



# 2025 State of Volunteering Report

Volunteering Victoria acknowledges the Bunurong Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples, the traditional custodians of the land on which our office stands, as well as all the traditional lands of those across Victoria who contributed to this report.

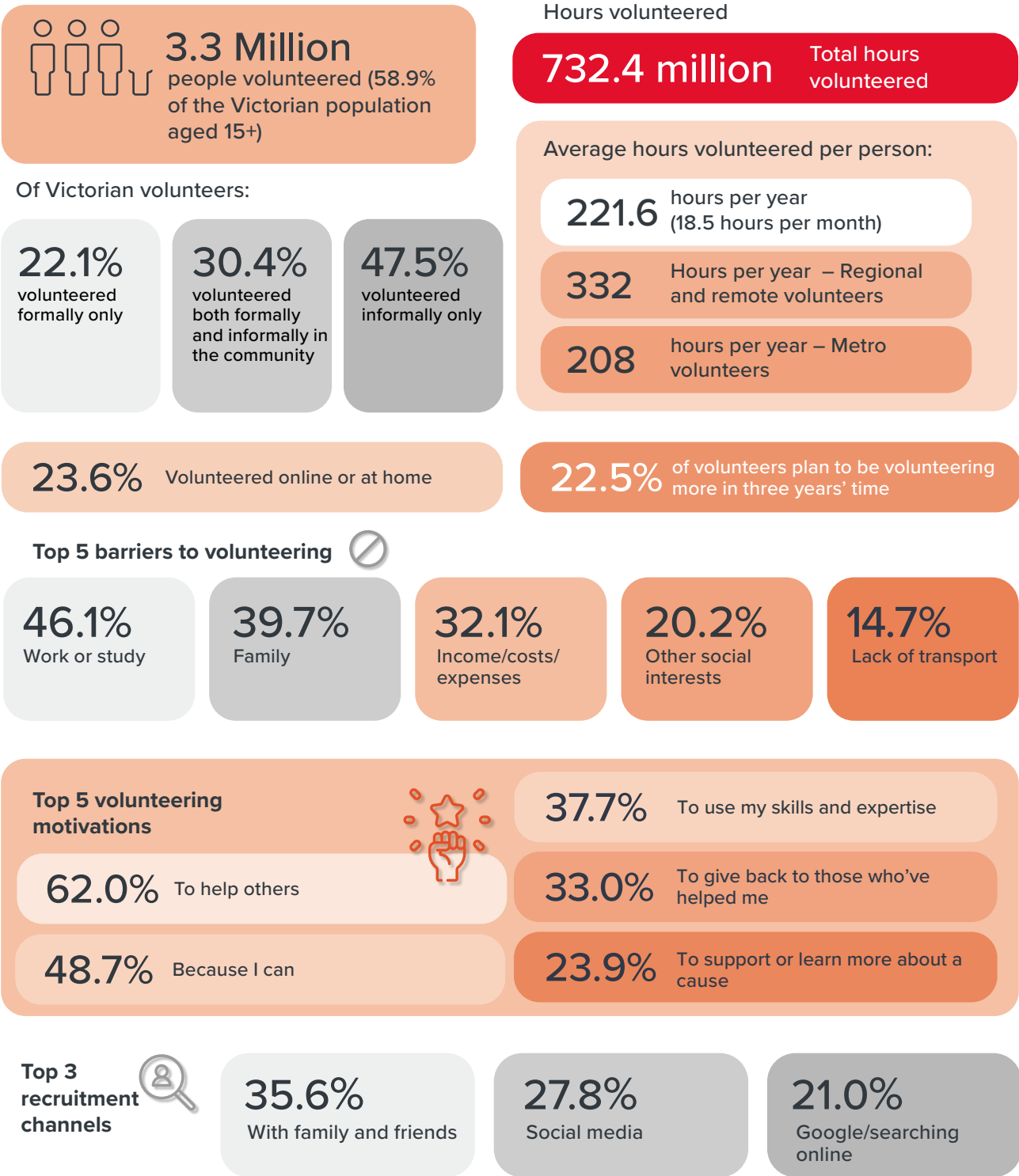
We recognise the significance of their connection to place and community and pay respects to Elders past and present.

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# Key Findings

**Volunteers** This section describes volunteering as it occurred in Victoria in the 12 months prior to August 2024, as reported in the survey of Victorian residents.



## Leaders of Volunteers

**54.7 years** Average age

**12.8 years** Average years of experience



Gender

**23.8%**  
Men

**69.4%**  
Women

**2.1%**  
Non binary

Role type

**49.7%**  
Paid

**46.3%**  
Unpaid

**4.0%**  
Both paid & unpaid

**Key inclusion metrics**

Percentage of Leaders of Volunteers who engage specific volunteer cohorts in their programs)



**85.6%** engage retirees

**49.3%** engage culturally and/or linguistically diverse volunteers

**45.5%** engage young people

**55.5%** engage people living with disability

**57.9%** of Leaders of Volunteers think they will still be managing volunteers with their organisation/group in three years

## Volunteer-Involving Organisations

Organisation/Group structure

**29.8%**  
Volunteers only

**41.7%**  
More volunteers

**28.5%**  
More paid staff

Top 3 methods to recruit volunteers

**73.2%**  
Family and friends\*

**63.2%**  
Social media

**48.3%**  
Participants or service users

*\* of volunteers, participants or service users*

Top 3 volunteer issues

**78.0%** Volunteer physical health and safety

**75.2%** Volunteer mental health and safety

**68.4%** Volunteer retention

Top 3 methods to retain volunteers

**79.2%**  
Personal relationship and team building

**78.4%**  
Public praise & acknowledgment

**72.5%**  
Volunteer training and development

Top 3 reasons people stop or reduce their volunteering with the organisation

**20.1%**  
Change to work or family circumstances

**18.6%**  
Too much paperwork / red tape

**16.0%**  
Burnout (over-volunteering)

**70.9%** of organisations predict they will need more volunteers in three years.

# Introduction

Commissioned by Volunteering Victoria, this report presents the findings of a comprehensive research project designed to understand the current state of volunteering in Victoria and to inform a strong, inclusive, and sustainable future for the sector.

The overall objective of the research was to examine the experiences of both volunteers and Leaders of Volunteers across various groups and geographic regions. By doing so, the project aimed to build a clearer picture of the dynamics influencing volunteering in 2024 and to identify practical pathways forward.

More specifically, the research sought to:

- » **Comprehensively analyse** the state of volunteering in Victoria in 2024;
- » **Identify key drivers** of volunteering;
- » **Describe the experiences** of different groups of volunteers and Leaders of Volunteers;
- » **Highlight levers and opportunities** to increase inclusivity in volunteering; and
- » **Provide recommendations** for short, medium, and long-term actions to support the sustainability of volunteering in Victoria.

## Definition of Volunteering

Volunteering is defined as *‘time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.’* This definition was developed by Volunteering Australia and includes both formal volunteering and informal volunteering:

**Formal volunteering** takes 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.



# Acknowledgements

This is an independent report led by Volunteering Victoria, the state peak body for volunteering, focusing on advocacy, sector development, and the promotion of volunteering.

The report was commissioned and funded by the Victorian Government as announced in May 2024 by the Minister for Carers and Volunteers, The Hon. Ros Spence MP.

Quantitative research cited in this report was conducted by Paul Muller from the Institute of Project Management. Qualitative research was undertaken and supported by independent facilitators and Volunteering Victoria staff.

Analysis and tabulation of qualitative and quantitative data was provided as an academic analysis by researchers from the University of Western Australia.

We would like to extend our deepest thanks to the Victorian Government for their support, and to our research teams and facilitators for their commitment in delivering this important piece of work.

We would also like to recognise the valuable contribution of all Victorian volunteers and volunteer leaders who generously gave their time to provide insights into their experiences to inform this report and future work in the sector. Without their contributions, we would not have this report.

# History of the State of Volunteering Report

The methodology used in this report was first undertaken in Tasmania in 2014, in Western Australia in 2015 and again in Tasmania in 2019. Since then, the State of Volunteering Research has been conducted and reported on in all States and Territories. In most it has been run repeated times, allowing Volunteering Peak Bodies to build up a knowledge base that

indicates change over time and in-depth national figures.

**For more information and to view the reports from across the country, visit [stateofvolunteering.org.au](https://stateofvolunteering.org.au)**



# Methodology

In undertaking the **State of Volunteering 2025**, funded by a grant from the State Government, Volunteering Victoria sought to develop a deep, nuanced picture of volunteering across Victoria.

We started by reviewing available research, conducted within and outside of the volunteering field, to understand past and current research and understand the gaps.

Volunteering Victoria then engaged researchers responsible for the national State of Volunteering Research to undertake two surveys between September and November 2024:

- » **2024 Public Survey of Victorian residents, soliciting the responses of over 2,500 Victorians (n=2,541)**
- » **2024 Volunteer Manager Survey, collecting the insights of 326 leaders in the field**

Volunteering Victoria, with the support of our partner network, then held 24 focus groups across Victoria between October 2024 and January 2025. Over two hundred (n=225) volunteers, Leaders of Volunteers and non-volunteers generously shared their insights, challenges and ideas for the future.

Data analysis and tabulation of both the surveys and focus groups was undertaken by researchers from the University of Western Australia. This included a significant and deep analysis of the qualitative focus group data, providing a detailed evidence base that informed the findings presented in this report.





# Caveats and Disclaimers

It is important to acknowledge that this report was developed in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected volunteering in Victoria in unique ways.

The last State of Volunteering in Victoria report was published in 2020, with data collected between April and June when the impact of COVID-19 had drastically altered patterns of daily life and Volunteering.

Direct comparisons between the 2020 and 2025 reports should be made with caution and do not feature heavily in this report.

Please refer to the Appendices for links to further detail on the research methodologies used and the complete lists of source materials for the data and insights available.

## Disclaimer:

The analysis and opinion in this report are the views of its authors and third parties. Publication of this document by Volunteering Victoria does not necessarily reflect the views of Volunteering Victoria.

While every effort has been made to supply accurate and up-to-date data, Volunteering Victoria does not accept any liability for the accuracy, reliability or completeness of data in this report.

**This report and related collateral, including an accessible version, can be found at [volunteeringvictoria.org.au](https://volunteeringvictoria.org.au)**



## First Nations representation in this report

According to the ABS In Victoria, there are 66,000 people who identify as First Nations or about 1% of the population. Given the survey sample size, there was insufficient data to meaningfully (and respectfully) report on key insights.

We have chosen not to trivialise First Nations history of caring for “family, mob and country” by reducing this area to a few lines of observations from a survey sample. We also recognise that even the word “volunteering” has mixed meanings for some and can create painful associations, so we seek to tread lightly.

