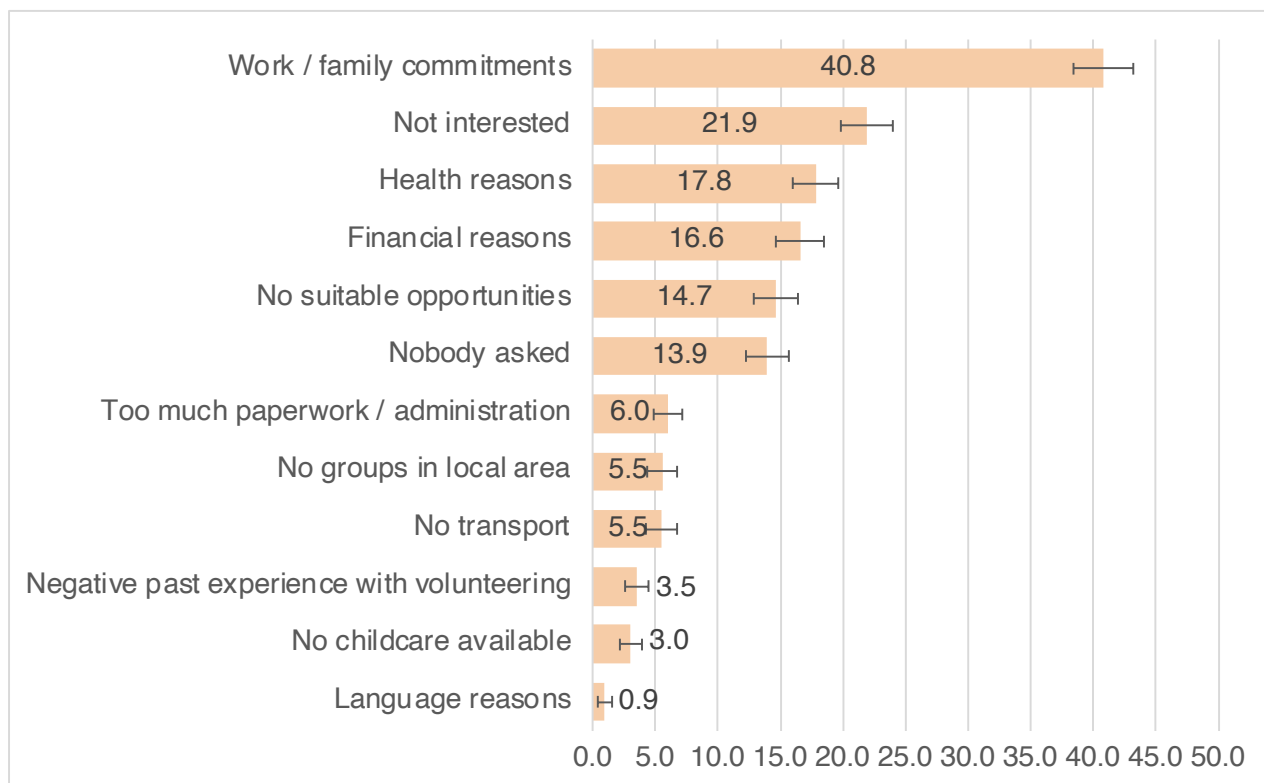


Note: Respondent could select more than one reason. The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

For non-volunteers, when asked ‘What are all the reasons that you have not formally volunteered for an organisation or group in the last 12 months?’ the most common reason was ‘work / family commitments’, given by 40.8 per cent (Figure 12). About one-in-five (21.9 per cent) of non-volunteers indicated that they were not interested as one of their reasons, with fewer than one-in-five non-volunteers giving each of the remaining ten reasons.

Figure 12 Reasons for not volunteering, April 2022 (%)



Note: Respondent could select more than one reason. The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

Interestingly, about one-in-eight (14.7 per cent) said that they did not volunteer because there were ‘no suitable opportunities’ and a similar proportion said it was because ‘nobody asked’ (13.9 per cent). This indicates there is a potential untapped pool of volunteers.

This is broadly consistent with data from the 2020 General Social Survey which found that 52 per cent of Australians aged 15 years and over who had not volunteered in the 12 months prior to the survey reported ‘No time (family / work commitments)’ and another 33 per cent reported ‘Not interested / no need’ as the main reason for not volunteering (ABS, 2021b).

The time pressures generated by work and family commitments was mentioned in response to the open-ended questions included in the April 2022 ANUpoll. A woman aged 35 to 44 years stated that volunteering was, *“Time consuming for a busy family”*. Another woman aged 25 to 34 years said that previously she had, *“Volunteered running a playgroup. It was a lot to take on in conjunction with my job 3 days a week and a young family.”*

The barriers to volunteering differed for key population groups. The analysis in the remainder of this section focuses on four of these: work and family commitments; health reasons; financial reasons; and no suitable opportunities. These reasons are focused on because they are relatively common and can potentially be addressed by the volunteering ecosystem or through public policy.

The results of the regression analysis of the socio-demographic and geographic factors associated with the likelihood of reporting work and family commitments, health reasons, financial reasons, or no suitable opportunities as barriers to volunteering are presented in the online Appendix and the key results summarised in this section.

The discussion is focused on variables that were statistically significant in the regression analysis, but the results are presented as differences in percentages without controlling for other characteristics.

## Work and family commitments

- Women were more likely than men to give work and family commitments as a reason for not volunteering – 46.3 per cent of women and 35.6 per cent of men.
- Those aged 35 to 44 years were more likely to give work and family commitments (50.3 per cent) than those aged 18-34 years (42.2 per cent), those aged 45-64 years (44.7 per cent), and those aged 65 years and older (25.7 per cent). These reflect the heavier, on average, family responsibilities of those aged 35-44 years combined with higher rates of paid employment.
- Work and family commitments were also a common barrier for those with relatively high levels of education, with 47.6 per cent of those with a degree reporting this as a reason for not volunteering.

## Health reasons

- Women were more likely to report health reasons as a reason for not volunteering (19.7 per cent) than were men (15.5 per cent).<sup>14</sup>
- Older Australians were more likely to report health as a barrier to volunteering. Just under one-third (30.6 per cent) of those aged 65 years and over reported health as a reason for not volunteering compared to one-in-five (20.3 per cent) of those

aged 45 to 64 years and one-in-ten (11.1 per cent) of those aged 18 to 44 years. A woman aged 75 years or more in the survey stated that, *“Until my health got worse I loved being a volunteer. [It] was very rewarding.”*

- Those who lived in a highly socio-economically disadvantaged area (that is, the bottom socioeconomic quintile) were more likely to report health reasons (25.1 per cent) compared to the rest of the population (16.4 per cent).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (33.2 per cent) were more likely to report health reasons compared to non-Indigenous Australians (17.5 per cent).

## Financial barriers

- There were large differences in financial barriers by age. Those aged 18 to 34 years were more likely to report financial reasons for not volunteering (25.5 per cent) compared to those aged 35 to 54 years (16.7 per cent) and those aged 55 years and over (9.3 per cent).
- People living in a capital city were more likely to report financial reasons (18.4 per cent) compared to those who live outside of capital cities (12.6 per cent).
- Somewhat surprisingly, there does not appear to be much variation in reporting financial reasons across the socioeconomic characteristics of the neighbourhood in which a person lives.

## No suitable opportunities in the area

- Older Australians were less likely to report a lack of suitable opportunities as a reason they do not volunteer.
- Those in the middle quintile in terms of socioeconomic characteristics of an area were the most likely to report lack of suitable opportunities as a reason.
- Compared to those born in Australia or those born in another English-speaking country (13.2 per cent), 20.7 per cent of those born in a non-English speaking country reported no suitable opportunities as their reason for not volunteering. This may reflect the area in which people from these countries live, or it may reflect the social/language barriers to hearing about or being able to access the opportunities that do exist.

## 7. The Characteristics of Volunteering

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This section provides an overview of the nature of volunteering and the activities undertaken. The data reported is for April 2022 and relates to formal volunteering unless otherwise stated.

### 7.1 Time spent volunteering

On average, volunteers spent 180 hours doing volunteer work over the previous 12 months.<sup>15</sup>

Focusing on those who had volunteered for at least one hour over the previous 12 months, there is a very skewed distribution of volunteering hours across the population, with a large number of volunteers contributing relatively few hours and, conversely, a few volunteers contributing a very large number of hours. The median number of hours was 80, which means that 50 per cent of the population volunteered for 80 hours or less, and the other 50 per cent volunteered for 80 hours or more. This is far less than the mean (180 hours).

While there was a moderate proportion of volunteers (16.4 per cent) who volunteered for 10 hours or less over the previous 12 months, it is estimated that 19.6 per cent of volunteers contributed more than 250 hours. 9.8 per cent of volunteers contributed more than 450 hours and 5.5 per cent contributed more than 700 hours over the previous 12 months.

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Table 1 Per cent of volunteers by numbers of hours spent volunteering over the previous 12 months, April 2022

Hours spent volunteering	Per cent of volunteers
10 hours or less	16.5
11 to 25 hours	12.1
26 to 50 hours	12.7
51 to 100 hours	14.2
101 to 150 hours	13.1
151 to 250 hours	11.9
251 to 450 hours	9.9
451 to 700 hours	4.3
701 hours or more	5.5

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Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

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A regression model of the relationship between total hours spent volunteering and the variables discussed in the previous section has been estimated. The detailed regression results are available in the online Appendix and the key results summarised in this section. The model found only a few variables that were statistically significant.

Older volunteers (those aged 55 years and over) spent more time volunteering on average (263 hours) than those aged 54 years or under (123 hours). For example, a man aged 75 years and over in the sample reported that their experience was positive, and, *“in quantum [they provided] some 60 hours per week pro bono support.”* Another man aged 65 to 74 years reported that, *“10 to 14 hours a week has been no problem.”*

Volunteers who were born overseas in a non-English speaking country volunteered for fewer hours on average (109 hours) than those born in Australia (197 hours) or those born in an English-speaking country (184 hours). For example, one volunteer from a non-English speaking background said that although their volunteering experience was good, there were, *“... not too many options for volunteering as many volunteering are during weekdays. And cannot go out during weekdays.”*

## 7.2 Mode of volunteering

The April 2022 ANUpoll asked volunteers ‘How did you undertake your volunteering in the last 12 months?’ The options were (more than one option could be selected):

- In person at the organisation
- In person in the field
- Over the internet
- Over the phone
- Other

Over two-thirds (69.4 per cent) undertook volunteering in person at the organisation they volunteer for, and four-in-ten (41.5 per cent) undertook volunteering in person in the field. Over the internet and over the phone were also quite prevalent modes of volunteering with 30.2 per cent and 16.9 per cent respectively volunteering using these modes. Only 4.6 per cent said they volunteered another way not listed.

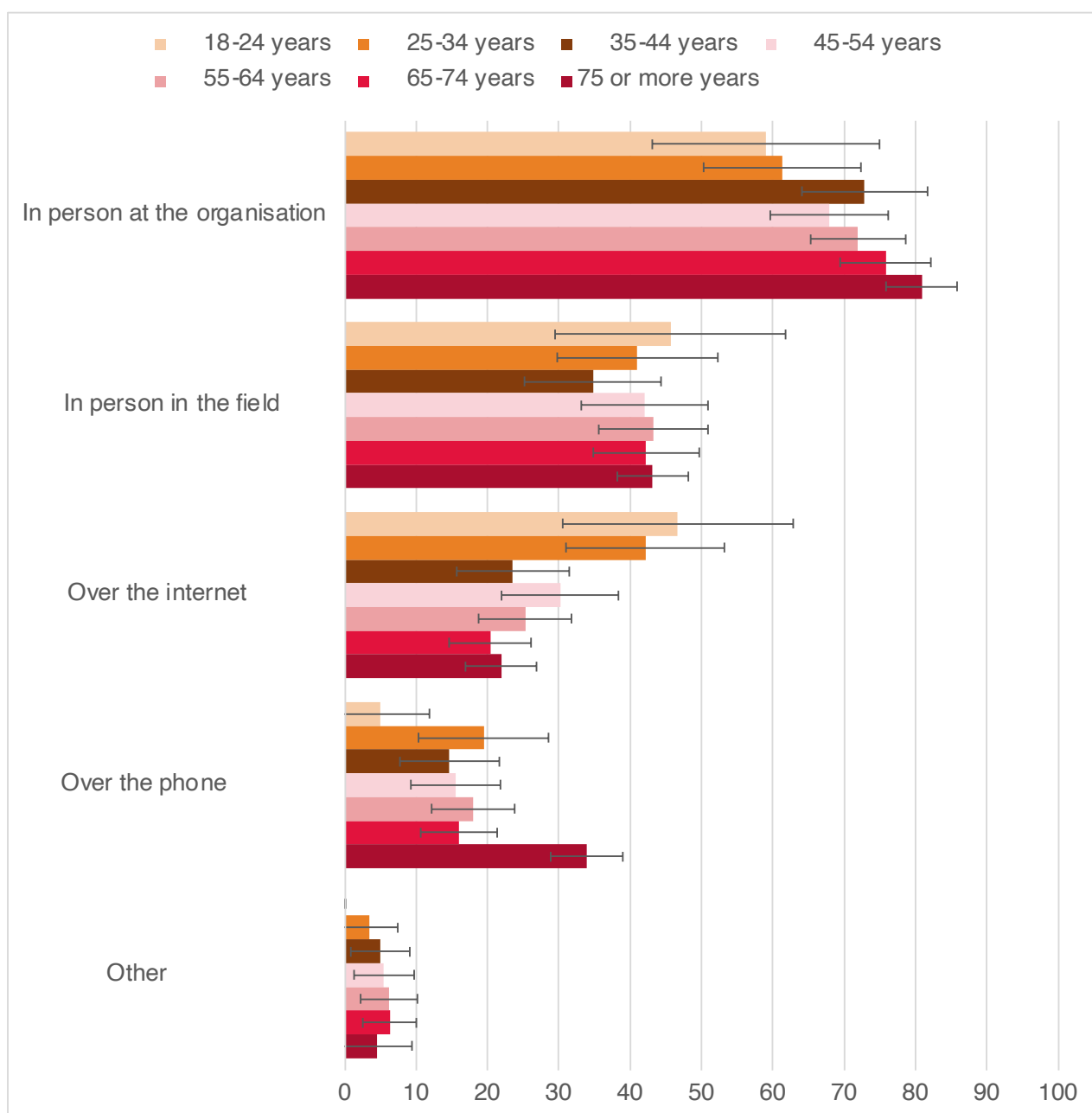
The continuing high proportion of volunteering occurring in person is significant given the COVID-19 pandemic and its ongoing impacts. This likely explains why volunteering was so difficult for many people to undertake during the COVID-19 period. Respondents noted both the positives and negatives of volunteering online. One respondent reported:

*“I really enjoy doing voluntary work. While I need to dedicate some of my personal time I enjoy it. Since COVID-19 my work is done remotely through zoom which has pros and cons. Pros- less time due to no travel, cons- slightly less of a connection is made.”*



There were some differences by age in how people volunteered, though perhaps not as much as one might have assumed (Figure 13). Keeping in mind the relatively large standard errors and therefore the uncertainty around the estimates, older Australians were relatively more likely to volunteer in person at an organisation or over the phone, whereas younger Australians were more likely to volunteer in the field or over the internet. An older volunteer (a woman aged 65 to 74 years) who volunteered in person stated that, *“I enjoy it as it gives me connection with others as I’m a carer for a family member with dementia.”*

Figure 13 Mode of volunteering by age, April 2022 (%)



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
 Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

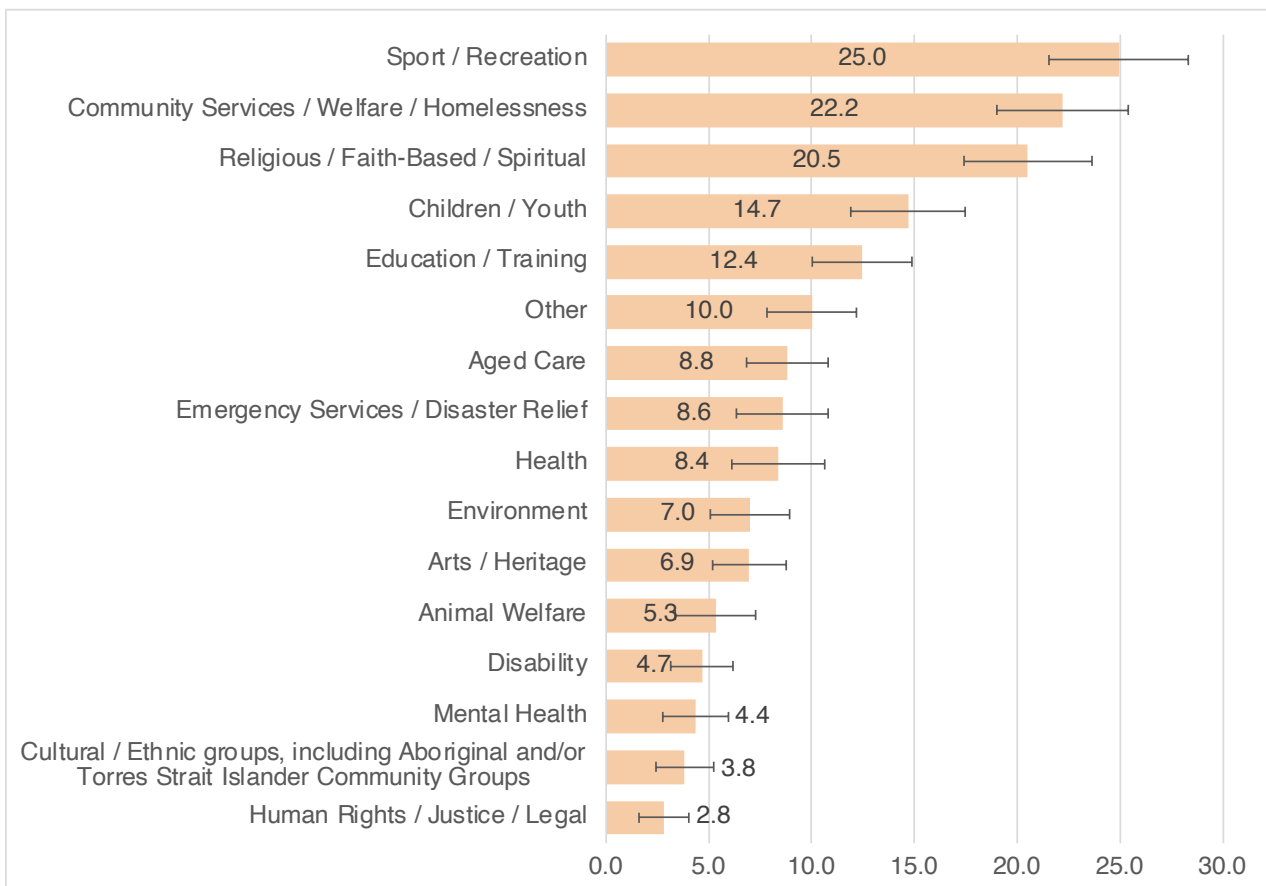
### 7.3 Types of organisations volunteered for

Volunteers were asked ‘Which of these best describes the type of organisation[s] you have volunteered for?’ with 15 potential options and an ‘other’ category. Volunteers were able to answer that they undertook volunteering in more than one category.

The most common type of organisation that individuals volunteered for was sport and recreation organisations with one-quarter of volunteers (25.0 per cent) selecting this category. One respondent stated that, *“It has been a positive experience providing a service to the community, supported a sporting organisation and providing social interaction.”*

Other types of organisations that at least one-fifth of volunteers undertook volunteer work for were community services, welfare and homelessness organisations (22.2 per cent) and religious, faith-based and spiritual organisations (20.5 per cent). A volunteer that highlighted the importance of work in these areas stated that, *“It has been very positive, I have been volunteering for 2 years since COVID-19 started. I volunteer in a food program making meals and serving the homeless and not so homeless. I love it and I get much more out of it than I give.”*

Figure 14 Type of organisation volunteered for (current volunteers), April 2022 (%)



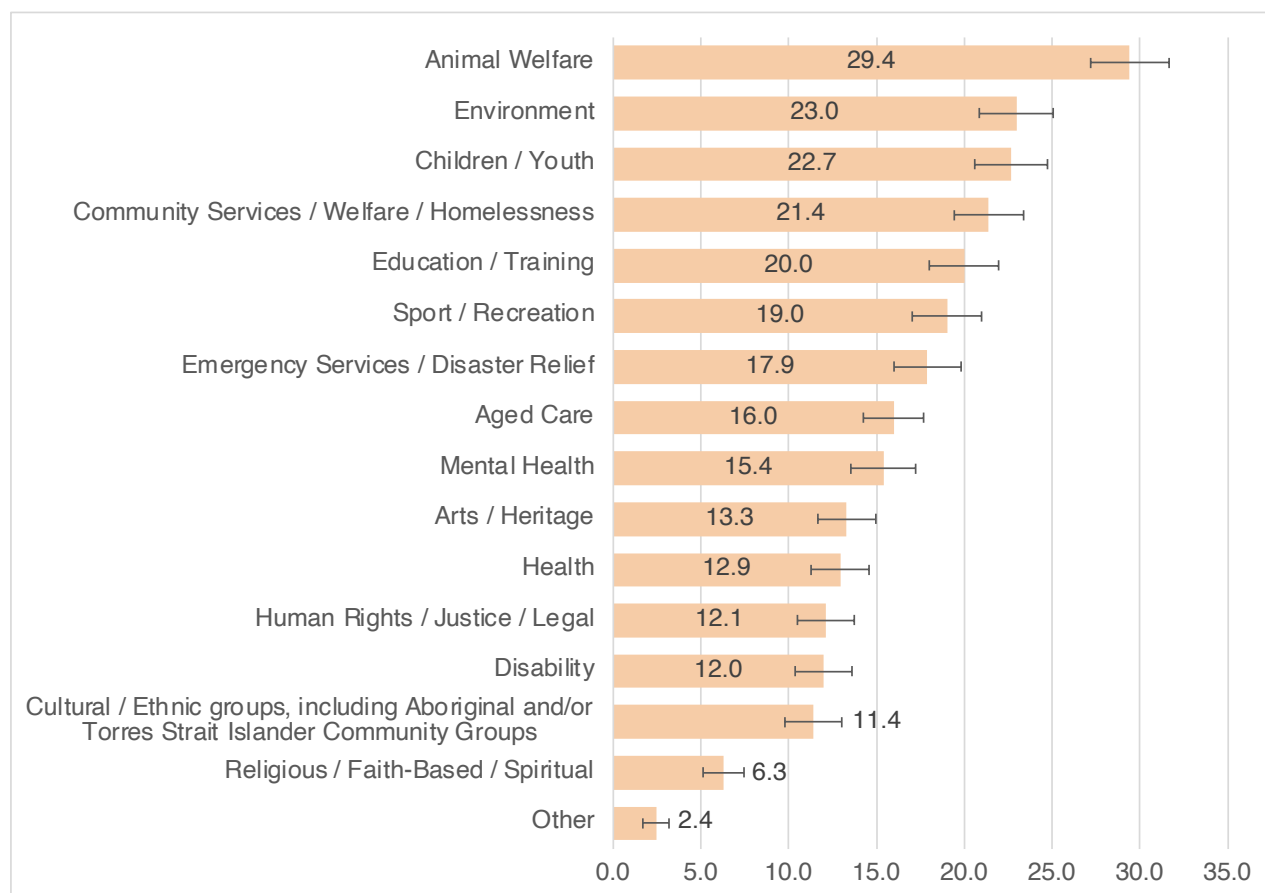
Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

These findings are mostly consistent with data collected in the 2020 GSS, which shows that the three most common types of organisations for which individuals volunteered are sport and physical recreation (31 per cent of volunteers), religious groups (23 per cent of volunteers), and education and training (19 per cent of volunteers) (ABS, 2021b).<sup>16</sup> However, this data also reveals sizeable volunteer workforces in specific sectors that were not included in the GSS survey, such as aged care (8.8 per cent), disability (4.7 per cent), and mental health (4.4 per cent).

People who were not currently volunteering were asked ‘In which of the following sectors, if any, would you be interested in volunteering in the future?’ The most common type of organisation that those who were not currently volunteering might be interested in volunteering for in the future was animal welfare (29.4 per cent), followed by environmental organisations (23.0 per cent), and organisations focused on children and youth (22.7 per cent) (Figure 15). The survey identified a lot of potential future supply for these three types of organisations, yet only a small percentage of current volunteers indicated they volunteer for these organisation types.

Figure 15 Type/sector of organisation would like to volunteer for in the future (non-volunteers), April 2022 (%)



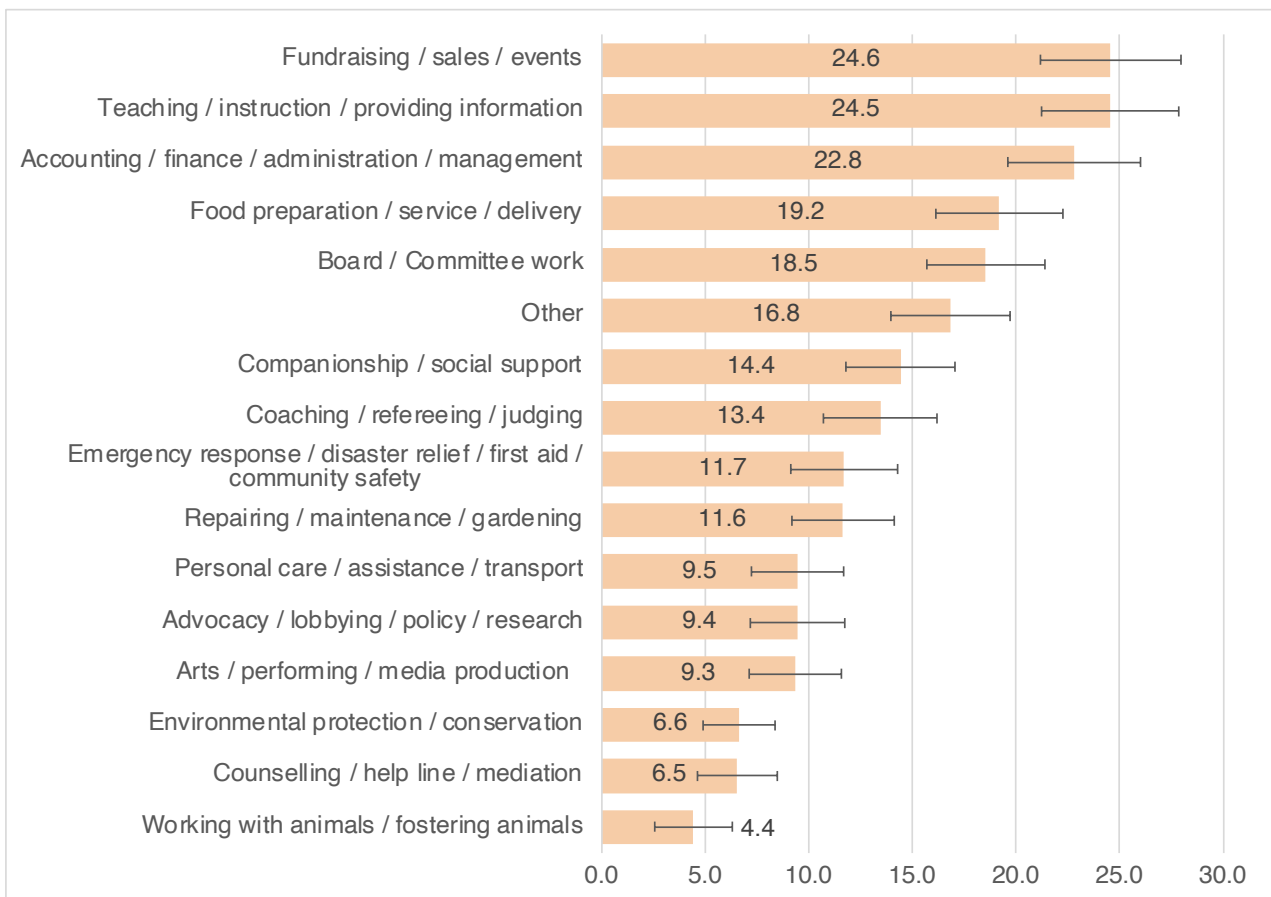
Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

## 7.4 Type of activity undertaken when volunteering

Volunteers undertake a wide range of activities. The most common activity, given by 24.6 per cent of volunteers, was fundraising, sales and events (Figure 16). One volunteer said that their contribution was, *“Fundraising for the Australian Cancer Research Foundation and the Heart Foundation. I no longer go door to door seeking donations since Covid, but I still support those organisations in other ways.”*

There were also a large proportion of people who undertook teaching, instruction or providing information (24.5 per cent) as well as accounting, finance, administration, and management (22.8 per cent), and board and committee work (18.5 per cent).