Volunteering Victoria is seeking more in-depth conversations with First Nations volunteers and leaders. We are also seeking to find ways to elevate those experiences in meaningful, relevant and respectful ways and make available the best resources and supports we can provide.

Our **2022 report** provides a glimpse of the experiences of First Nations people in Gippsland, Victoria, with insights and recommendations to support the volunteering eco-system.

**More insights: National Knowledge Base: Barriers to volunteering for First Nations people**

**<https://volunteering.freshdesk.com/support/solutions/articles/51000440198-barriers-to-volunteering>**



# Foreword: Minister for Volunteers

**When volunteers are provided with tools, resources and access to opportunities in their communities, the whole state benefits.**

There are 3.3 million Victorians who volunteer, and these volunteers generously contribute more than 730 million hours each year to vital causes across the state. To truly capture their impact and continue to support volunteers to thrive, it is important that we listen to voices from within the volunteering community.

The State of Volunteering report provides important insights from our volunteers and the sector to inform how we can best support Victoria's volunteers into the future. It shows that volunteering provides many benefits for those who volunteer, building their skills and confidence and strengthening social and community connections. It also shows a rise in informal volunteering, with many Victorians responding to community needs by helping their neighbours and lending a hand wherever it's needed.

We're seeing an increased focus on the impact of volunteering. Victorians volunteer because they want to help others and give back, and more people want to understand how their volunteering adds value to their communities. I'm particularly excited to see a surge in

young volunteers, with 7 in 10 young people volunteering their time to help others. This is the highest rate of all age cohorts.

We also understand that there are challenges. The lingering effects of COVID-19 and cost of living pressures have impacted how and where people volunteer. I recognise the Victorian Government has an important role to play in reducing barriers to volunteering. The government will continue to work closely with Volunteering Victoria to build a vibrant volunteering culture across the state.

Thank you to Victoria's outstanding volunteering community – your work is essential to building stronger, more resilient and inclusive communities.



**The Hon. Ros Spence MP**  
**Minister for Carers and Volunteers**



# Foreword: Volunteering Victoria

**Volunteering is the heart of Victorian communities. Yet people regularly ask us: "What is going on in volunteering?" This report helps answer that question. It sheds light on a sector in transition – evolving in ways that challenge traditional structures and demand fresh insight.**

The 2025 State of Volunteering Report directly responds to the call made in the National Strategy for Volunteering for strong, evidence-based research to guide the future. We are proud to contribute to this national effort and offer a clearer picture of how, where, and why Victorians volunteer – and what must change to support them.

We sincerely thank the Victorian Government – particularly the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), and The Hon. Ros Spence, Minister for Carers and Volunteers – for championing this research and providing the funding to make it possible. Their leadership enables us to listen deeply to the sector, engage meaningfully with volunteers and organisations, and chart a more informed and strategic path forward.

We deeply appreciate everyone who contributed to this report – every volunteer, Leader of Volunteers, and organisation that shared their experiences, and all those who supported the process: analysts, writers, designers, editors, and proofreaders.

This report equips Volunteering Victoria – and the broader volunteering field – with a deeper understanding of what people and organisations need during this time of transition. Our purpose is to enable organisations and individuals to meet community needs through volunteering, and these findings give us essential direction to fulfil that role.

As we look ahead, we are committed to turning these insights into action. We look forward to working with our members and partners to advocate for the right support, and to provide the tools and resources needed to adapt and thrive. Together, we can shape a future where every Victorian can contribute and belong through volunteering.



**Geoff Sharp**  
CEO, Volunteering Victoria



# Executive Summary





# The Changing State of Volunteering in Victoria

In 2024, **3.3 million Victorians volunteered**, contributing over **732 million hours** of unpaid service; a testament to the enduring strength of community life.

This report honours their contribution and provides the most detailed picture yet of how volunteering is evolving, and what must change to sustain it.

## Volunteering is transforming

Led by new voices, new formats, and new motivations, it remains one of Victoria's greatest strengths. But our systems, structures, and funding models must adapt to support it.

## A sector in transition

Over the past five years, volunteering in Victoria has undergone significant change. While headlines during the COVID-19 pandemic pointed to a sharp decline in participation, the story in 2025 is one of **remarkable recovery – but also transformation**.

In 2020, just **42.1%** of Victorians over 15 years of age reported volunteering – a low point given the COVID reality. By 2024, that figure had climbed to **58.9%**, representing **3.3 million** people across the state who gave their time to causes, organisations, neighbours and communities.

This recovery is not only encouraging – it is a powerful indicator of Victoria's deep civic spirit and social resilience.

Yet, when viewed nationally against the other State of Volunteering Reports, Victoria's volunteer participation rate is below the national rate of **64.3%**. If we matched the national average rate, we would have approximately **300,000 more volunteers**. In practical terms, that is an estimated **68 million hours of additional community service** that we are missing.

Importantly, the nature of volunteering has also shifted. Much of the recent growth has occurred not in traditional roles, but in informal and non-traditional settings.

At the same time, **formal volunteering has declined sharply**. Compared to 2020, there are now over **200,000 fewer formal volunteers** in Victoria. This is not an isolated finding – major national datasets including the Census, the General Social Survey (GSS), and successive State of Volunteering reports in multiple states since 2014 have all shown a consistent decline in formal volunteering participation. While many Victorians continue to give their time, they are choosing new models.

This shift is not a sign of disengagement – it is a sign that people's lives, motivations, and circumstances have changed.

Volunteering is still thriving, but it is doing so in ways that often fall outside of conventional structures.

That said if our systems of recognition, support, and funding continue to prioritise only traditional ways and models of volunteering we risk becoming a case study in not responding adequately to disruptive change at a population level.

The task ahead is not to restore volunteering to what it once was – but to recognise and support what it is becoming. The energy, willingness and care are all still here. The question is: will our institutions, practices, and strategies evolve to meet them?

## Participation is rebounding, in new and expansive ways

Victorians have returned to volunteering in large numbers since 2020, but not in the same ways. Participation is increasingly taking place outside formal structures.

In 2024, nearly **half of all volunteers (47.5%) engaged informally**, outside of formal organisational structures. **Online volunteering** also expanded significantly, with almost **one in four volunteers (23.6%)** donating time remotely.

These trends reflect the growing appeal of flexible, self-directed forms of contribution – particularly among younger, culturally diverse, and regional communities.

This shift is not merely logistical – it reflects changing lifestyles, expectations, and values. People want to contribute, but they need options that fit their lives. Informal, cause-based, short-term, and flexible roles are proving more attractive than traditional long-term commitments.

The challenge ahead is to **recognise and support these new models**.

If volunteering is defined too narrowly, we risk missing a surge of civic energy already underway.

“I help out whenever I can, it's not official, but it matters to my neighbours.”



## Volunteers are more purposeful and impact-focused

Today's volunteers are looking for roles that offer meaning, impact, and personal alignment.

The most common motivations included **helping others (62%)**, **using skills (37.7%)**, and **giving back to those who have helped them (33%)**.

Young people in particular are highly engaged and highly motivated. They do more volunteering and have the highest participation rate of any age cohort, but they also seek roles that build confidence, develop skills, and offer a sense of purpose.

However, the infrastructure around recognition, support, and cost reimbursement has not kept pace. Most volunteers are not reimbursed for expenses, and many report a disconnect between their motivations and what organisations offer.

To retain and grow this contribution, organisations must rethink how they design and frame volunteer roles - **moving from an ask for help to an invitation to contribute and grow.**

"I want to volunteer where it actually makes a difference, not just where there's a gap."

## Let's make it easier to say "yes"

Despite high levels of interest in volunteering, many people still encounter barriers.

For current volunteers, common limitations include **work or study commitments (46.1%)**, **cost (32%)**, and **transport (14.7%)**. For those not currently volunteering, **lack of confidence**, **not knowing how to get started**, and **lack of visible opportunities** were among the most frequently cited issues. Cost of living barriers and lack of reimbursement were repeated themes across the quantitative research.

Too often, the pathway into volunteering is unclear or too complex. Administrative burdens, background checks, and unclear expectations can deter otherwise willing contributors.

**Making volunteering more accessible means more than outreach. It requires a full rethink of how we recruit, onboard, and support people to get involved.**

"It took me weeks to find a role that didn't need five forms and a police check."

## Behind every volunteer is someone making it happen

Leaders of Volunteers are the unseen infrastructure behind much of the state's volunteering. They train, support, and coordinate the people who give their time. However, many are under-resourced and at risk of leaving the sector.

In 2024, less than 60% of volunteer leaders said they expected to still be in their role in three years. Many are older, unpaid, or managing programs without formal support. Volunteer-Involving Organisations in Victoria currently invest less than \$6 per volunteer hour – well below the national average of \$13.97/hour.

Ensuring a healthy volunteering system requires **investment in the people who lead it.**

That includes professional development, leadership pathways, and funding for the critical infrastructure of coordination and support. It was also clear from the research data that this reflects the financial challenges many Volunteer Involving Organisations are facing.

"I love what I do, but I can't keep doing it without support – it's too much for one person"

## Digital tools should strengthen, not replace connection

Technology is reshaping how people volunteer. Online and remote roles have increased significantly, especially among younger and culturally diverse communities. These options offer flexibility and accessibility – but they must not come at the cost of community connection.

Current digital tools often treat volunteers as a list to fill, rather than as people to engage. Systems are often clunky, computer (not phone) orientated, impersonal, or inaccessible to smaller organisations. The digital divide in rural and vulnerable communities is real and must be considered.

There is an opportunity to redesign digital volunteering tools, portals, platforms and interactions to **foster connection, reduce friction, and enhance accessibility.** Doing so could unlock wider participation and stronger retention.

"People say their volunteering program is digital... what they mean is they have a Facebook page... ask any young person, Facebook is NOT social media."



## Volunteers and volunteering looks different

Some of the strongest contributions to volunteering are coming from groups who have historically been underrepresented or undervalued.

Young people (15–24) now have the highest volunteering rate in the state, averaging more hours than any other age group. They are values-driven, digitally fluent, and eager to contribute – but often face barriers related to cost, burnout, and lack of fit.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) volunteers demonstrate exceptional participation (71%), often volunteering across multiple settings and for reasons rooted in culture, identity, and reciprocity. Yet they face significantly higher costs and more systemic barriers.

Volunteers with disability or mental health conditions give more hours on average and report high wellbeing benefits. Still, they also report experiencing the most barriers, particularly around access, confidence, and fatigue.

To sustain this shift, **we must treat these groups not as “marginal” but as central to the future of volunteering.** Inclusion must be built into role design, leadership, recognition, and access.

“There’s this idea that young people don’t care. But I do care – I just don’t know where I’m supposed to go.”

“I treat my volunteer work like it was paid employment... turning up on time, doing tasks that were expected of me.”



## Aligning with the National Strategy



The issues raised in this report do not stand alone. They echo and reinforce the priorities identified in the National Strategy for Volunteering 2023–2033.

<https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au>

That national framework calls for a volunteering ecosystem that is inclusive, well supported, and aligned to modern life. It highlights the need to value volunteers' contributions, strengthen leadership and infrastructure, and design volunteering experiences that reflect Australia's diversity and evolving expectations. The evidence presented here affirms



those national objectives: the shift to informal and digital volunteering, the desire for purpose-driven roles, the fragility of volunteer leadership, and the need for better recognition and investment are all part of a national pattern.

As Victoria reflects on the findings of this report, there is a clear opportunity to respond not in isolation, but in step with a national vision. By aligning policy, investment and practice with the direction set by the national strategy, Victoria can not only meet local challenges – it can help shape a stronger, more connected future for volunteering across Australia.

## The way forward

Volunteering in Victoria is not in decline – it is in transition.

More than **3.3 million Victorians** gave their time in 2024, contributing over **732 million hours** to causes, communities, and people they care about. That generosity is one of the state's greatest assets. **Even at the minimum wage rate, that is nearly over \$18 billion in donated time, and in many cases would require skills and abilities far in excess of the minimum wage. That is only a tiny fraction of what is given to the community every year.**


This report shows that while the desire to contribute remains strong, our systems and supports have not kept pace with the changing nature of volunteering.

The upside is significant. If Victoria lifted its participation rate to the current national average (64.3%), we would see nearly **half a million additional volunteers** across the state. That equates to an estimated **68 million more hours** of service every year – hours that could strengthen neighbourhood networks, fill gaps in essential services, improve community wellbeing, and drive social inclusion at a time when it's needed most.

Importantly, this is not a distant or unreachable goal. The intent to volunteer already exists. Among people who are not currently volunteering, **over one in five (21.8%)** say they plan to start within the next three years. A further **36.3% are unsure** – not unwilling, but unconvinced or unsure how to begin. This is a group that can be reached with the right combination of visibility, encouragement, and support.

Even among current volunteers, there is clear appetite to do more. **Nearly a quarter (22.5%)** say they intend to increase their involvement, and many others would give more if barriers such as cost, inflexible roles, or lack of recognition were addressed. In total, this points to a pool of over **one million Victorians** who are either ready to start volunteering or ready to give more – if the conditions are right.

This presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape the volunteering system in Victoria. To do so, we must move beyond a focus on participation rates alone and design for what volunteering is becoming: **more informal, more diverse, more digital, and more integrated with people's lives.**



The generosity is here.  
The intent is here.  
The future is already emerging.

## What this all means

This all requires a **reset of “the system” to reflect how people live and give today** – recognising informal and episodic volunteering, investing in flexible and inclusive role design, and resourcing the infrastructure that makes volunteering possible.

It means **supporting those who lead volunteers** – not just through training and recognition, but with sustainable funding, succession planning, and wellbeing support. It also means embracing **digital tools that connect rather than isolate**, and ensuring regional and smaller organisations have the capacity to engage in modern ways.

Perhaps most importantly, it means **reframing volunteering as a pathway**, not just an activity – as a way to build skills, find purpose, strengthen community, and foster belonging.

The evidence is clear: **the future of volunteering will be more flexible, inclusive, and digital**. To get there, we must invest in volunteer infrastructure, support diverse pathways into volunteering, and resource the people and systems that make it all possible. This work must be aligned not only with community needs, but also with the national strategy and shared goals across the country, so together we can all shift and adapt to the Future of Volunteering.

If we can do that, the future of volunteering in Victoria will not only be more sustainable; it will be more equitable, more inclusive, and more impactful than ever before.



# Section 1: The Characteristics of Volunteers in Victoria

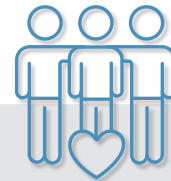




# Who is volunteering?

Based on the survey results, six in ten Victorians (58.9%), or 3.3 million Victorians, engaged in volunteering in some form in 2024.

Of those who volunteer



FORMAL SETTINGS

**728,818** Victorians (22.1% of volunteers)

INFORMAL SETTINGS

**1,568,063** Victorians (47.5% of volunteers)

FORMAL AND INFORMAL SETTINGS

**1,002,667** Victorians (30.4% of volunteers)

This means that three-quarters of volunteers were informally volunteering; a rate close to double that of the 2020 survey, whilst formal rates have dropped since 2020.

This is consistent with previous findings, as informal volunteering tends to be more accessible and diverse in its reach, particularly among culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Victorian volunteers collectively contributed an **estimated 732.4 million hours** of donated time in 2024. On average, each volunteer gave **nearly 222 hours**, or around **18.5 hours per month**. Noting that although informal volunteering is more prevalent, formal roles tend to involve a greater time commitment per volunteer – 196 hours vs 121.

Victorian volunteers were asked to estimate the percentage of their volunteering time spent in different locations. On average, the largest proportion of time was spent **within their local community (59.0%)**, followed by **online or from home (23.6%)**; the latter a significant jump from 2020 (16.9%). Smaller portions of time were spent **somewhere else in the state (11.0%)**, **elsewhere in Australia (4.0%)**, and **overseas (4.2%)**.

The infographics below summarise key differences in volunteering participation across demographic groups in Victoria in 2024.

#### Volunteer participation by Gender Identified\*



#### Volunteer participation by Location



#### Volunteer participation by Age Group



#### Volunteers by Work/Study



#### Volunteer participation by Level of Completed Education



28.1%  
Year 10 or below

50.8%  
Year 11 or 12

57.4%  
Vocational qualification

67.1%  
Bachelor's degree

73.6%  
Graduate degree

#### Volunteer participation by Demographic Grouping



62.7% Other or multiple cultures

56.7% Anglo-Australian

57.2% Speaks only English at home

71.2% Speaks another language at home

67.2% Identifies as LGBTQIA+

\* Non-binary/Other/Declined were also present in the sample.

This data reveals several essential patterns in reported volunteering participation in Victoria in 2024 which must be read against wider society perceptions of what is volunteering and the value placed on care roles within the community:

- » **Young people (15–24) had the highest participation rate of any age group** (69.4%).
- » **Men were more likely than women to report that they are volunteering.** However, the formal data may not have accurately captured rates of informal volunteering, particularly that undertaken by women.
- » **Students volunteer more:** 79.2% of those currently studying reported volunteering vs 46.0% of non-students.

- » **Higher education levels** had a positive correlation with volunteering.
- » **Location mattered** in how and what volunteers reported as volunteering.
- » **Cultural background and language** were also linked to participation. Those identifying with other or multiple cultures had higher rates of volunteering (62.7%) as did those who speak a language other than English at home (71.2%) vs Anglo-Australian participants (56.7%).
- » **LGBTQIA+ respondents reported particularly high volunteering rates** (67.2%), suggesting strong community engagement in this group.

# Where volunteers give their time

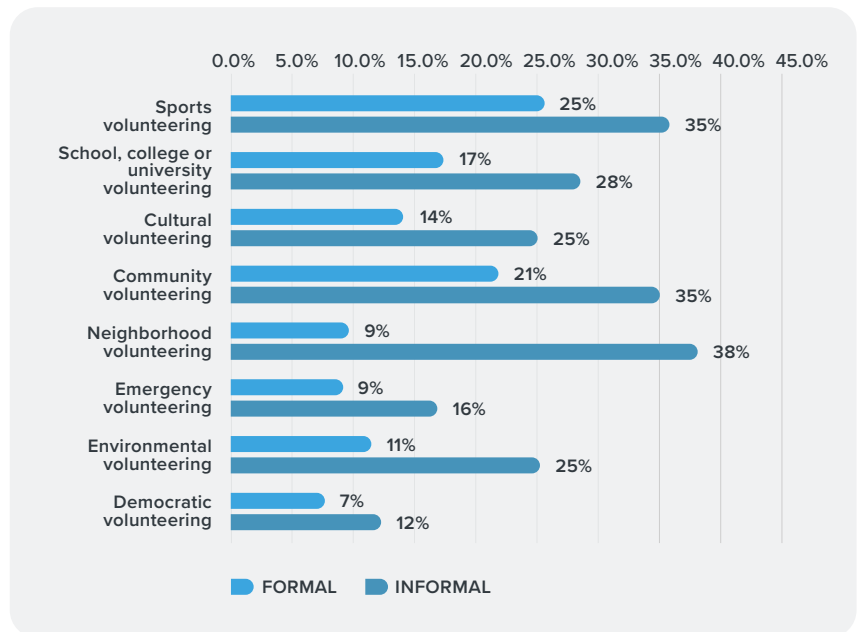
Victorian volunteers were active across a wide range of domains<sup>3</sup>.

The highest rates of formal volunteering were reported in **sports volunteering (25.7%)**, followed by **community (21.9%)** and **school, college or university volunteering (17.4%)**. In terms of informal volunteering, **neighbourhood volunteering (38.2%)**, **sports (35.9%)**, and **community (35.0%)** were the most common domains.

The figures opposite show that formal volunteering is strongest in structured sectors such as sport and education, while informal volunteering is more prevalent in neighbourhood and community-based support.

<sup>3</sup> Respondents could select multiple volunteering domains, so percentages do not sum to 100%. These results are based on a sub-sample of 1,300 respondents (740 volunteers), due to the use of two different survey forms.

Figure 1: Percentage of Victorian Volunteers Across Domains, Comparing Formal and Informal Participation



## What motivates Victorians to volunteer?

**62.0%**  
To help others

**48.7%**  
Because I can

**37.7%**  
To use my skills and expertise

**33.0%**  
To give back to those who've helped me

**23.9%**  
To support or learn more about a cause

"I come from a long history of volunteering. My parents were volunteers – it kind of rubs off on you."

"It's part of our culture. You don't wait to be asked – you just help."

"I want to do something good, not just for myself but for other people too."

"I started volunteering to meet new people – I didn't know anyone when I first came here."

"We don't do it for recognition. We do it because it's the right thing to do."

While compassion and connection lead the list, many volunteers also seek purpose, opportunities to apply their talents, or experiences that align with their values.

# Recruitment channels

The most common recruitment route was **supporting or volunteering with family or friends (35.6%)**, followed by **social media (27.8%)** and **search engines like Google (21.0%)**.

**One in five volunteers (20.2%)** started volunteering after participating in or using the service, highlighting the importance of meaningful service experiences in recruiting future volunteers.

Traditional recruitment methods such as **posters, newsletters, and flyers (15.4%)**, **referrals from professionals (15.3%)**, and **volunteer resource centres (13.5%)** were used by a smaller, but still notable, proportion of volunteers. Just 13.5% reported using SEEK Volunteer or other online recruitment platforms directly, while **open days and walk-ins attracted 15.5%** of volunteers.