Figure 16 Type of activity undertaken when volunteering (current volunteers), April 2022 (%)



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

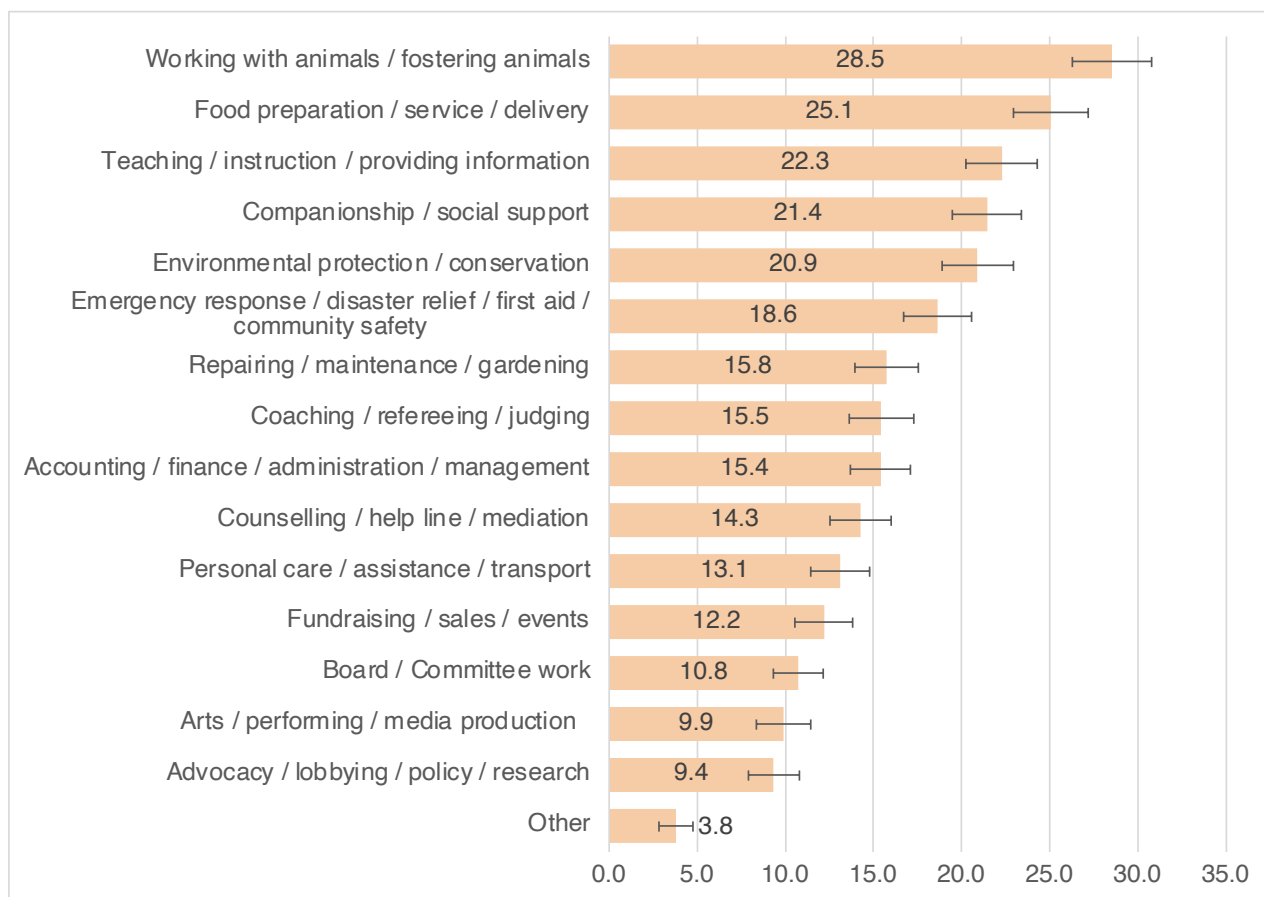
Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

There are substantial mismatches between the types of activities that current volunteers undertake and the types of activities that non-volunteers would consider (Figure 17). The most common potential future activity of interest given is working with animals / fostering animals (28.5 per cent of non-volunteers), whereas just 4.4 per cent of current volunteers

were with organisations that provide these roles. Amongst non-volunteers, 14.3 per cent said they would consider counselling / help line / mediation, whereas only 6.5 per cent of current volunteers were with organisations undertaking these activities.

For other areas, there was a much closer alignment. For example, one-quarter (25.1 per cent) of non-volunteers would potentially volunteer for food preparation, service, and delivery. This is closer to matching the types of activities that volunteers currently undertake (19.2 per cent). The proportion of non-volunteers who said they would like to undertake teaching, instruction and providing information was 22.3 per cent which is similar to the 24.5 per cent of volunteers currently doing this type of role.

Figure 17 Type of activity would like to undertake when volunteering (non-volunteers), April 2022 (%)



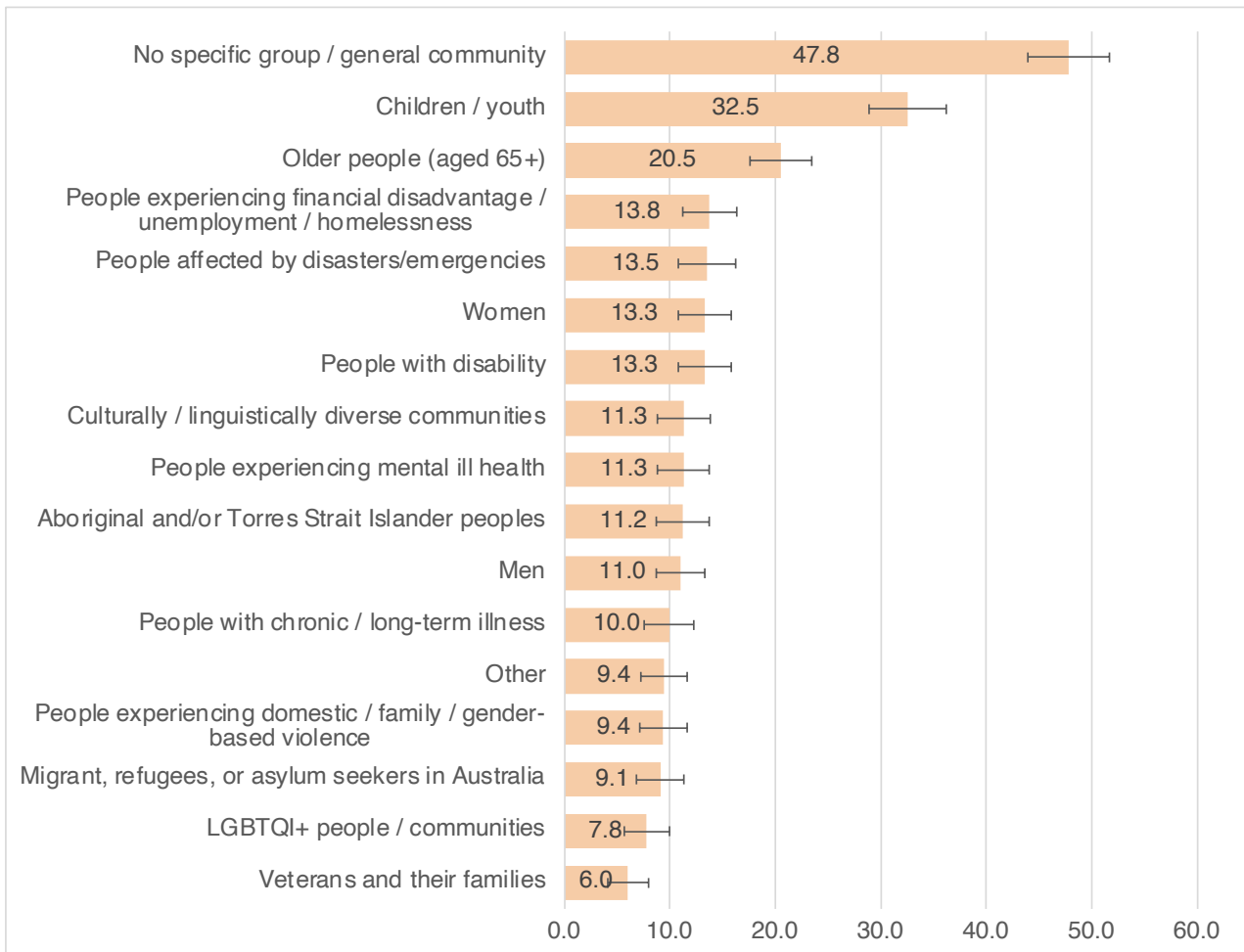
Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

## 7.5 Group that volunteering activity aims to assist

Most volunteers undertook activities that were targeted towards the general community (Figure 18). Where there is a focus on particular groups of beneficiaries, the most

common focus was children / youth (32.5 per cent) and older people (20.5 per cent). One respondent stated that, *“Working with kids in sporting and school contexts, gives me a feeling of accomplishment I don’t get from my job as much anymore.”*

Figure 18 Group that volunteering activity aims to assist, April 2022 (%)



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

## 8. COVID-19 and Volunteering

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### 8.1 Organisational perspectives

Rates of volunteering fell dramatically once the COVID-19 pandemic reached Australia (see Section 4). There is a small amount of existing data that outlines how, due to the changing pandemic environment, volunteer involving organisations had to adapt their volunteer engagement strategies and processes. The Victorian State of Volunteering Report detailed how COVID-19 impacted organisations' engagement of volunteers. Victorian volunteer involving organisations reported a '57.1 per cent change in their volunteer profile', '61 per cent noted they have altered their [volunteer] recruitment strategies', and '42.1 per cent altered their retention strategies' (Ellis et al. 2020).

Some volunteer involving organisations had to suspend and/or reduce operations during COVID-19. The NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) (2020) survey found that 'physical distancing and Public Health Order restrictions' resulted in organisations 'suspending operations where possible'. The 'closure of facilities, offices, and venues' and 'all volunteer services and activities suspended at this time' were amongst the 'most common impacts' noted by respondents (DCJ 2020). Volunteering Australia's (2021a) stakeholder survey demonstrated that 'nearly three quarters (72 per cent) of respondents reported their volunteering programs were either only partially operational (60 per cent) or not operational (12 per cent)'.

Organisations also had to adapt their services to account for the changing environment of the pandemic. Victorian, Queensland, and New South Wales volunteer involving organisations reported adapting to new models of service to manage physical distancing, Public Health Orders, and the safety of those engaging in their services (Ellis et al. 2020, Muller et al. 2021a, Muller et al 2021b).

Adaption included moving programs online 'where possible', increasing 'health and cleanliness protocols', and changing or adapting services to adjust to the COVID-19 needs and environment (DCJ 2020). As a result of changes, organisations faced increased internet, telephone, IT hardware and software costs or lacked these facilities so could not conduct their services online (DCJ 2020). Some services could not be delivered online due to their nature (Muller et al. 2021a). The State of Volunteering in Queensland report recorded a 15.2 per cent increase in online/at home volunteering from 2019 to 2020 (Muller et al. 2021a). Additionally, the ABS (2020) noted an increase in people volunteering online from 8.5 per cent in 2019 to 17.3 per cent in 2020. These changes resulted in increased pressure on Managers and Coordinators of Volunteers (DCJ 2020).

Not all of the impacts of COVID-19 were negative. An example of how a service successfully adapted is documented by Fearn et al. (2021), which showed how a befriending program in residential aged care successfully changed. The program was part of a study involving face-to-face and one-on-one regular conversations between volunteers and aged care residents. Following the introduction of aged care visitor restrictions, ‘volunteers ... attempted to continue befriending residents by whatever remote means possible’ (Fearn et al. 2021). Findings from the study showed that mostly residents preferred face-to-face interactions ‘yet remote befriending was definitely a good alternative to doing nothing at all during the isolation periods’ (Fearn et al. 2021). Other findings included that the form of communication needed to be ‘decided collaboratively between volunteer and resident’ and a ‘face to face meeting prior to remote befriending’ helped, and a need for residential staff assistance to facilitate the method of communication (Fearn et al. 2021). Negative elements of remote befriending included technology issues, accessibility issues, difficulty in reading the emotions of residents, and no opportunity for friendly and consensual affection, such as a hug or ‘touch of the hand’ (Fearn et al. 2021).

New initiatives have also emerged due to COVID-19 and its associated circumstances. For example, Conversation in Isolation (CII) was created, which is a long-term telephone intervention service designed to combat social isolation and loneliness experienced during the pandemic (Liu et al. 2021). Tertiary students studying health disciplines were assigned a community member in need to engage with weekly via telephone, video calls, emails, text, or letter writing. The program was run by volunteers and has expanded nationally to continue beyond the pandemic due to its success. Feedback from community members documented by Liu et al. (2021) was positive.

One community member said that the phone calls “gives [them] something to look forward to.” Others said it’s a “wonderful way to break up the monotony” and it’s “like having an opportunity to go out during the week.” Overall, community reception was extremely positive, with many participants having developed long-term friendships with their volunteers (Liu et al. 2021).

## 8.2 Who stopped volunteering during COVID-19?

This section presents data on the demographic characteristics of people who stopped volunteering due to COVID-19. The association between having stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 and financial and health circumstances are also documented.



The second question asked in the April 2022 ANUpoll volunteering module was ‘In the last 12 months, have you done more or less voluntary work than you did previously?’ This question was asked only of those who said they had volunteered in the previous 12 months. Based on this question, 28.4 per cent of volunteers felt they had increased the amount of volunteering they did, 31.7 per cent felt that the amount of volunteering they had done did not change, and 40.0 per cent felt that their volunteering decreased. That is, even amongst the current volunteering group, there was a net decline in the amount of volunteering undertaken.

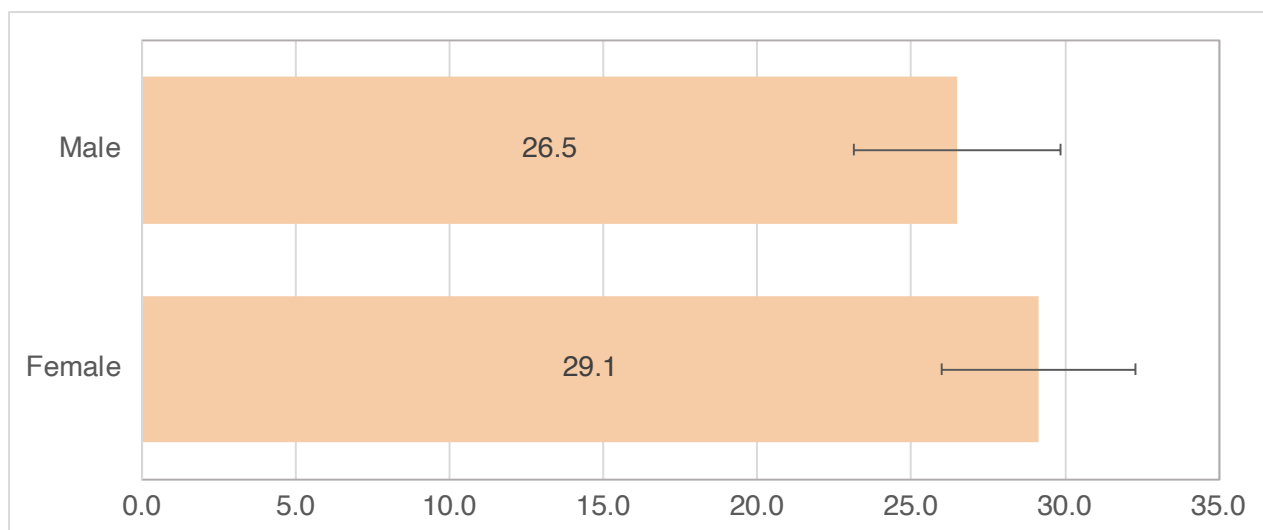
Those who had not volunteered in the previous 12 months were asked ‘Did you do any voluntary work prior to the last 12 months?’ Of those in April who had not volunteered in the previous 12 months, 76.8 per cent said that they had not done any volunteer work prior to the last 12 months, 19.8 per cent said that they had done a little, and 3.5 per cent said that they had done a lot. These last two groups represent people who had recently stopped volunteering.

The April 2022 ANUpoll included a set of questions about the direct impact of COVID-19. Specifically, the questionnaire started with the following introduction: ‘We are now going to ask you some questions about any changes you have made to your life since the start of the spread of COVID-19...**Since February 2020**, have you undertaken any of the following precautions to minimise COVID-19 transmission?’

One of the impacts asked about in the April 2022 ANUpoll was whether respondents ‘Stopped volunteering or other unpaid work.’ Highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on volunteering, amongst those who had volunteered at some stage in their lives, over a quarter of respondents (27.9 per cent) said that they stopped volunteering due to COVID-19. Of those who said they had stopped volunteering at some stage, 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. When combined with the high proportion of volunteers who had reduced the amount of time spent volunteering, responses to these questions highlight the significant impact of COVID-19 on volunteering.

There is variation in the proportions of those who stopped volunteering across demographic groups, as shown in the following figures. There are some small differences by sex (Figure 19), with females slightly more likely to have stopped volunteering (29.1 per cent) compared to males (26.5 per cent).

Figure 19 Stopped volunteering activity due to COVID-19 by sex, April 2022 (%)

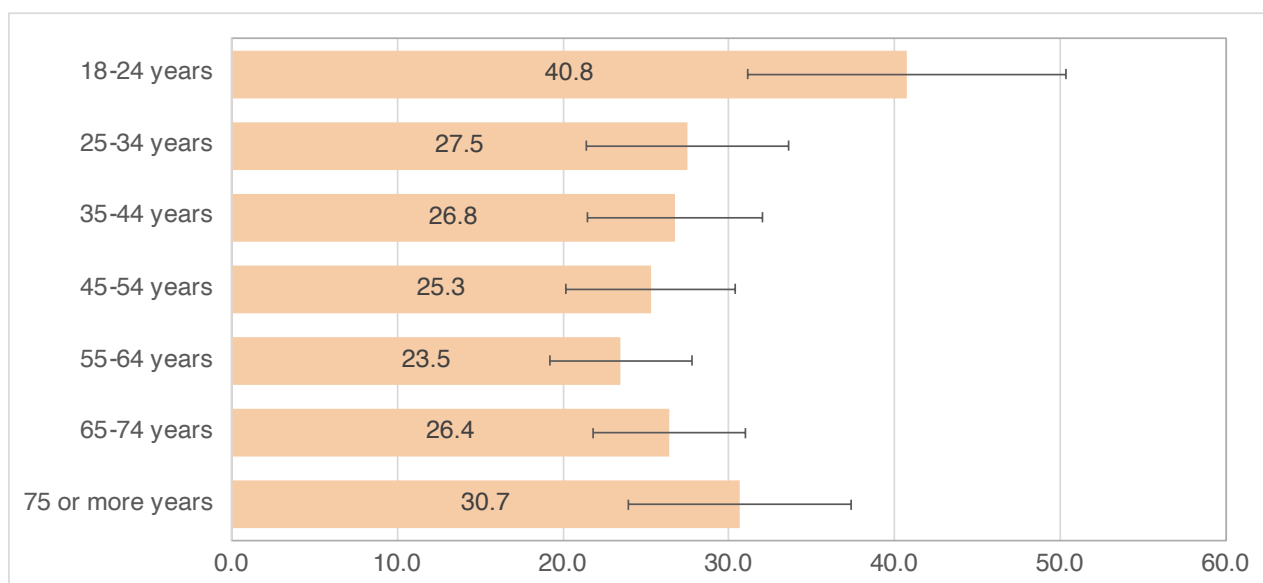


Note: This figure is for those who volunteered at some stage in their life. The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

There are differences in rates of stopping volunteering due to COVID-19 between age groups (Figure 20). The highest proportion of volunteers stopping due to COVID-19 was for 18 to 24 year olds (40.8 per cent, though this difference was not significant when other demographic characteristics are controlled for, see section 8.4), and the eldest age group of 75 years or older (30.7 per cent).

Figure 20 Stopped volunteering activity due to COVID-19 by age, April 2022 (%)

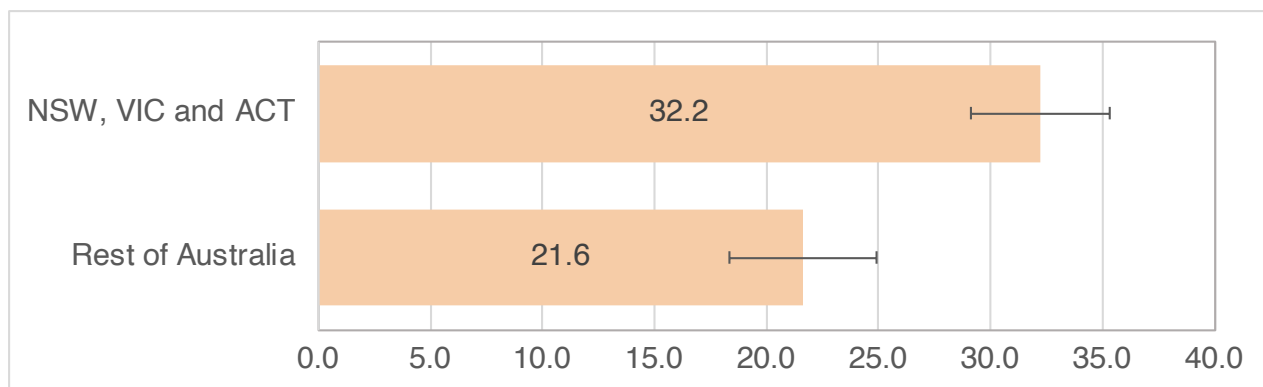


Note: This figure is for those who volunteered at some stage in their life. The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

COVID-19 had quite different impacts across Australia, particularly in 2021 when the two most populous states in the country (New South Wales and Victoria), as well as the Australian Capital Territory, experienced prolonged lockdown conditions, whereas the rest of the country were subject to much less extensive and severe restrictions (with the exception of internal and external border closures). The ‘lockdown jurisdictions’ of New South Wales, Victoria, and the Australian Capital Territory had a much higher proportion of people who had stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 (Figure 21).

Figure 21 Stopped volunteering activity due to COVID-19, New South Wales/Victoria/ Australian Capital Territory and rest of Australia, April 2022 (%)



Note: This figure is for those who volunteered at some stage in their life. The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

The ongoing impact of COVID-19 hung over many of the qualitative responses to the April 2022 ANUpoll. One respondent stated that, *“Due to covid [sic], many of my volunteering roles have been put on hold”* and another that, *“Unfortunately because of Covid [sic] I was stopped doing volunteer work as it was in a hospital.”* Even for those who had managed to continue volunteering, COVID-19 had an impact with one respondent saying simply that, *“COVID has made volunteering harder.”*

Not all the stories were completely negative though, with one respondent saying that although COVID-19, *“Has had a huge impact”* and that, *“Volunteering gives me a structure in my life as I love being around others.”* They also mentioned that they had had their, *“First day at my local footy and netball club recently after a long time away due to covid [and it] was an absolute joy.”*

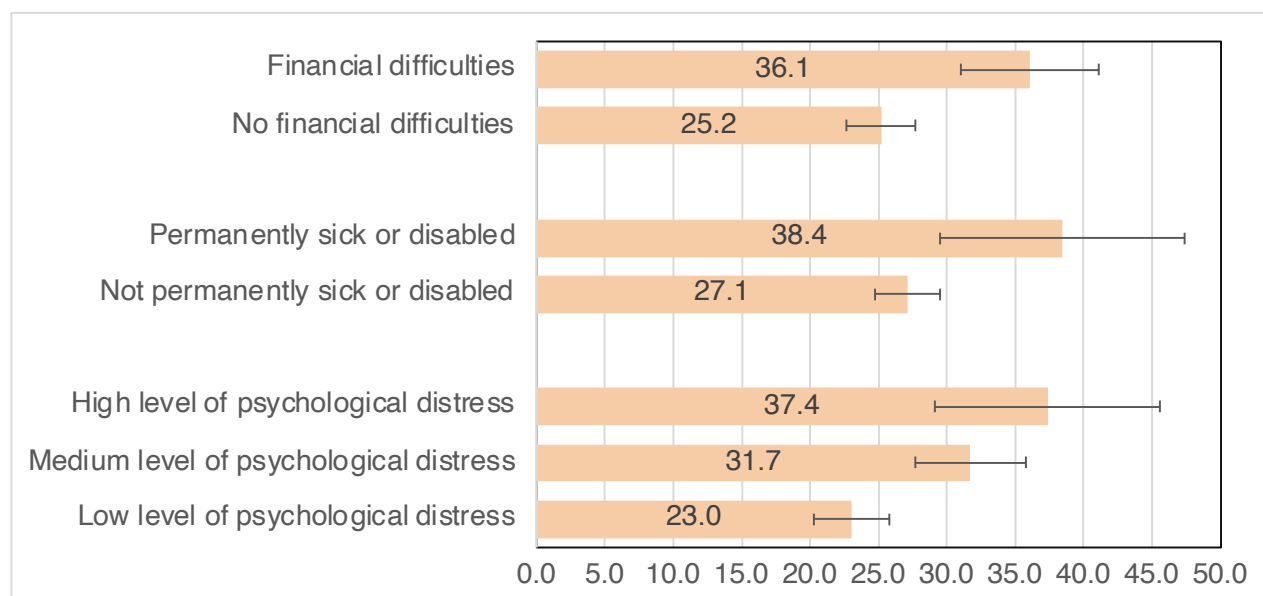
Figure 22 describes the association between having stopped volunteering during COVID-19 and financial and health characteristics, in particular stress-related factors. It is important to bear in mind that the data reported in Figure 22 are associations between having stopped volunteering and the various characteristics and cannot be interpreted as being causal effects.