“That’s why I started volunteering in the first place, because I thought, ‘hang on, if these girls don’t get volunteers at their comps, they’re not going to have any comps.’”

“We started seeing that people didn’t feel like the club was theirs... So we turned around and thought: how do we make the families that are in our community feel like they’re part of our club?”

# Identified benefits

The most cited benefit was a **sense of purpose (56.3%)**, closely followed by **enjoyment (52.3%)** and the **formation of friendships (48.4%)**.

“Volunteering helped my mental health – I felt like I had a purpose again.”

A significant portion also reported experiencing **greater social and community connection (42.2%)** and the opportunity to **gain new skills and experience (30.6%)**. Nearly a third (29.4%) of volunteers noted **physical activity** as a benefit, indicating that volunteering may also contribute positively to health and wellbeing.

While mental health was not an option included in the volunteer survey, several focus group participants strongly emphasised the **psychological impact** of volunteering.

Around one in three volunteers (36.7%) said they prefer to volunteer **with others**, highlighting the importance of shared experience and social connection. A slightly smaller group (34.2%) indicated they enjoy volunteering **alone and with others**, showing a flexible approach depending on the context. Meanwhile, 29.1% of volunteers reported that they prefer to volunteer **alone**, suggesting that for some, volunteering is a more personal or reflective activity.



# Identified barriers

Unsurprisingly, the most common limiting factor was **work or study commitments**, reported by 46.1% of all volunteers, particularly for young people.

“It's been an interesting juggle to do my normal job and do this... It has an impact on your day-to-day living and what you're earning.”

Other key barriers included:

- » Family responsibilities (39.7%)
- » Income, costs or expenses (32.0%)
- » Other social interests (20.2%)
- » Lack of transport (14.7%)
- » Cultural practices or commitments (7.9%)

Focus group participants reinforced this, frequently highlighting the pressure of rising living costs, the need to juggle paid work or study, and out-of-pocket expenses related to travel, uniforms, or certifications.



# What makes volunteering more difficult

When asked what makes volunteering more difficult, the most frequently cited issues were:

- » **Location**, with 21.1% of volunteers saying that where they live made volunteering more difficult – highlighting ongoing issues with local availability, access, or transport.
- » **Physical health** (18.6%), **age** (18.1%), and **mental health** (12.1%)
- » **Caring responsibilities** were a barrier for 14.6% of volunteers, reflecting the challenge of balancing unpaid caregiving with unpaid community service.

“Less people in regional areas means fewer volunteering opportunities, and often you have to travel long distances.”

“It’s hard to volunteer when I’m juggling kids and work. Every week looks different.”

“Family comes first – and sometimes that means I just can’t say yes, even if I want to.”

“Sometimes it’s not safe for me to keep doing the things I used to do as a volunteer.”

“I’ve been doing this for years... at some point, you just hit a wall.”

When asked why Victorians reduce or stop volunteering, the most commonly cited reason was a **change in work, study or family commitments** and current volunteers were more than twice as likely than former volunteers to cite **burnout** from too much volunteering (21.5% vs. 10.2%).

Focus group participants reinforced the complexity of volunteering. They described a perception of a straightforward and welcoming activity now burdened by **administrative hurdles, compliance requirements, and formal procedures** that can be particularly discouraging for people with disabilities or “non-traditional” backgrounds.

“Once upon a time, you used to just turn up and say you want to help.”

Today, volunteers are expected to complete identity checks, background clearances, and sometimes medical tests before they can begin.

While often well-intentioned in terms of safety and accountability, this evolution was seen as having unintended consequences: it creates a gatekeeping effect that can deter or exclude potential volunteers, particularly those already facing systemic disadvantage.

# Volunteer expenses

The financial burden of volunteering also came up regularly as a barrier. Participants noted that even modest out-of-pocket costs for things like travel, police checks, or uniforms could become a deterrent, particularly when combined with rising living costs.

In 2024, **Victorian volunteers reported an average of \$235 per month** in out-of-pocket expenses related to their volunteering. In 2020, this was reported as \$142.

Only **27.4% of volunteers received any reimbursement**:

- » 11.9% were fully reimbursed
- » 15.5% were partially reimbursed

Reasons given by volunteers for receiving no reimbursement:

- » 18.3% said the reimbursement was available, but they did not apply
- » 26.6% said it was not offered to them

It is important to note that 27.8% of volunteers reported not incurring any expenses.

“I'd love to keep helping, but I can't afford to drive across town every week.”

These insights suggest that retention strategies must go beyond recruitment efforts and address the **real-life pressures** that make volunteering hard to sustain. Flexible roles, clear recognition, and removing unnecessary costs may help keep valued volunteers engaged over the long term.

## Barriers for people not currently volunteering

Many non-volunteers identified a lack of time as a key reason for not volunteering, with less than a quarter saying they were not interested in volunteering. This presents a significant opportunity for volunteering that is flexible or time-sensitive to the needs of the volunteer.

“It also makes it easier to try because I think a lot of people are scared. Like if you don't know anyone or it feels too formal, you don't even try.”

The key reasons given for not volunteering were:

- » **Lack of time** (42.2%)
- » **Not interested** (22.8%)
- » **Didn't know how to start or had never been asked** (19.9%)
- » **Lacked the confidence** (18.8%) **or the skills** (8.8%) they thought they would need
- » **Lack of options nearby** (13.2%)
- » Only 5.6% identified having **no-one to volunteer with** as a barrier



# Intent to volunteer in the future

**Table 1: Future Intent to Volunteer Over the Next Three Years**

Percentage of respondents by current volunteer status (n = 2,541).

Response Option	Volunteers (%)	Non-Volunteers (%)
More	22.5%	21.8%
About the same	49.5%	0.0%
Less	13.4%	0.0%
Not volunteering at all	4.1%	41.9%
Don't know	10.4%	36.3%

Among current volunteers, 49.5% indicated they expect to **continue volunteering at the same level** and 22.5% plan to **increase their involvement**. These findings suggest that there is a strong base of volunteers intending to maintain or increase their contribution, noting that nearly one-third (27.9%) are at risk of reducing or ending their involvement.

Among non-volunteers, nearly a quarter (21.8%) expressed **firm interest in starting** to volunteer and 36.3% were unsure. This indicates just under two-thirds of the population who do not currently volunteer have the potential to begin in the next three years.

“People have aged out of it, and they haven’t inspired the next group. But I’d like to pick it up again.”

Chart Note: Percentages are based on sub-sample sizes: 1,073 volunteers and 1,046 non-volunteers.





# Impact of COVID-19: Volunteers

The last State of Volunteering in Victoria report (2020) was published in 2020 and captured data during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, when stay-at-home restrictions were in force and volunteering was only allowed if it was essential and could not be performed remotely.

The accompanying Survey of Volunteer Managers (April–June 2020) gathered insights on both pre-COVID practices and the immediate impact of lockdowns.

Victoria's COVID-19 experience was the most prolonged and severe in Australia, with extended restrictions, especially for unvaccinated residents. **These conditions had lasting social and economic impacts on volunteering.** Many VIOs faced sustained operational strain, while volunteers and Volunteer Leaders navigated program suspensions, changing rules, and widespread disengagement.

While the 2024 population survey did not include direct COVID-related questions, participants in focus groups reflected on how the pandemic influenced their volunteering. The 2024 Survey of Volunteer Managers did ask about perceived changes linked to COVID-19, supported by additional focus groups.

The survey reveals a complex legacy. COVID-19 disrupted traditional volunteering, accelerated pre-existing trends, and prompted innovation. For many, it marked a turning point – some never returned and others re-evaluated their priorities. The effects continue to shape volunteering in Victoria in 2025.

"I think a lot of people sort of said to heck with it after that and thought I couldn't be bothered going back."

"We lost between 45 and 50% of our volunteers... we had to maintain our service from our own homes."

The burden on individual volunteers also grew. Some organisations lost half their workforce overnight when older volunteers were barred from participating due to government health directives.

For some, this led to burnout or withdrawal. Yet others found ways to continue their work with pride and purpose.

"We still did our thing... with masks and contact-free delivery... we still felt slightly useful."



## A decline in formal volunteering

“The impact on people who potentially were just going in in the first instance to have a chat with a few people to see how they were going and what was troubling them, to having to be almost solely responsible for that service in their own homes, meant that we lost volunteers because of the responsibility that they were asked to take on, and that really affected our service.”

The early stages of the pandemic brought widespread suspension of formal volunteering programs.

Social distancing requirements, vaccine mandates, and lockdowns made formal volunteering difficult – if not impossible – for many organisations. This led to volunteer disengagement and increased the pressure on Leaders of Volunteers.

Some Leaders of Volunteers reflected that the pandemic placed an increased burden on volunteers.

## A rise in informal volunteering

As formal volunteering declined, informal volunteering flourished.

This shift mirrored national trends: data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) shows a long-term decline in formal volunteering alongside a rise in informal volunteering. COVID-19 appeared to accelerate this trajectory.

“I also think for my family specifically... they started helping out their neighbours who couldn’t go food shopping or started taking their bins out.”

“As soon as we went into first lockdown, we started meeting on zoom and the groups that didn't fell by the wayside.”

Informal volunteering was also driven by the need to be agile, with those failing to do so being left behind.

Informal volunteering also gained traction against a backdrop of ever-increasing requirements for formal volunteering, including vaccination mandates.

“I started volunteering when we had all the lockdowns in Melbourne. I know some people would love to volunteer in certain settings, but maybe they might not have had all the vaccines.”

## Reduced commitment, changing priorities

Volunteers and Leaders of Volunteers alike noticed a shift in willingness to commit to regular, scheduled, and long-term roles.

Many volunteers reevaluated how they wanted to spend their time and chose to reduce or restructure their commitments.

“Since COVID volunteering has diminished – it’s hard to get people out when they have discovered life with time.”

“Less volunteers. Absolutely. People have got used to having their own time back. People really jealously guard their free time. They got used to not turning up.”

“But there's people who potentially can't afford that now who might could have in the past ...because of the cost of fuel and everything else is going up. So it's likely definitely played a role in some people's motivations and abilities. You've got to be able to afford your time to be able to give it.”

Increased work pressures, changing care responsibilities, and financial strain also influenced people’s capacity to volunteer – a trend that has continued in subsequent years.

## Impact on mental wellbeing

Lockdowns and isolation had a profound and lasting effect on the mental wellbeing of volunteers, particularly young people.

Younger volunteers commented that their confidence and social skills were diminished, and they found it difficult to navigate new experiences after COVID-19.

Participants consistently reported increased health anxiety, particularly older or immunocompromised volunteers. This anxiety contributed to the reluctance to return to in-person activities.