A higher percentage of people who found it difficult to manage on their current income had stopped volunteering (36.1 per cent) compared to people not experiencing financial difficulties in April 2022 (25.2 per cent). Furthermore, those who identified as ‘permanently sick or disabled’ had higher rates of stopping volunteering due to COVID-19 (38.4 per cent) compared to people who were not permanently sick or disabled (27.1 per cent).<sup>17</sup>

Those with a high level of psychological distress<sup>18</sup> were more likely to have stopped volunteering (37.4 per cent), compared to people with a medium level of psychological distress (31.7 per cent), and people with lower levels of psychological distress (23 per cent).

While not necessarily reflecting a causal relationship between health/financial circumstances and volunteering, a higher proportion of volunteers who had stopped volunteering had poor health and therefore are at a greater risk of becoming very unwell if they catch COVID-19 or are more likely to experience financial hardship.

Figure 22 Stopped volunteering activity due to COVID-19 – financial and health characteristics, April 2022 (%)



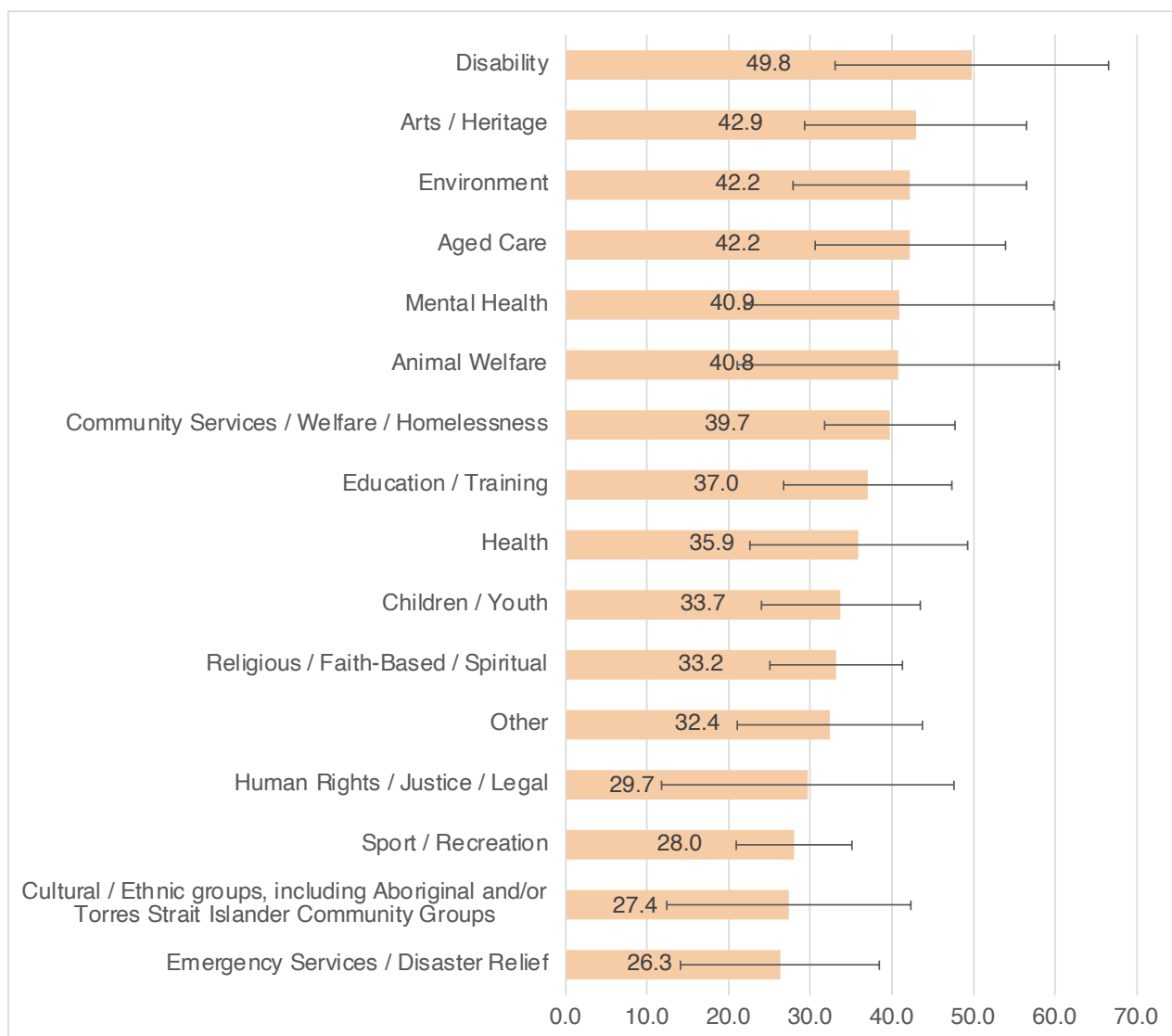
Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

### 8.3 The impact of COVID-19 on volunteering by type of organisation and activity

COVID-19 may have had a different impact on volunteering by type of organisation, activity, and target groups. Volunteers were particularly likely to have stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 if they were involved in organisations with a focus on

Disability (49.8 per cent), Arts / Heritage (42.9 per cent), Environment (42.2 per cent), Aged Care (42.2 per cent), and Mental Health (40.9 per cent) (Figure 23). In comparison, only 26.3 per cent of those volunteering for organisations with a focus on Emergency Services / Disaster Relief stopped volunteering due to COVID-19.

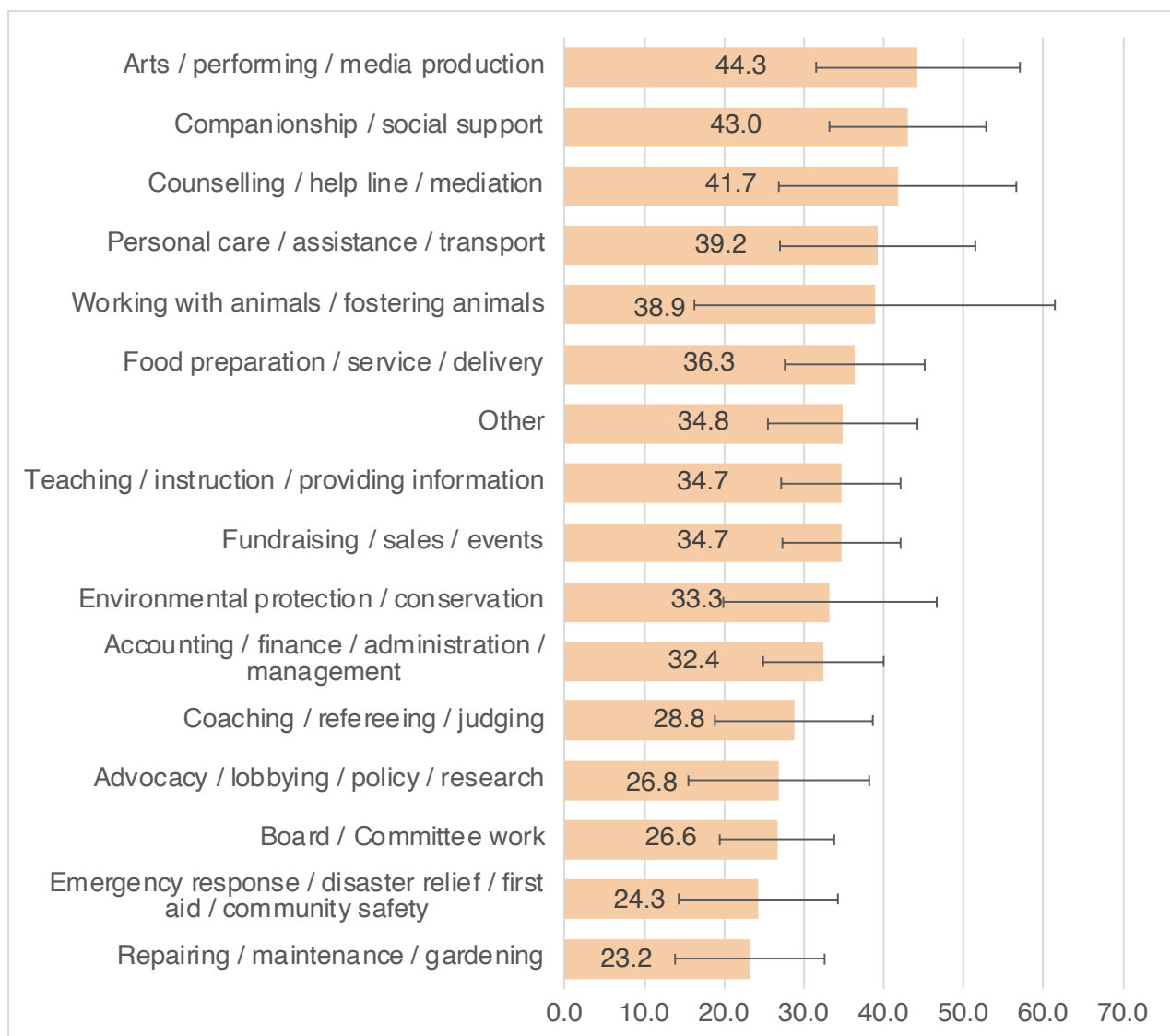
Figure 23 Stopped volunteering activity due to COVID-19 – by type of organisation, April 2022 (%)



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
 Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

Figure 24 shows a similar pattern, where volunteers undertaking activities that involved arts / performing / media production had the highest rates of having stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 (44.3 per cent). This is followed by activities that involved social contact, such as companionship and social support (43.0 per cent), counselling / help line / mediation (41.7 per cent) and personal care / assistance / transport (39.2 per cent). On the other hand, volunteering activities related to emergency response / disaster relief / first aid / community safety and repairing / maintenance / gardening were associated with lower rates of having stopped volunteering (24.3 per cent and 23.2 per cent, respectively).

Figure 24 Stopped volunteering activity due to COVID-19 – by type of activity, April 2022 (%)



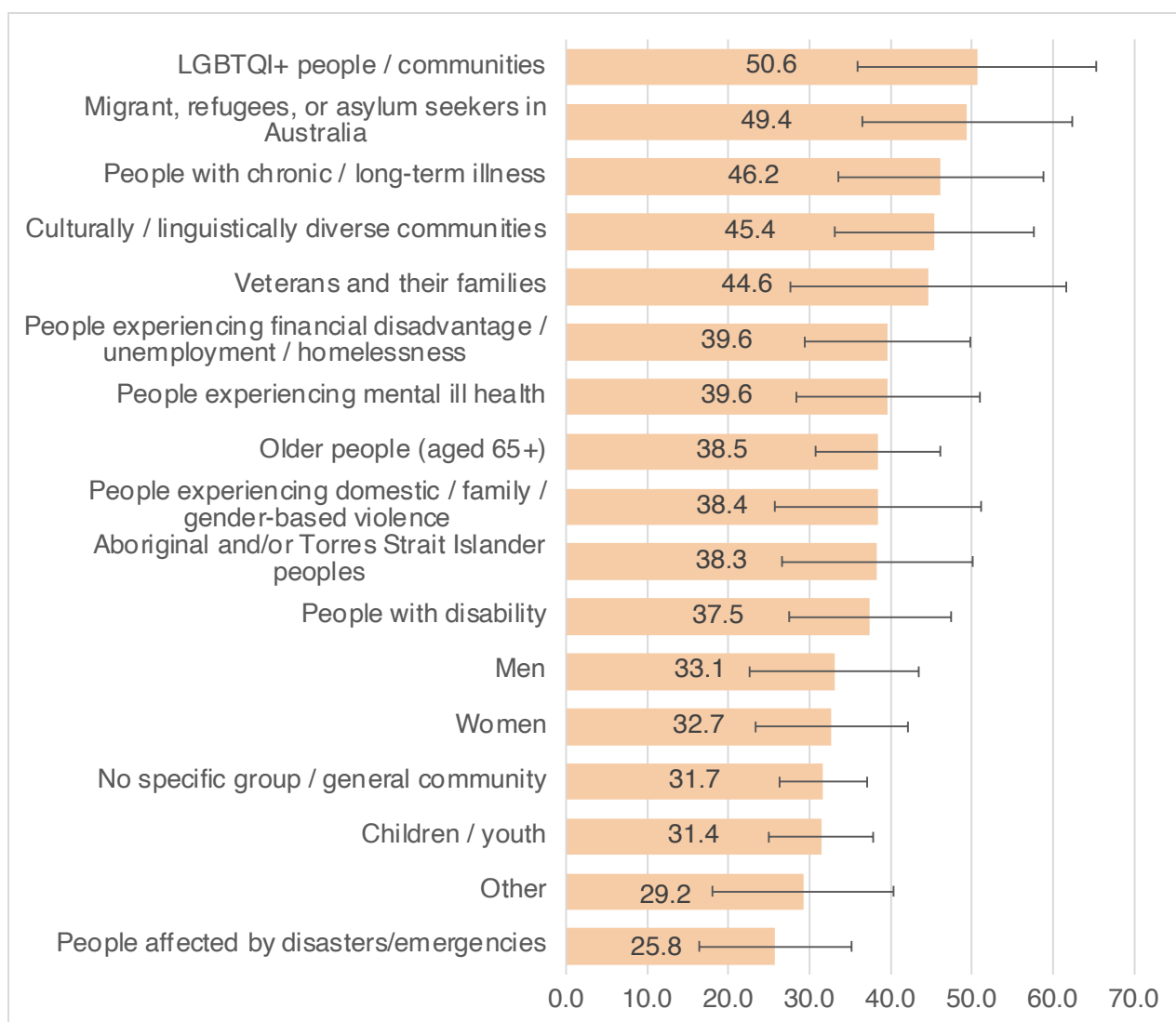
Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
 Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

There were differences in the rates of having stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 across different target groups. There were particularly high proportions of volunteers who stopped volunteering where the target groups of the activities were:

- LGBTQI+ people / communities (50.6 per cent)
- migrant, refugees, or asylum seekers (49.4 per cent)
- people with chronic / long-term illness (46.2 per cent)

The lowest proportion of individuals who stopped volunteering was, once again, where the focus was on people affected by disasters / emergencies.