“Yeah I think everyone's mental health took a really big hit during COVID. And now since COVID, I'm realising that a lot more mental health challenges have come up as well, which sort of limits what I feel like I can do.”

“People have taken a real battering. And so I suppose it's a glimmer of hope for them now. They're looking to try and bring back the community, that sense of community again.”

“So for me, COVID brought up a lot more anxiety that I didn't think I had before COVID. So I find it really awkward now to say yes as easily as what I used to. I found I was a bit more awkward in social situations. Even going back to work after all the lockdowns, it was a bit, yeah, unnerving. Like going back into social situations.”





“What I've learned over the last year or so, particularly as you've come out of COVID, people join organisations to be with people, not to be with computer screens. So the social connection piece is really important for us and even more difficult in the country.”

“I think that's probably the biggest barrier coming back from COVID – the trauma people are having.”



## Desire for greater flexibility

A significant legacy of the pandemic was the push for more flexible volunteering opportunities.

Online, remote, and hybrid models made volunteering more accessible, particularly for those who had previously faced barriers to participation. Many volunteers felt this was a positive shift: the ability to volunteer remotely improved their efficiency.

Leaders of Volunteers who introduced flexible models earlier were more likely to report program resilience.

“I do only online now. I'm so addicted to it and it is so convenient.”

“Ever since the technology enablement happened, I found it much more convenient, effective if people could work from home. Doing volunteering from home was a no brainer. Now I refuse to do face to face. I feel safe, I save on time, I can schedule as per my availability.”

“I actually think it accelerated our training more and made us a bit more professional. I think it professionalised us a little bit more because they couldn't travel, so online training was the only way to do it.”

However, many roles – particularly in health, emergency relief, and aged care – could not be performed remotely and organisations delivering these roles consistently reported that COVID-19 had negatively affected their volunteers, programs, and service users.

“We want to make it so that our volunteering roles are as accessible as possible, but we still have to maintain that quite rigid, strict, traditional volunteer role.”



## Seeking connection, community and inclusion

The experience of lockdowns deepened people's appreciation for social connection, and volunteering became a vital way to rebuild that.

"But for me, I'm prioritising volunteering over a few things and sort of making my socialisation link in with volunteering a bit more. So rather than seeing it as another task to add on, it's actually 'this is me being social'. It was a bit of a mindset change".

"Seeing all these people that you saw, all the friendships starting to be formed at the club because they were yearning for that connection coming out of COVID. So all these people that became friends are still friends today. And that's because the club was the only connection they had because it was one of the few things that was allowed back after COVID. It's interesting to see that people are just wanting that one-on-one connection."

Leaders of Volunteers observed that post-COVID yearning for connection had created lasting friendships and stronger community bonds.

For many volunteers, COVID shone a spotlight on the importance of community. It highlighted not just the critical role that volunteering plays during crises, but its unique ability to help people stay connected, feel useful, and support others in meaningful ways.

"It's kind of like highlighted the importance of community. I would say COVID, basically it's shifted how and where people volunteer. And it's also showed how important volunteering is in times of crisis."

"I also think for my family specifically, more non-structured volunteering happened. Whereas maybe they'd never volunteered before, now they've started helping out their neighbours who couldn't go food shopping because they were compromised or started taking their bins out for them. Even if it's not in an organised way, you do it and you're volunteering for more kindness and helping someone else."

"We created online classes and translated information into Arabic."

COVID-19 prompted innovation around accessibility and inclusion. Volunteers reflected that there was an increase in opportunities for them to help in places where they had previously experienced barriers. In multicultural communities, COVID-19 created opportunities particularly around language translation.

## Seeking connection, community and inclusion (cont.)

Leaders of Volunteers felt that changes to volunteer engagement had improved the effectiveness and efficiency of some roles.

Other Leaders of Volunteers recognised that as restrictions lifted, they had to change the way they did things to encourage volunteers to return or motivate new volunteers to join.

“It was good in that some of the skilled people that we had were no longer having the commute to the city, so they're available for response during the day, which had always been our difficult time.”

## Significant impact on older volunteers

Older volunteers were among the most impacted by COVID-19. Some reported never returning due to health anxieties, others were excluded by compliance requirements, and many simply found that they were no longer physically able to do the tasks they had done pre-pandemic.

In the health and aged care sectors, continuation of pandemic-era requirements such as vaccination mandates, have continued to affect volunteer participation into 2025. This has exacerbated the pressure on older volunteers and served to exclude many who were unable or unwilling to meet such requirements.

“They aged out of volunteering... they were devastated, crying on the phone... we're doing more hand-holding than we've ever done.”

“I was able to see very, very clearly the impact that not volunteering was having on our volunteers. So their lack of mobility, because they physically weren't moving around, their lack of cognition, because they didn't have the opportunity to continue learning, and then also the lack of social interaction and a sense of purpose. And so, for a lot of them, they didn't come back. We lost them. The ones that have returned, that have been brave enough to return, what we've really seen is a lack of confidence. So in addition to all the compliance stuff, we're also trying to rebuild confidence and make people feel safe in our space. I think it's had a profound impact not only on the volunteers' health and wellbeing themselves, but on our ability to provide service.”



## A moment of challenge and opportunity

The legacy of COVID-19 on volunteering in Victoria is profound. It disrupted long-held practices, reduced formal participation, and left many volunteers and organisations exhausted. Yet it also triggered innovation, accelerated long-needed shifts, and revealed new ways for people to connect and contribute.

If volunteering is willing to evolve, by embracing flexibility, rethinking screening processes, and prioritising wellbeing and inclusion there is a significant opportunity. Volunteers want to return, but they need to feel safe, valued, and supported. Communities are seeking connection. People are looking for meaningful ways to re-engage.

**COVID-19 changed volunteering – but it also clarified just how vital it is.** The challenge now is to carry forward what we've learned, and to ensure that every willing volunteer has a meaningful, safe, and supported place to give.



# Summary statistics:

## State of Volunteering in Victoria

Participation Rate (% of cohort who volunteer)	Different Motives	Recruitment Channels	Barriers
<b>Young Volunteers (15–24 years old)</b>	<b>69.4</b> % <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No one else was doing it</li> <li>• Educational or government requirements</li> <li>• Career development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media</li> <li>• Traditional media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work or study commitment</li> <li>• Income, costs and expenses</li> <li>• Lack of transport</li> </ul>
<b>Older Volunteers (65+)</b>	<b>50.1</b> % <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic or community duty</li> <li>• To use my skills and experience</li> <li>• Because I can</li> </ul>	I was a participant/ user who started volunteering	Other social interests
<b>Rural and Regional Volunteers</b>	<b>53.3</b> % <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because I can</li> <li>• To use my skills and experience</li> </ul>	I was a participant/ user who started volunteering	Family
<b>Women</b>	<b>56.4</b> % <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To help others</li> <li>• To use my skill and experience</li> </ul>	Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work or study</li> <li>• Family</li> <li>• Lack of transport</li> </ul>
<b>CALD Volunteers</b>	<b>71.0</b> % <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education or government requirement</li> <li>• To contribute during a crisis</li> <li>• To support or to learn more about a cause</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SEEK Volunteer or online volunteer recruitment</li> <li>• Social media</li> <li>• Google/ searching online</li> <li>• Referral</li> <li>• Open days or events / walk-in</li> <li>• Volunteer resource centres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work or study</li> <li>• Family</li> <li>• Cultural practices</li> <li>• Lack of transport</li> <li>• Income, costs and expenses</li> </ul>
<b>Volunteers with Disability</b>	<b>53.6</b> % <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To give back to those who have helped me</li> <li>• Because I can</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open days or events / walk-in</li> <li>• I was a participant/ user who started volunteering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of transport</li> <li>• Income, costs and expenses</li> </ul>
<b>Volunteers with Mental Health condition</b>	<b>54.8</b> % <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To help others</li> <li>• No one else was doing it</li> <li>• To contribute during a crisis</li> <li>• To support or to learn more about a cause</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media</li> <li>• Google/ searching online</li> <li>• Traditional media</li> <li>• Open days or events / walk-in</li> <li>• Volunteer resource centres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural practices</li> <li>• Lack of transport</li> <li>• Income, costs and expenses</li> </ul>

	Intent to volunteer more in 3 years (% of current volunteers)	Average volunteer cost per year	Average hours volunteered annually	Cost per volunteering hour	Wellbeing (volunteers vs non-volunteers)
Young Volunteers (15–24 years old)	29.8 %	\$4,390 \$	272 🕒	\$16.14 \$	65 Vols 63 Non-Vols 👤
Older Volunteers (65+)	5.5 %	\$823 \$	242 🕒	\$3.40 \$	78 Vols 68 Non-Vols 👤
Rural and Regional Volunteers	20.9 %	\$2,282 \$	257 🕒	\$8.88 \$	69 Vols 63 Non-Vols 👤
Women	25.7 %	\$2,513 \$	201 🕒	\$12.50 \$	70 Vols 63 Non-Vols 👤
CALD Volunteers	25.8 %	\$4,918 \$	234 🕒	\$21.02 \$	70 Vols 62 Non Vols 👤
Volunteers with Disability	23.0 %	\$1,815 \$	248 🕒	\$7.32 \$	61 Vols 47 Non-Vols 👤
Volunteers with Mental Health condition	28.7 %	\$3,626 \$	233 🕒	\$15.56 \$	59 Vols 57 Non-Vols 👤

# Section 2: Snapshots





# Geography of Victorian Volunteers

## At a glance

### Volunteering rates

Major cities  
**61.2%**

Inner regional  
**55.0%**

Outer regional/  
remote  
**45.2%**

### Hours contributed per year

Major cities  
**208**

Inner regional  
**243**

Outer regional/  
remote  
**332**

### Prefer volunteering with others

Major cities  
**35.6%**

Inner regional  
**38.3%**

Outer regional/  
remote  
**48.2%**

### Intention to increase volunteering

Major cities  
**23.1%**

Inner regional  
**21.2%**

Outer regional/  
remote  
**19.3%**

### Key barriers

#### Major cities

1. Work or study commitments (48.8%)
2. Family responsibilities (38.4%)
3. Financial constraints (33.2%)

#### Inner regional

1. Family responsibilities (45.6%)
2. Work or study commitments (41.6%)
3. Financial constraints (29.1%)

#### Outer regional/remote

1. Financial constraints (29.8%)
  2. Other social interests (28.1%)
- = Family responsibilities (28.1%)

## Volunteering looks different across Victoria

Community expectations, access to opportunities, and practical barriers are all significantly influenced by geography.

While people in major cities are the most likely to volunteer overall, those in regional and remote areas

often give significantly more of their time, particularly in informal or community-led roles.

**For many in regional areas, volunteering is described as a natural extension of community life** – driven by local connectedness, social responsibility, and a strong desire to help “where needed”.

“Less people in the area means everyone chips in – it’s just what you do.”

“Spending time with people, working with people – it’s how you build community here.”

“That’s not informal volunteering, that’s just being neighbourly”

In these communities, volunteering is often less about structured programs and more about relationships, informal leadership, and stepping in where needed. In smaller towns, the strength of local networks can be both a help and a hindrance.

“If they do know you ... you get approached. If they don’t know you, you’re kind of on your own.”

Volunteers in outer regional and remote areas are more likely to contribute their time outside their immediate locality, at nearly double the proportion of those in major cities (**20.2%** vs **11.3%**). This seems to point to the realities of rural living. However, location also affects access. Focus group participants in regional areas frequently cited transport issues, isolation, and limited opportunities as barriers to volunteering.

Financial pressures also affect volunteers differently depending on location. While monthly out-of-pocket expenses tend to be lower in regional areas (**\$188** for

inner regional volunteers versus **\$252** in major cities), support for covering these costs is more limited – with reimbursement least likely to be offered in outer regional/remote areas (**33.9%**).

Even when available, many volunteers across all locations do not apply for reimbursement – **19.0%** in major cities, **15.6%** in inner regional areas, and **17.9%** in outer regional/remote communities. This reflects broader trends and cultural perceptions of volunteering, with many volunteers being either unaware of support, hesitant to ask, or not viewing their expenses as significant enough to report.

## Summary

### These trends point to both strengths and vulnerabilities.

Volunteers in less urbanised areas are highly committed yet carry a heavier load and face more logistical and financial barriers. Supporting regional volunteering requires attention not just to participation rates, but to sustainability, equity, and access.

#### Strengthening and expanding volunteering across Victoria will require tailored, region-sensitive approaches. Key recommendations include:

- » Enhance local infrastructure and transport support in regional and remote areas to improve access to volunteering opportunities.
- » Introduce or expand reimbursement programs to offset the financial burden on volunteers, particularly in rural communities.
- » Streamline administrative requirements for volunteers in urban areas to reduce paperwork fatigue and role mismatches.
- » Prioritise place-based program design, working directly with regional communities to create opportunities that reflect their needs and contexts, rather than applying metro-centric models.
- » Promote flexible volunteering models, including online and micro-volunteering, to accommodate diverse lifestyles and reduce barriers across all regions.

# Youth (Ages 15-24)

## At a glance

**69.4%**

young Victorians volunteer

Above statewide average (58.9%)

**271**

hours contributed per year

Highest average hours across all age groups (211 hours on average)

### Key motivations:

Helping others (**57.6%**)

Because they can (**45.7%**)

To use their skills & expertise (**40.8%**)

No one else is doing it (**21.6%**)

**44%**

prefer to volunteer with others

**25.1%**

volunteer online or from home

Among the highest of all age groups

**29.8%**

expect to increase their volunteering over the next 3 years

Highest rate across all age groups

### Key barriers

1. Work or study commitments (69.0%)
2. Income, costs or expenses (42.0%)
3. Family responsibilities (29.0%)

4. Other social interests (28.2%)
5. Lack of transport (24.5%)

## Young volunteers are leading the way in Victoria

Whether it's contributing to causes they care about, gaining industry experience, or responding to unmet needs in their community, young people are actively carving out space to make a difference.

Many are motivated by a desire to give back, but also by gaining skills and experience relevant to future employment, particularly for students.

**For this age group, volunteering isn't just about service – it's about connection.**

Many spoke about the sense of belonging and shared purpose they found through volunteering.

"For me, a big reason for volunteering was trying to get into a particular industry I may see myself working in."

"All the volunteers, we're like a group now. It's really like a community."

"It's good for your mental health, to get out of the house, do some activity with people you can get along with."

“You learn about injustice in the world, and it makes you want to do something. Volunteering helps you feel like you’re making an impact.”

Volunteering is also seen as a meaningful way to manage uncertainty and take positive action.

However, their participation isn’t without challenges. Young people face more barriers than older age groups – including demanding study and work schedules, financial pressures, and transport limitations.

Adding to this, many young volunteers absorb out-of-pocket costs but are the least likely to be reimbursed (**7.7%** receiving full reimbursement and **18.3%** partial). A high proportion (**36.1%**) don’t apply for reimbursement, even when it is available. This may reflect a lack of awareness, confidence, or willingness to ask for support.

At times, young volunteers can also feel underestimated. While some Leaders of Volunteers are eager to engage them, others still question their commitment. Yet the evidence tells a clear story:

**Young volunteers demonstrate strong motivations, high participation rates, and an apparent willingness to contribute when given the right opportunity.**

"There’s this idea that young people don’t care. But I do care – I just don’t know where I’m supposed to go."

## Summary

Despite facing more external limitations than older age groups, when roles are accessible, flexible, and meaningful – young people show up.

### More insights

Monash Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice (CYPEP), (2024) Anxiety, wellbeing and engaging young people in volunteering

<https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Anxiety-Wellbeing-and-Engaging-Young-People-in-Volunteering-CYPEP-report.pdf>

Volunteering Australia (2023) Youth Volunteering Factsheet

<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Youth-Volunteering-Factsheet-2023.pdf>

### To support and retain young volunteers, volunteering needs to adapt by:

- » Increasing role flexibility and supporting digital participation
- » Providing visibility and clarity on how to get involved
- » Offsetting or reimbursing expenses where possible
- » Fostering inclusive and respectful environments free from stigma or gatekeeping
- » Listening to young people and co-designing volunteering opportunities that reflect their reality

"Youth volunteering is increasing, but [organisations] need to adapt culturally to engage them effectively."



# Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities

## At a glance

**71.0%**

CALD volunteers

Well above the statewide average (58.9%)

**234**

hours contributed per year

Above the average of non-CALD volunteers (217)

### Key motivations:

- **40.8%** Use their skills and experience
- **34.9%** Give back to those who helped them
- **29.6%** Support or learn about a cause

### Key pathways into volunteering:

- **37.0%** Social media
- **24.0%** Google / searching online
- **21.9%** Professional referral
- **21.4%** Online recruitment sites

**\$409.38**

Average out-of-pocket expenses per year

More than double the average for non-CALD volunteers (\$173.45)

**25.8%**

expect to increase their volunteering over the next 3 years

### Key barriers

1. Work or study commitments (50.5%)
2. Family responsibilities (44.6%)

3. Income, costs, and expenses (38.0%)
4. Lack of transport (24.0%)

## CALD volunteering in Victoria

For people from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background, volunteering is not just a task or activity, but a powerful expression of identity, belonging, and shared responsibility.

Participants spoke of volunteering as an act **deeply embedded in cultural and spiritual life**, rooted in traditions of collective care and reciprocity. While Western volunteering models often emphasise formal roles and structured hours, many CALD volunteers see service as embedded in everyday life.

“Volunteering is one of the ways to assist new migrants with English and to settle into a new place.”

“While volunteering is something we all do, it almost seems like it's just a word. It's our way of life. It's about seeing people in need, seeing communities in need, and going: what can I do as a person to help?”

In some cultures, there isn't even a direct translation for volunteering in their first language.

CALD volunteers are highly motivated by gratitude, learning, and community connection. Many contribute more hours than average, reporting distinct benefits such as **gaining skills and experience (35.7%)**, **reinforcing religious or cultural connection (23.2%)**, and **building professional networks (21.2%)**.

“In Iraq there is no term for volunteering – helping is just part of the community.”

## Challenges across society are also challenges in volunteering

Despite a strong willingness to volunteer, participants from CALD backgrounds face multiple and intersecting barriers.

These include visa-related restrictions, unfamiliar compliance processes, and a lack of culturally responsive practices within Volunteer-Involving Organisations. Rigid role structures, limited flexibility

for cultural or caregiving obligations, and a lack of understanding about different community norms were also identified as obstacles.

Many also reported experiences of racism, cultural bias, and discrimination. These experiences shape their sense of belonging, confidence, and willingness to continue engaging.

“They really want to do volunteering, but they have visa issues and they haven't settled enough. So that's a barrier for them to participate.”

“Sometimes just looking a certain way or belonging to a certain religion makes people treat you differently.”



When asked “Have you recently reduced your time or stopped volunteering?”, significantly more CALD volunteers (41.8%) reported cutting back compared with the non-CALD rate of 26.1%.

What’s clear is that inclusion is not just about access – it is also about culture. Volunteers want to be welcomed for who they are, not just what they can contribute.

“It’s a long road, but it’s worth it. We’re building trust and showing people they are welcome.”

**Building safe, affirming, and culturally responsive volunteering environments requires a sustained effort.**

Despite the challenges, CALD communities continue to show resilience, with many volunteers appearing optimistic about their ongoing involvement. Nearly half (47.4%) said they expect to continue volunteering at about the same level, and 25.8% plan to increase their participation, slightly more than non-CALD respondents (21.4%).

“CALD communities take responsibility really seriously... if they commit, they follow through.”

## Summary

CALD volunteers play a vital role in community life across the state.

**To better support CALD volunteers and ensure an inclusive future for volunteering in Victoria, key actions include:**

- » Reduce financial burdens by improving reimbursement access and offsetting high participation costs.
- » Strengthen access pathways by providing more transport options, culturally responsive onboarding, and flexible role structures.
- » Invest in culturally safe volunteering environments, where inclusion goes beyond access to genuinely affirm identity, language, and community values.
- » Recognise and value informal and culturally embedded volunteering, not just formal registered hours.
- » Build trust-based partnerships with CALD communities, focusing on co-designing volunteer roles and leadership opportunities.

### More insights

National Knowledge Base: Barriers to Volunteering for Newly Arrived Migrants

<https://volunteering.freshdesk.com/support/solutions/articles/51000440198-barriers-to-volunteering>



# Volunteers living with disability and/or mental health conditions

## At a glance

### Volunteering rates

People with disability  
**53.6%**  
 Slightly below statewide average (58.9%)

People with mental health condition  
**54.8%**  
 Slightly below statewide average (58.9%)

### Hours contributed per year

People with disability  
**248**  
 Above average of those without disability (219.4)

People with mental health condition  
**233**  
 Above statewide average (221.6)

### Volunteering location

People with disability  
**30.5%**  
 Volunteer online or from home

People with mental health condition  
**23.3%**  
 Volunteer online or from home

### Intention to increase volunteering

People with disability  
**18.1%**  
 Expect to increase their volunteering  
**17.3%**  
 Expect to reduce their volunteering

People with mental health condition  
**28.7%**  
 Expect to increase their volunteering  
**13.9%**  
 Expect to reduce their volunteering

### Key motivations

People with disability

- Because they can **(58.3%)**
- To give back to those who have helped them **(37.8%)**
- No one else was doing it **(15.0%)**

People with mental health condition

- Helping others **(69.1%)**
- To support or learn more about a cause **(30.9%)**
- To contribute during a crisis **(24.7%)**

### Key barriers

People with disability

- Income related barriers **(37.8%)**
- Lack of transport **(23.6%)**
- Other social interests **(20.5%)**

People with mental health condition

- Work or study commitments **(49.8%)**
- Income, costs, or expenses **(43.0%)**
- Other social interests **(22.4%)**

Victorians living with disability or mental health conditions are active, engaged members of the volunteering community. While their participation

rates are slightly below average, their contributions are significant – with both groups giving more hours annually on average than the general population.