Figure 25 Stopped volunteering activity due to COVID-19 – by group, April 2022 (%)



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

## 8.4 Modelling the factors associated with stopping volunteering

This section summarises the results of statistical modelling of the socio-demographic factors associated with having stopped volunteering due to COVID-19. The use of the regression models allows for the effects of particular characteristics on the likelihood of having stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 holding constant other characteristics. This allows the effect of particular characteristics (such as age) to be isolated from the effect of other characteristics. As the outcome measure of having stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 is a binary variable with two possible outcomes ('yes' or 'no'), a probit model is used. Explanatory variables include socio-demographic characteristics, financial situation, and health status.

The key findings are:

- Volunteers aged 65 years and over were more likely to have stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 than those aged 35-44 years. Interestingly, the higher rate of having stopped volunteering among those aged 18-24 years (Figure 20) was not observed once other characteristics are taken into account, when there is no longer a statistically significant difference.
- Volunteers born overseas in a main English-speaking country were less likely to have stopped volunteering, while those speaking a language other than English at home were more likely to have stopped volunteering.
- People who work short or long hours of paid employment were more likely to have stopped volunteering.
- Having a high level of psychological distress was associated with being more likely to have stopped volunteering as was being 'permanently sick or disabled'.
- COVID-19 restrictions and locations with high levels of transmission likely played a role as well, with individuals in Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania, and Northern Territory being less likely to have stopped volunteering relative to those in New South Wales. Individuals who experienced financial difficulties were also more likely to have stopped volunteering.

## 8.5 Who recommenced volunteering

The longitudinal nature of the ANUpoll surveys allows the identification of factors associated with recommencing volunteering for those who stopped due to COVID-19.

The outcome measure of having recommenced volunteering is a binary variable derived from the variable whether the individual has volunteered over the past 12 months. The



factors associated with recommencing volunteering are estimated using the sub-sample of people who had stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 when asked in April 2020. As there are two possible outcomes ('yes' or 'no'), a probit model is used.

The key differences between those who had recommenced volunteering compared to those who had not (which are statistically significant in a regression model) are<sup>19</sup>:

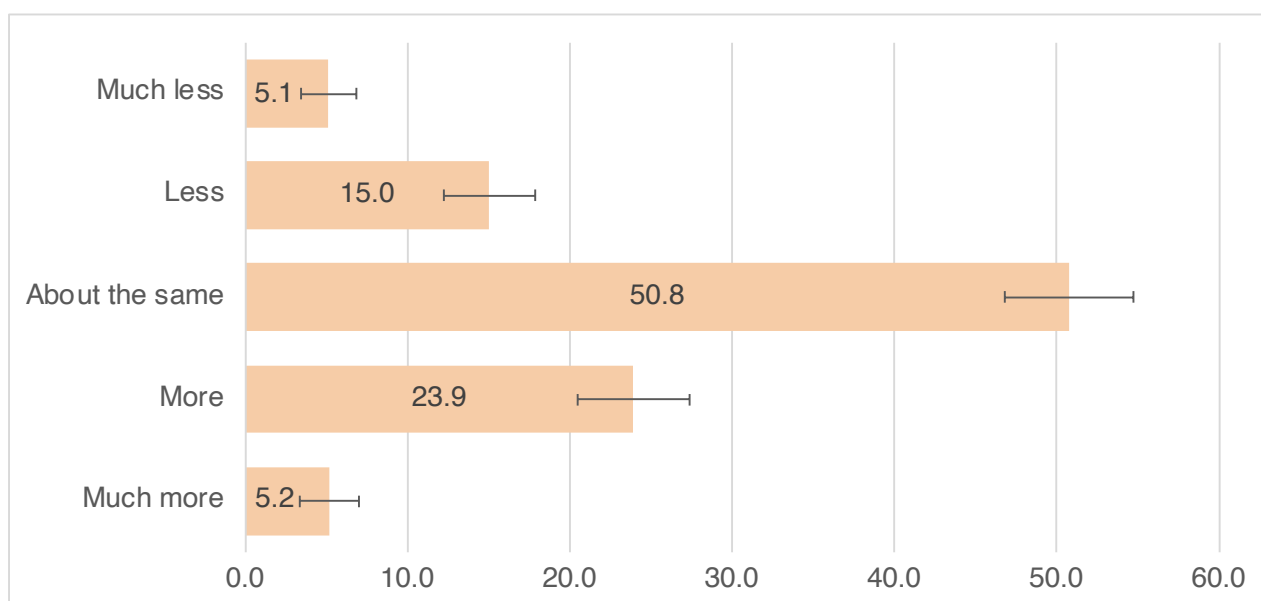
- 50.9 per cent of women had recommenced volunteering compared to 39.3 per cent of men.
- 49.7 per cent of those born in Australia recommenced volunteering compared to 5.6 per cent of those born overseas in a non-English speaking country.
- 38.2 per cent of those who reported financial difficulties recommenced volunteering compared to 49.4 per cent of those who did not.

## 9. Future Volunteering

People who had volunteered over the previous 12 months were asked ‘In the next five years, do you see yourself volunteering more or less frequently than the last 12 months.’ Half of volunteers (50.8 per cent) said that they thought they would do about the same amount of volunteering in the future (Figure 26). Just under one-in-four (23.9 per cent) thought they would do more and 5.2 per cent thought they would do much more volunteering in the future. Only 20.2 per cent of volunteers said that they are likely to volunteer less frequently (5.1 per cent said they were likely to volunteer ‘much less’ and 15.0 per cent said ‘less frequently’).

Slightly more people said they intended to increase their future volunteering than people who said they intended to reduce their future volunteering. If these intentions accurately reflect future volunteering there is likely to be a light increase in hours of volunteering, though it seems unlikely to lead to a return to the level of volunteering seen pre-COVID-19.

Figure 26 Intentions of future volunteering, per cent of current volunteers, April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

A regression model of the demographic and geographic factors associated with the expected frequency of volunteering over the next five years has been estimated.

Amongst those who had volunteered over the previous 12 months in April 2022, individuals from the upper age groups (aged 65 to 74 years and aged 75 years plus) were

more likely to have intentions of reducing the frequency of volunteering over the next five years (relative to those aged 35 to 44 years), while individuals born overseas were more likely to see themselves volunteering more frequently over the next five years (relative to individuals born in Australia).

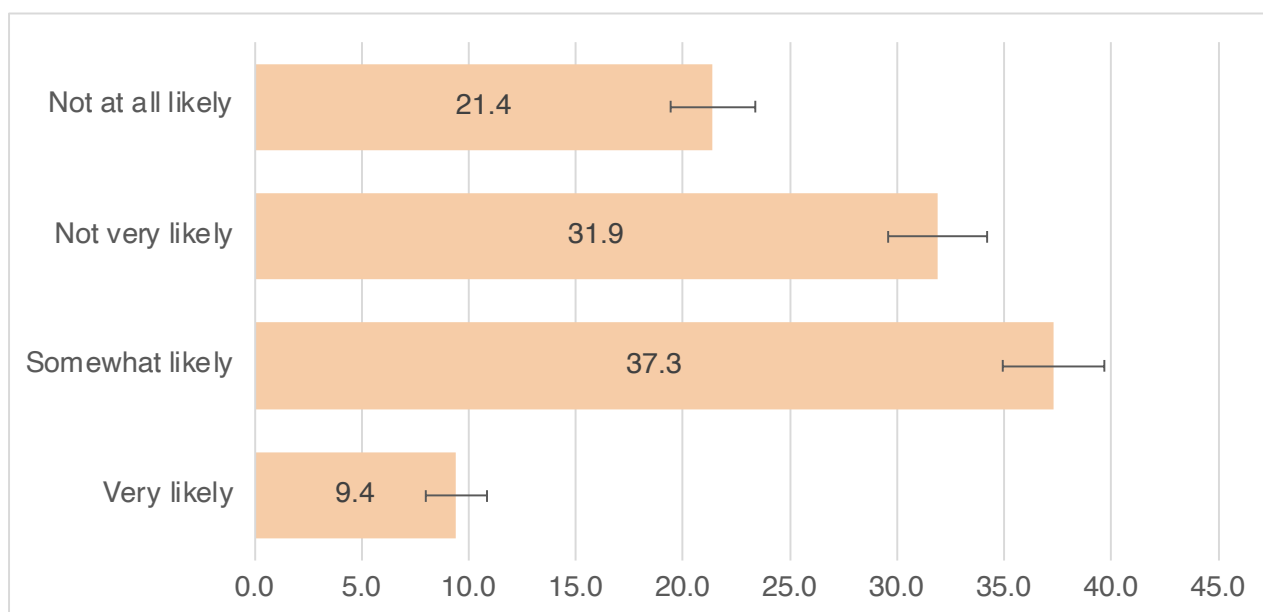
These findings from the regression models control for individual characteristics, but there are consistent results with the raw data. For example, 24.5 per cent of volunteers aged 65 to 74 and 39.0 per cent of volunteers aged 75 plus indicated their intentions to reduce the frequency of volunteering over the next five years, compared to 16.1 per cent of volunteers aged 35 to 44. Moreover, 43.7 per cent of volunteers born overseas in a non-English speaking country, 29.6 per cent of volunteers born overseas in an English-speaking country, and 25.9 per cent of volunteers born in Australia indicated their intention to increase the frequency of volunteering over the next five years. Further analysis finds that labour market outcomes (employment, unemployment, education, permanently sick or disabled, retired, housework or caring, other) did not predict the intended frequency of volunteering in the next five years.

## 9.1 Commencing/recommencing volunteering

People who had volunteered in the past (but not in the last 12 months) were asked 'In the next five years, what do you think is the likelihood that you will recommence volunteering'. People who had never volunteered before were asked how likely it was that they would commence volunteering in the future.

Combining the two samples, only one-in-ten people (9.4 per cent) who had never volunteered or who had not volunteered in the previous 12 months said that they were very likely to commence or recommence volunteering in the next five years. A further 37.3 per cent said they were somewhat likely to volunteer within the next five years. Slightly more than half of non-volunteers felt that they were either not very likely (31.9 per cent) or not at all likely (21.4 per cent) to commence or recommence volunteering. While this represents a potential pool of volunteers in the future, it is unlikely to be sufficient to make up for the gap caused by COVID-19.

Figure 27 Intentions of commencing/recommencing volunteering, per cent of Australian adults, April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

Not surprisingly, those who had volunteered in the past (but not in the previous 12 months) were more likely to say that they are likely or very likely to volunteer in the next five years. 69.8 per cent of those who said they had volunteered a lot previously said they were likely or very likely to recommence volunteering, not significantly different from the 68.1 per cent of those who had volunteered a little previously. Both, however, are much larger than the 40.1 per cent of those who had not volunteered previously who said that they would be likely or very likely to commence volunteering.

The results of the regression analysis of the demographic and geographic factors associated with the likelihood of commencing/recommencing volunteering in the next five years are presented in the online Appendix.

Individuals who had volunteered prior to the last 12 months, females, those born overseas in non-English speaking countries, and those with a postgraduate degree were more likely to indicate an intention to commence/recommence volunteering, whilst those aged 65 to 74 and those aged 75 plus, and those who lived in the most disadvantaged areas (1<sup>st</sup> SEIFA quintile) were less likely to intend to commence/recommence volunteering.

In general, there is not much association between labour market outcomes and the likelihood of commencing/recommencing volunteering, except for individuals who

identified as 'permanently sick or disabled' (as their main activity). This group was less likely to have intentions of commencing/recommencing volunteering in the next five years, relative to those who were employed (as their main activity).

The impact of personality and attitudes has also been estimated. Individuals who believed that most people can be trusted were more likely to have the intention to commence/recommence volunteering. The findings from our regression models are broadly consistent with the raw data:

- 68.3 per cent of those who had prior volunteering experience considered commencing/recommencing volunteering, compared to 40.1 per cent of those without prior volunteering experience.
- Females were more likely to consider commencing/recommencing volunteering (50.1 per cent) relative to males (42.6 per cent).
- Those born overseas in a non-English speaking country were more likely to consider commencing/recommencing volunteering (56.4 per cent) relative to 44.1 per cent of those born in Australia.
- 58.7 per cent of those with a postgraduate qualification considered commencing/recommencing volunteering but only 45.4 per cent of those with no further qualifications beyond high school considered this.
- Those aged 65 to 74 and aged 75 and over were less likely to consider commencing/recommencing volunteering (35.4 per cent and 24.7 per cent, respectively) relative to those aged 35 to 44 (47.9 per cent).
- Individuals who lived in the most disadvantaged areas (1<sup>st</sup> SEIFA quintile) were less likely to consider commencing/recommencing volunteering (36.6 per cent) relative to 51.1 per cent among those in the most advantaged areas (5<sup>th</sup> SEIFA quintile).
- Individuals who reported being 'permanently sick or disabled' as their main labour market activity were less likely to consider commencing/recommencing volunteering (33.4 per cent) relative to employed individuals (50.2 per cent).