## People with disability

8.5% of Victorian volunteers live with disability. For many, volunteering is more than just an act of service – it provides a sense of identity, personal growth, and belonging.

"It's not only volunteer work; it's also experience – gaining the experience to, like, help you get a job."

"For fun and enjoyment with me and new people... I actually met new people last year and just made new friendships."

"I think I volunteered because I just want to feel worthy... I feel like I need to keep giving back, especially when I became disabled."

For some, volunteering is a path from service recipient to contributor. Over a quarter of volunteers with disability (25.2%) started volunteering after being a **participant or user of a service**.

When compared to statewide averages, volunteers with disability were **more likely to engage online or from home** (30.5%) and less likely to volunteer in-person in their local community (41.7%), reflecting the importance of flexible and accessible roles.

However, barriers to participation remain substantial and mirror those reported in the search for paid work,

all of which limit the ability of people with disability to engage meaningfully and consistently. Over half cited their **physical health** (54.3%) as making volunteering more difficult, while many also experience difficulties related to **accessibility**, including physical access to venues, inadequate facilities, and limited transport options.

"You get there and you can get in, but there's no accessible toilet or anything like that, so you can't stay."

Participants also described the mental effort required to 'fit in' or challenge assumptions about their capability.

"They don't recognise us for the skills we have."

"You can only have so many disappointments and come back so many times."

"If it was to cost me to volunteer, I wouldn't because I couldn't justify that coming out of the family budget."

The financial burden of compliance was also a common theme. Volunteers with disabilities were most affected by income-related barriers, with 37.8% identifying **costs** as limiting their volunteering. Participants shared that obtaining the required identification or paying for police checks can be cost-prohibitive, especially for those on fixed incomes or disability support pensions.

## People with disability (cont.)

Another mentioned the difficulty of “getting your birth certificate or ID card if you don’t have a driver’s licence”.

These seemingly minor barriers add up, and for many, they create a point of attrition before volunteering can even begin.

Despite these barriers, improvements and efforts toward **genuine inclusion** are becoming more noticeable, especially when organisations make meaningful adjustments and offer equal responsibilities.

Ultimately, people with disability want compassionate, inclusive, and enabling volunteering environments – where they are not just included but welcomed, supported, and seen as vital.

### More insights

National Knowledge Base: Barriers to Volunteering for People with Disability

<https://volunteering.freshdesk.com/support/solutions/articles/51000440198-barriers-to-volunteering>

“You can’t be what you can’t see. Sometimes it just takes that first person to be included for others to realise what’s possible.”

“I’m seeing it changing now... It’s a positive thing that they’re inclusive.”

“Having been a volunteer with and without a disability, I can say it gives you that feeling that you are part of something.”

## People with mental health conditions

According to the 2024 data, 14.9% of Victorian volunteers report living with a mental health condition.

Volunteers with mental health conditions are more likely to be recruited through digital channels such as **social media (34.5%) or online searches (31.8%), and also showed a strong presence in remote volunteering (23.3%)** – indicating that flexible and digital pathways support their engagement.

That said, those with a mental health condition were more likely than people with disability to volunteer in-person **within their local community** (58.7% compared to 41.7%), highlighting the physical barriers that exist. Unsurprisingly, nearly 45% of volunteers with a mental health condition cited **mental health** itself as a limiting factor, nearly four times the state average.

People with a mental health condition were also more likely to be affected by **financial pressures**, with 43.0% reporting income, costs or expenses as a limiting factor, more than 10 percentage points higher than the general population.

For many people navigating mental health conditions, volunteering plays an important role in wellbeing and inclusion, providing a valuable space to contribute and connect with their community.

### More insights

Volunteering Australia (2021), Evidence Insights: Volunteering and Mental Health

<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Evidence-Insights-Volunteering-and-mental-health-Final.pdf>

## Summary

These findings reinforce the value of inclusive volunteering environments that are flexible, accessible, and responsive to different needs.

Creating meaningful pathways for people with disability and mental health conditions not only enables their continued contribution – it strengthens the entire volunteering ecosystem.

**To better support volunteers with disability and/or mental health conditions in Victoria, key recommendations include:**

- » Consider accessibility and inclusion from all perspectives – not just in physical spaces, but in attitudes and processes.
- » Design flexible roles that accommodate varying energy levels, access needs, and remote participation.
- » Prioritise inclusive recruitment – use accessible language, multiple platforms, and proactive outreach through disability and mental health networks.
- » Invest in training and support for volunteer-involving organisations to build confidence and capacity around inclusive practice.
- » Create pathways from participation to volunteering, particularly for those engaged as service users.
- » Recognise the value of lived experience and provide meaningful roles that allow volunteers to contribute and lead.



# Wellbeing and quality of life

When volunteering is inclusive and accessible to all, it acts as a powerful contributor to individual wellbeing.

In 2024, data showed that Victorian volunteers report significantly higher levels of wellbeing and quality of life than those who do not volunteer.

On average, volunteers scored 8.3 points higher in wellbeing and 8.3 points higher in life satisfaction than non-volunteers on a 100-point scale.

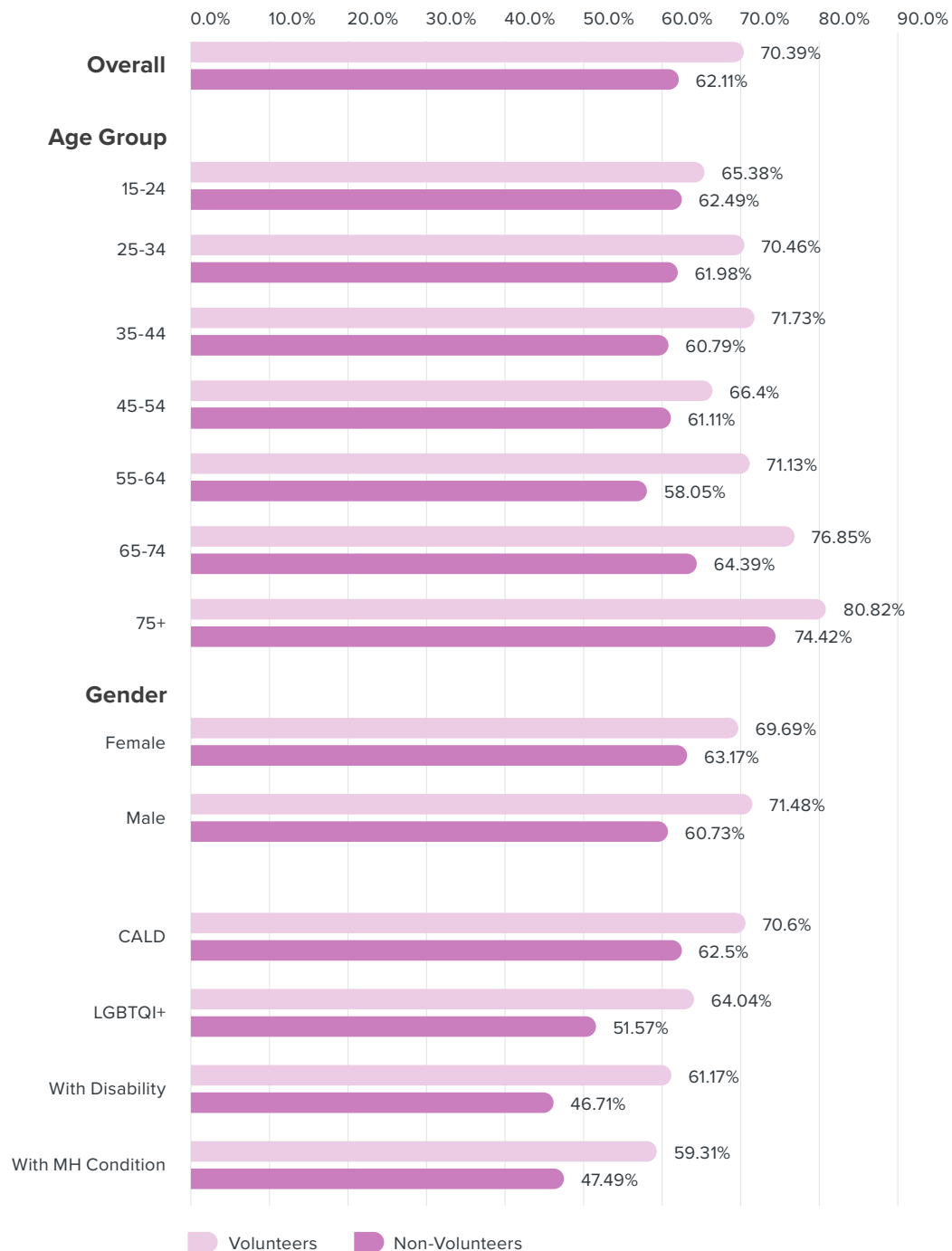
Some groups show particularly notable benefits:

- » **People with disability** reported a 14.5-point increase in wellbeing and a 13.3-point increase in quality of life.
- » **People with mental health conditions** saw an 11.8-point uplift in wellbeing and a 10.4-point boost in quality of life.
- » **LGBTQIA+ volunteers** reported 12.5 points higher wellbeing than LGBTQIA+ non-volunteers.
- » **Older adults** also report powerful benefits, with volunteers aged 55–64 reporting the largest quality of life gains (+18.8 points).