## 10. Out-of-pocket Expenses

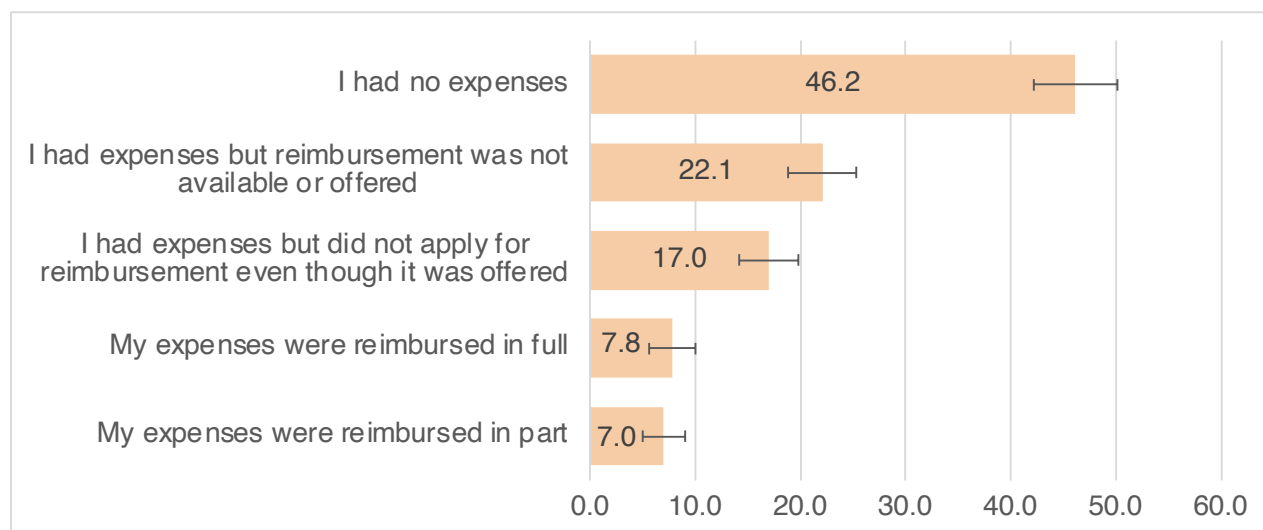
The 2016 State of Volunteering in Australia Report found that volunteers were deterred from volunteering because of personal expenses incurred and a lack of reimbursement for these out-of-pocket expenses (Volunteering Australia 2016).

In the ANUpoll results, just over half (54 per cent) of volunteers incurred out of pocket expenses through their volunteering role (Figure 28). This is similar to the 60 per cent of volunteers who incurred out of pocket expenses in 2016.

Amongst volunteers who incurred expenses, only 14.5 per cent were reimbursed in full and 13.0 per cent were reimbursed in part. By contrast, 41.0 per cent of volunteers who incurred expenses through their volunteering role indicated that reimbursement was not available or offered.

The remaining 31.5 per cent of volunteers who incurred expenses did not apply for reimbursement even though it was offered. According to these findings, there are higher rates of reimbursement (27.5 per cent) in our sample of volunteers relative to 18 per cent from the Survey in 2016. Further, among those who incurred costs, the average amount that volunteers spent personally on volunteering over the past 12 months (after reimbursement) was \$582.83.<sup>20</sup>

Figure 28 Expenses and reimbursement, per cent of volunteers, April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

## 11. Informal Volunteering

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In addition to volunteering for an organisation or group, many Australians provide informal voluntary support. The NSW State of Volunteering Report 2020 (The Centre for Volunteering, 2021) noted the importance of informal volunteering during the pandemic. ‘Anecdotally ... informal volunteering has not only been prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic; stories of powerful models of informal volunteering service delivery and community support have come to the fore’ (NSW Government et al. 2021). A case study of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) groups in Victoria found these groups ‘played a critical role’ in responding to the pandemic through informal volunteering (Gapasin et al 2021).

In the April 2022 ANUpoll, respondents were first prompted with the following statement:

**‘Informal volunteering** is unpaid help that takes place outside the context of a formal organisation. It excludes help provided to other members of your household or to family members living outside your household. When answering these questions please exclude any volunteering you have already reported’ (bold in original).

Respondents were then asked:

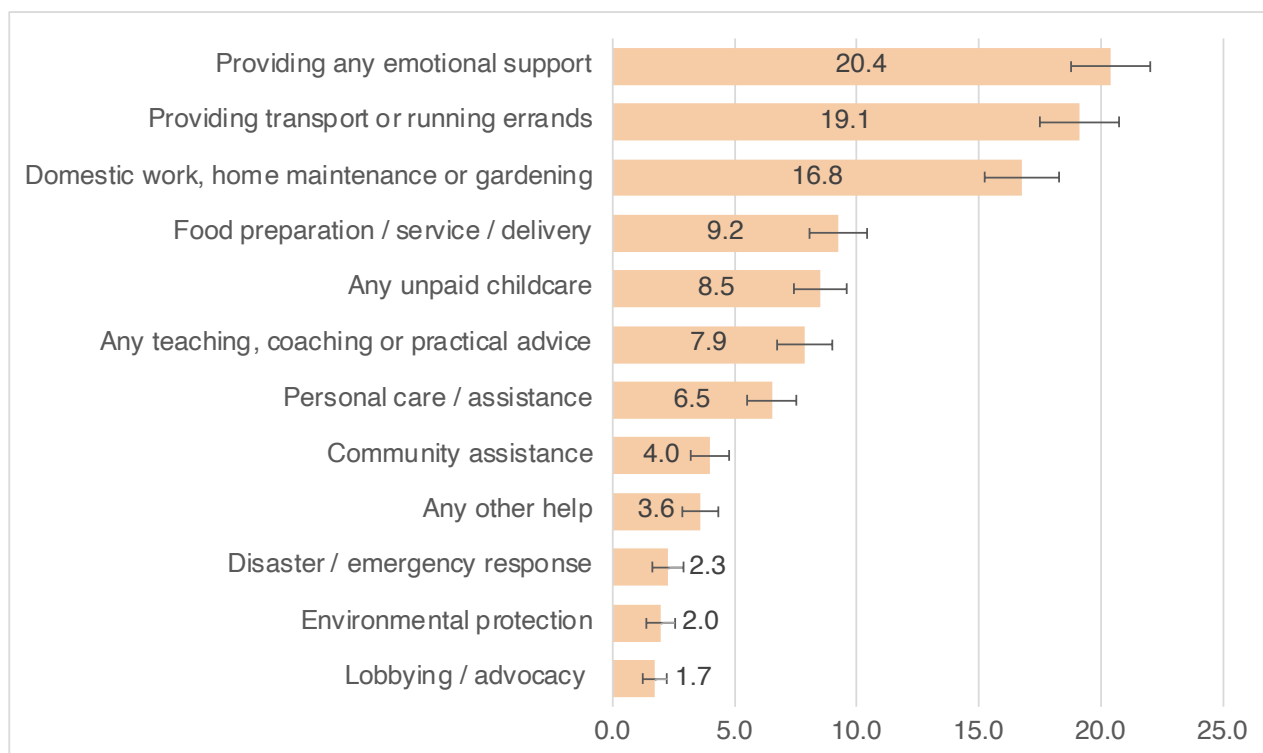
‘In the last 4 weeks, did you help anyone not living with you with the following activities?’

This question aligns with the GSS question on informal volunteering, and there were eleven specific activities asked about, with respondents able to select more than one activity and having the option of choosing ‘other’ activities.

### 11.1 Types of informal volunteering

As discussed in Section 3, a little under half of respondents (46.5 per cent) said that they provided some form of informal volunteering over the previous four weeks. This is very similar to the findings in the 2016 Report (Volunteering Australia 2016), according to which 46 per cent of respondents participated in informal volunteering in the last 12 months. The most common form of informal volunteering was providing emotional support (provided by 20.4 per cent of Australians), followed by providing transport or running errands (19.1 per cent), and domestic work, home maintenance or gardening (16.8 per cent) (Figure 29). The other forms of informal volunteering were provided by less than 10 per cent of people in Australia.

Figure 29 Types of informal volunteering provided, per cent of the adult population, April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

## 11.2 Variation in informal volunteering across demographic groups

A regression analysis of the factors associated with undertaking informal volunteering as the dependent variable has been undertaken. The detailed regression results are available in the online Appendix.

The factors that predict informal volunteering are somewhat different to those that predict formal volunteering. Females and older Australians were more likely to have undertaken informal volunteering than males and younger Australians, respectively. The absolute differences by sex (in particular) are much larger for informal compared to formal volunteering. Specifically, 51.3 per cent of females undertook informal volunteering in the previous 4 weeks compared to 41.5 per cent of males.

Those born overseas in a non-English speaking country were more likely to have undertaken informal volunteering than those born in Australia. This is in the opposite direction to the association with formal volunteering, where this group had lower relative probabilities. Taken together, these findings suggest it is the type of volunteering that varies by country of birth, rather than a general propensity to volunteer. Those with a postgraduate 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 than those who lived in a capital city.

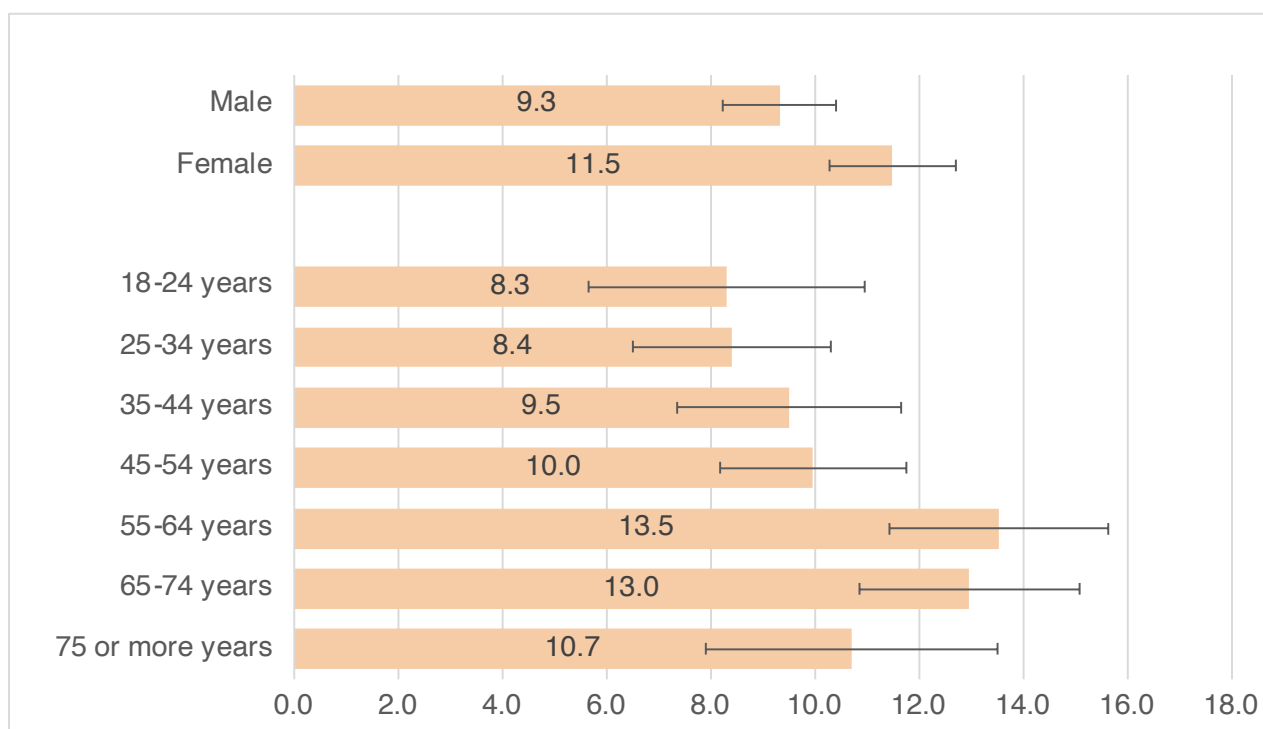
Interestingly, there were no differences in informal volunteering by hours in paid work. There were, however, quite large differences by whether or not a person undertook formal volunteering in the previous 12 months (Model 3), with those who undertook formal volunteering in the previous 12 months being far more likely to have undertaken informal volunteering in the previous four weeks.

### 11.3 Number of hours providing unpaid help

For those who did undertake informal volunteering, the average number of hours spent providing unpaid help over the previous four weeks was 10.6 hours. When averaged across all adults (that is, setting those who did not provide unpaid help to zero hours), the average is 4.7 hours over the previous four weeks.

There were large differences in the number of hours spent providing unpaid help by age and sex<sup>21</sup> as shown in Figure 30. Keeping in mind that these averages are only for those who undertook at least some form of informal volunteering, females (11.5 hours) provided two hours more of unpaid help than males (9.3 hours), and young people provided fewer hours than older Australians, with the peak age group in terms of number of hours being those aged 55 to 64 years, who provided 13.5 hours per week on average.

Figure 30 Average number of hours providing unpaid help over previous four weeks, by age and sex, April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

## 12. Volunteering and Wellbeing

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The drop in volunteering during COVID-19 is not only important in terms of the lost services that would have otherwise been provided by volunteers, but also because of the impact on volunteers.

Volunteers reported mixed experiences from the pandemic. Biddle and Gray (2021) explained that some people experienced little to no impact while others talked of positive and negative aspects. Analysis of the April 2021 ANUpoll found that ‘Australians who had stopped volunteering since 2019 had a greater loss of life satisfaction than those who continued to volunteer during COVID-19’, which is supported by the finding that prior to COVID-19, volunteers reported having a greater life satisfaction than non-volunteers (Biddle & Gray 2021; Biddle & Gray 2020). Additionally, people that stopped volunteering over this time were ‘more likely to say they felt lonely at least some of the time’ than those that continued to volunteer (Biddle & Gray 2021).

Other studies supported these findings, including a South Australian qualitative study of 39 youth, parents, coaches, and sports administrators, which highlighted the increase in loneliness experienced through COVID-19 when volunteers could not participate in community sport. A study by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) documented volunteers’ anxiety during COVID-19 (Elliot et al. 2021; DCJ 2021).

Another negative impact was increased workloads for those who were able to continue their volunteering, as McDermott (2021) found that some volunteers experienced ‘increased workloads and heightened concern over the risks to themselves and others’.

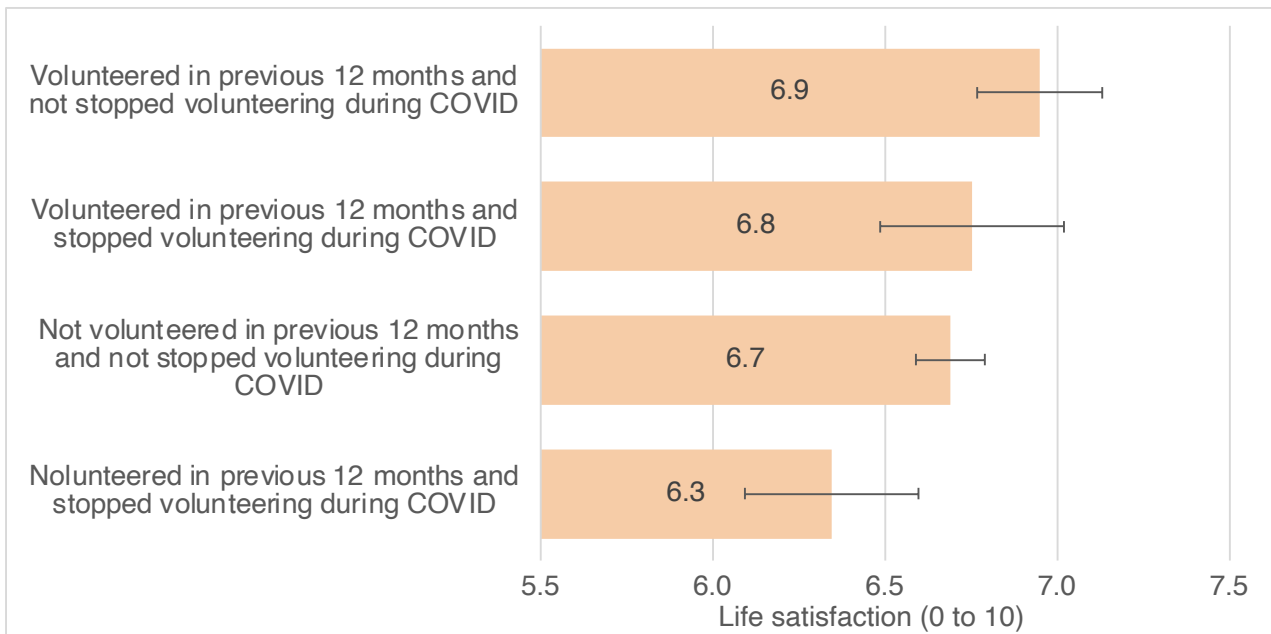
It is important to note that some volunteers experienced limited impacts. For example, qualitative data from the ANUpoll shows that, ‘environmental volunteering and remote roles like committee work or board membership, were largely unaffected by the pandemic, or adapted in response to public health restrictions’ (McDermott 2021).

McDermott (2021) also reported that volunteers who continued to volunteer at the same frequency or more often (from April 2020 to 2021) were more likely to have positive volunteer experiences, whereas those that volunteered less were more likely to report negative experiences. These negatives comprised experiencing ‘public health restrictions’, a ‘loss of connection,’ and a decreased sense of social contribution.

The potential impact of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of volunteers as of April 2022 can be seen by considering the measure of life satisfaction that was asked of respondents in ANUpoll since prior to the pandemic. This question is framed as follows: ‘The following question asks how satisfied you feel about life in general, on a scale from 0 to 10. Zero means you feel ‘not at all satisfied’ and 10 means ‘completely satisfied’. Overall, how satisfied are you with life as a whole these days?’

The average life satisfaction value for Australian adults in April 2022 was 6.69 (lower than prior to the pandemic, but higher than during the lockdown periods). However, there are very different results depending on a person’s volunteering experience (Figure 31).

Figure 31 Life satisfaction by volunteering in April 2022 and experience during COVID-19



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.  
 Source: ANUpoll, April 2022.

For those who had volunteered in April 2022 and said they had not stopped volunteering during the COVID-19 period, average life satisfaction was 6.95. One respondent who was able to maintain their volunteering stated that, *“It has been very positive, I have been volunteering for 2 years since covid started. I volunteer in a food program making meals and serving the homeless and not so homeless. I love it and I get much more out of it than I give.”*

At the other extreme, for those who had said they had stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 and were not volunteering as of April 2022, average life satisfaction was only 6.34. This difference of 0.61 is roughly equivalent to one-third of a standard deviation of the population in the life satisfaction measure (1.89), quite a large difference in wellbeing. There were a number of quotes in the qualitative component of the survey that highlight the negative impact of COVID-19 on volunteering. One respondent stated that, *“I [felt] good for doing volunteering COVID reduced the amount I was allowed to do. I would have liked to do the same amount through covid.”* Another respondent said that *“Because of the risk of COVID to vulnerable people in my household, I have reduced my volunteer work. I feel less connected to the community.”* A third respondent noted the effect on

them and others, stating that, *“Covid has restricted the voluntary visits of our music group to the local nursing home. They and us are poorer for this restriction.”* A fourth, a woman aged 65 to 74 years, stated that, *“My voluntary work has involved helping elderly neighbours during covid. Whilst it has been taxing on my time it has been positive and rewarding in its execution.”*

Those who had not stopped volunteering and were not volunteers in April 2022 and those who had stopped volunteering but returned to volunteering by April 2022 had life satisfaction values that were somewhere in between these extremes (6.69 and 6.75 respectively).

## 13. Conclusion

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Volunteering supports the delivery of crucial services and contributes to the broader wellbeing of individuals and communities. Volunteering is strongly affected by shifts in the social and economic landscape, and has undergone significant change over the past decade. The data presented in this report reveal that rates of volunteering have been gradually declining for many years, and fell dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic. As of April 2022, volunteering rates had hardly recovered and remained well below what they were pre-COVID-19.

However, this research also sheds new light on the ways volunteering is changing and suggests avenues to support a reinvigoration of volunteering in the future.

In 2022, the rate of volunteering in Australia has increased for the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This new data also reveals that the kinds of roles and sectors that many people want to volunteer in differ from those occupied by current volunteers. This suggests opportunities for organisations to engage volunteers in new kinds of work in the future.

Despite a shift towards virtual opportunities, volunteering in person at an organisation or in the community remains the most popular way to volunteer. This change has created new and more accessible opportunities for prospective volunteers, without compromising the social benefits of in-person volunteering.

Finally, despite a significant decline in the rate of volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic, those who continued volunteering reported greater life satisfaction than those who stopped volunteering. Supporting people to volunteer could improve wellbeing outcomes while bolstering service delivery and social connection during future crises.

Across Australia's history, volunteers have provided essential goods and services that are either not provided by the market or by government, or which many people do not have access to due to financial or other barriers. The demand for these goods and services has not gone away during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in some ways may have increased. The policy challenge, therefore, is to find ways to engage or re-engage those who aren't volunteering or who have stopped volunteering. This research provides insights into how to go about this and demonstrates the value of doing so.

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## Endnotes

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1 Note: This report uses the terms ‘woman/female’ and ‘man/male’ to denote those who have selected ‘female’ or ‘male’ respectively as their sex in their response to the relevant survey. We note that the surveys used to collect the data presented here are not inclusive of the diversity of gender identities in our community, and that only those who identify as female or male are represented in the data presented in this report.

2 For discussions of the economic value of goods and services produced by volunteers see Kragt and Holtrop (2019) and for the social capital and community cohesion impacts of volunteering see Van Willingen (2000).

3 This estimate is based on the most recent estimates for the size of the Australian adult population of around 20 million.

4 <https://csrcm.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/covid-19>

5 The ANUpoll series of surveys is collected on a probability-based, longitudinal panel (Life in Australia™). By using probability-based recruiting (predominantly telephone-based) the unknown and unquantifiable biases inherent in opt-in (non-probability) panels are minimised and it is also possible to quantify the uncertainty around the estimates due to sampling error using standard statistical techniques. This is not possible with non-probability surveys.

6 Of those respondents who completed the April 2022 survey, 62.6 per cent had completed the April 2021 survey, and 57.8 per cent had completed the April 2020 survey (the first COVID-19 Impact Monitoring survey).

7 These findings are broadly consistent with the 2020 General Social Survey, according to which the rates of volunteering were also higher among older age groups relative to younger Australians, and somewhat higher for females (26 per cent) relative to males (23 per cent), although the gender difference was not statistically significant. Data from the GSS shows that the highest volunteering rates among individuals aged 40 to 54 years (31 per cent), followed by individuals aged 70 and over (28 per cent), aged 55 to 69 years (25 per cent) and lower volunteering rates among the younger groups, i.e., for those aged 25 to 39 years (21 per cent) and 15 to 24 years (19 per cent).

8 The ANUpoll survey includes this category in response to the question “Which of these descriptions applies to what you have been doing for the last 7 days?” It does not represent the population of people with disability in Australia.

9 According to GSS 29.5 per cent of Australians aged 15 years and over who volunteered through an organisation in 2019, which declined to 24.8 per cent in 2020 (ABS, 2021b)

10 The April 2022 ANUpoll survey asked people who had done volunteer work in the previous 12 months: ‘In the last 12 months, have you done more or less voluntary work than you did previously?’

11 In addition to the State of Volunteering in Victoria 2020 report, two other state-focussed reports were published during the COVID-19 period: the 2021 NSW State of Volunteering report and the State of Volunteering in Queensland 2021 report.

12 [https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/by%20subject/1270.0.55.001~july%202016~main%20features~statistical%20area%20level%20\(sa2\)~10014#:~:text=Statistical%20Areas%20Level%20\(SA2,interacts%20together%20socially%20and%20economically](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/by%20subject/1270.0.55.001~july%202016~main%20features~statistical%20area%20level%20(sa2)~10014#:~:text=Statistical%20Areas%20Level%20(SA2,interacts%20together%20socially%20and%20economically)

13 The correlation coefficient is 0.96.

14 The finding that females are more likely to report health reasons as a reason for not volunteering is consistent with the 2020 General Social Survey, as 15.0 per cent of females but only 11.3 per cent of males report health reasons as their main reason (ABS, 2021b).

15 The annual time spent volunteering is calculated using information on the average number of weeks over previous 12 months in which any volunteer work was done (24.5 weeks) and the average number of hours spent volunteering in weeks in which they volunteered (6.8 hours).

16 The ANUpoll survey used slightly different response categories for this question compared to the GSS. The categories ‘Environment/Animal welfare’ and ‘Health/Welfare’ were disaggregated into ‘Animal Welfare’ and ‘Environment’, and ‘Health’ and ‘Community Services / Welfare / Homelessness’ respectively. The categories ‘Emergency services’, ‘Law/Justice/Political’, ‘Parenting, children and youth’, and ‘Religious’ were changed to ‘Emergency Services / Disaster Relief’, ‘Human Rights / Justice / Legal’, and ‘Children / Youth’, and ‘Religious / Faith-Based / Spiritual’ respectively. Finally, ‘Aged Care’, ‘Mental Health’, and ‘Disability’ (which were likely captured in the ‘Health/Welfare’ category in the GSS) were added as new categories in the ANUpoll survey. Due to the small number of responses in the GSS, the ‘International Aid/Development’ category was removed.



17 The ANUPoll survey includes this category in response to the question “Which of these descriptions applies to what you have been doing for the last 7 days?” It does not represent the population of people with disability in Australia. Data on volunteering activity among people with disability is addressed using different data elsewhere in this report.

18 Psychological distress is measured using the K6 Index of the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (on a scale from 6 (no distress) to 36 (high level of distress)).

19 No associations were found between having recommenced volunteering and health and employment characteristics (after controlling for our socio-demographic characteristics and financial difficulties).

20 While the survey did not ask explicitly whether out of pocket expenses would deter volunteers from future volunteering, the results are that 16.6 per cent of non-volunteers indicate that they do not volunteer due to financial reasons. The survey also asked about whether those who had volunteered over the previous 12 months intended to volunteer more or less frequently in the next five years relative to the last 12 months. A regression model of the relationship between volunteers who indicate that they see themselves volunteering at the same frequency or more in the future, and any of our measures of costs and reimbursement has been estimated. However, no statistically significant relationships were found.

21 In a more detailed statistical model, the demographic, geographic and socioeconomic variables that were included in other sections of this paper were not statistically significant.