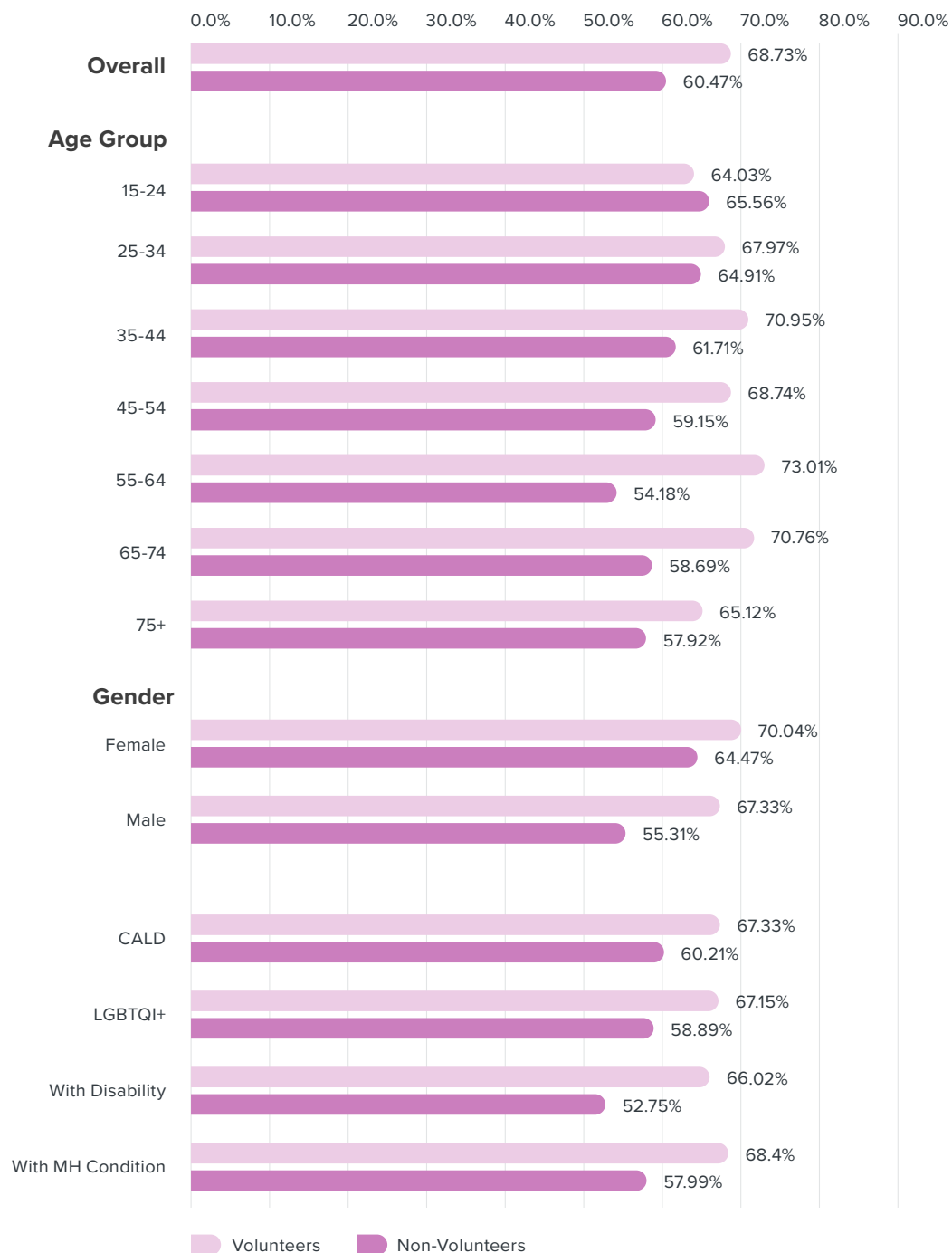
## Wellbeing scores: Volunteers vs Non-Volunteers



**Figure 2: Wellbeing Scores of Volunteers Compared to Non-Volunteers**

These findings align with one of the most researched areas of volunteering – clearly demonstrating that volunteering acts as a critical source of connection, capability, and contribution, particularly for those at greater risk of exclusion or isolation.

## Quality of life scores: Volunteers vs Non-Volunteers



**Figure 3: Quality of Life Scores of Volunteers Compared to Non-Volunteers**

The data underscores a key insight: **inclusive and meaningful volunteer opportunities are not just good practice – they are a vital pathway to better individual wellbeing.**

By creating volunteering environments that recognise and support diverse needs and experiences, we strengthen not only our communities, but the lives of the people within them.





# Section 3: Volunteer-Involving Organisations (VIOs)





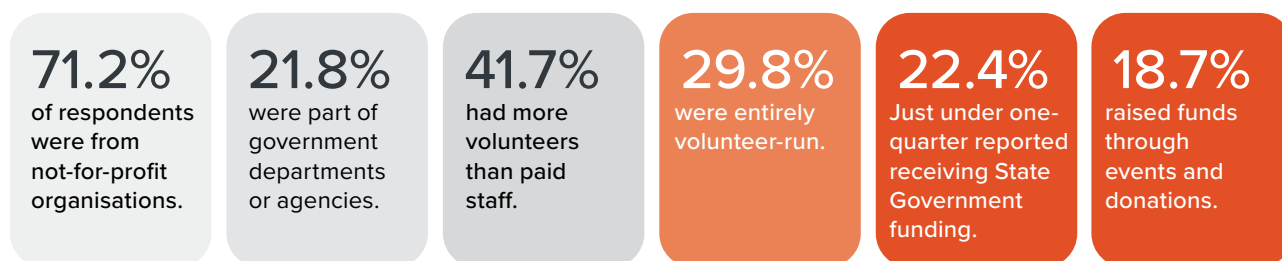
## Volunteer-Involving Organisations (VIOs) are the backbone of Victoria's volunteering ecosystem.

They provide the infrastructure, coordination, and leadership that enable people to contribute their time, skills, and care to their communities.

This section draws on survey responses from organisations across Victoria (326 respondents) and focus group insights to understand who these organisations are, who leads them, how they operate, and what challenges they face in a changing environment.

## Who are Victoria's VIOs?

Victoria's VIOs come in many forms – from large NGOs to small community groups, government agencies, and volunteer-run associations:



This diversity underscores the importance of flexible policy and funding frameworks that can respond to different organisational models and capacities.

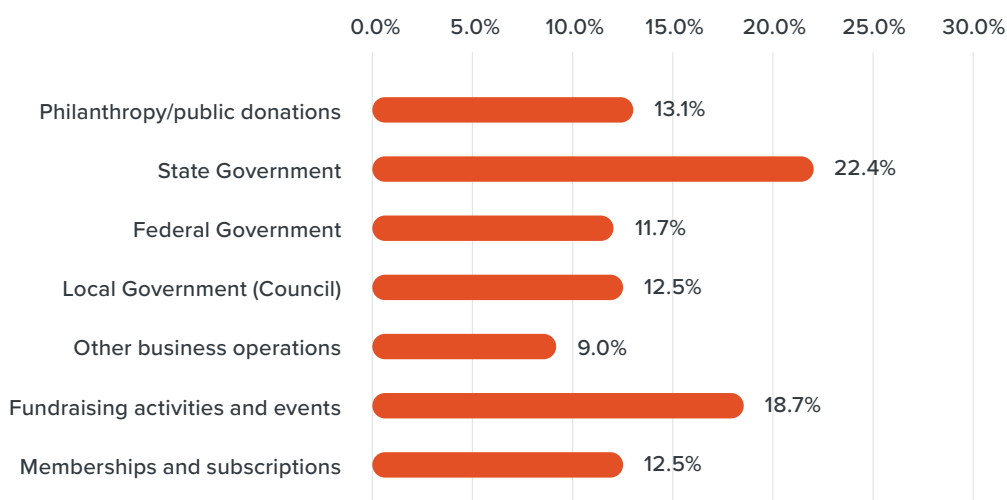
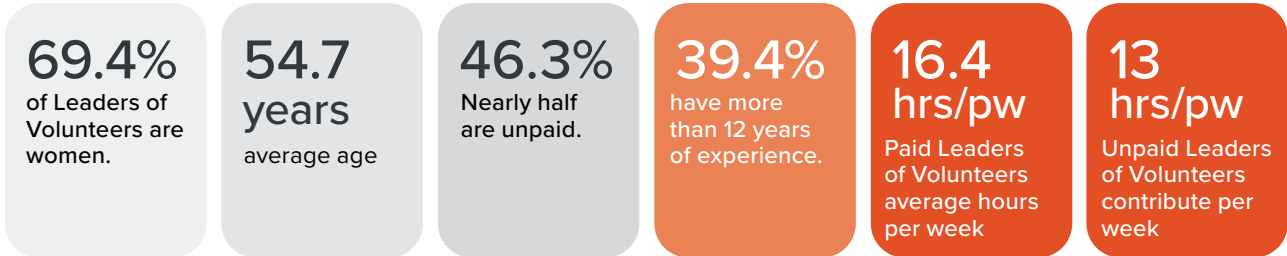


Figure 4: Fundings Sources for Organisations

# Leaders of volunteers: Profile

The leadership of volunteers in Victoria is experienced, but stretched:



Unpaid Leaders of Volunteers tend to appear most in sports-based and emergency volunteering

Leaders of Volunteers commonly seek support from within their organisation (**30%**), peers (**21%**), and volunteers themselves (**19%**). While experienced and committed, they often lack dedicated training or strategic backing.

"I love what I do, but I can't keep doing it without support – it's too much for one person."

The average cost to manage volunteers was **\$86,717** per year. The cost per volunteer hour is just **\$5.92**. This is significantly lower than the national average of **\$13.97/hour** reported in other State of Volunteering reports, and down from **\$6.69/hour** reported in Victoria's 2020 report. This suggests rising financial strain and declining investment in volunteer infrastructure.

Reimbursement of volunteer expenses was on average **\$131** per month, **comprising just 1.8% of organisations' spend on volunteers**, and highlighting the gap to average out-of-pocket costs of **\$235** per month, a cost carried by volunteers themselves.

Unpaid Leaders of Volunteers were nearly **five times** more likely than paid Leaders of Volunteers to personally cover costs, exposing a sustainability risk in organisations that rely on volunteer leadership.

Table 2: Average Volunteer Management Expenses per Organisation (preceding 21 months)

Expense	Amount (per annum)
Wages and salaries (related to volunteer management)	\$44,513.43
Rent and other infrastructure costs	\$7,710.78
Catering (food and beverages)	\$6,509.56
Volunteer recognition (for example: awards, merchandise)	\$4,757.53
Marketing and promotion	\$4,354.48
Induction, education and training	\$3,879.19
Tools, equipment, technology or other gear	\$3,307.24
Motor vehicle, transport and fuel	\$2,977.87
Insurances	\$2,236.13
Administration	\$2,200.87
Other expenses	\$2,144.47
Volunteer reimbursements	\$1,574.37
Accommodation	\$551.01
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$86,716.94</b>
Cost per volunteer per hour	\$5.92

# Growing inclusion in volunteer engagement

Many VIOs are expanding their efforts to engage more diverse volunteers:

Engagement of First Nations volunteers rose from **9%** in 2020 to **25%**.

**49%**  
engaged CALD volunteers, up from 30%.

**56%**  
included volunteers with disability, up from 32%

**41%**  
reported engaging LGBTQIA+ volunteers.

While encouraging, this also means half of all VIOs are not yet reaching these communities. Focus groups highlighted both progress and the need for deeper, culturally responsive practices.

It is also worth noting that corporate volunteering was mentioned by only **18%** of organisations, despite the growing emphasis on employee volunteering programs across sectors.

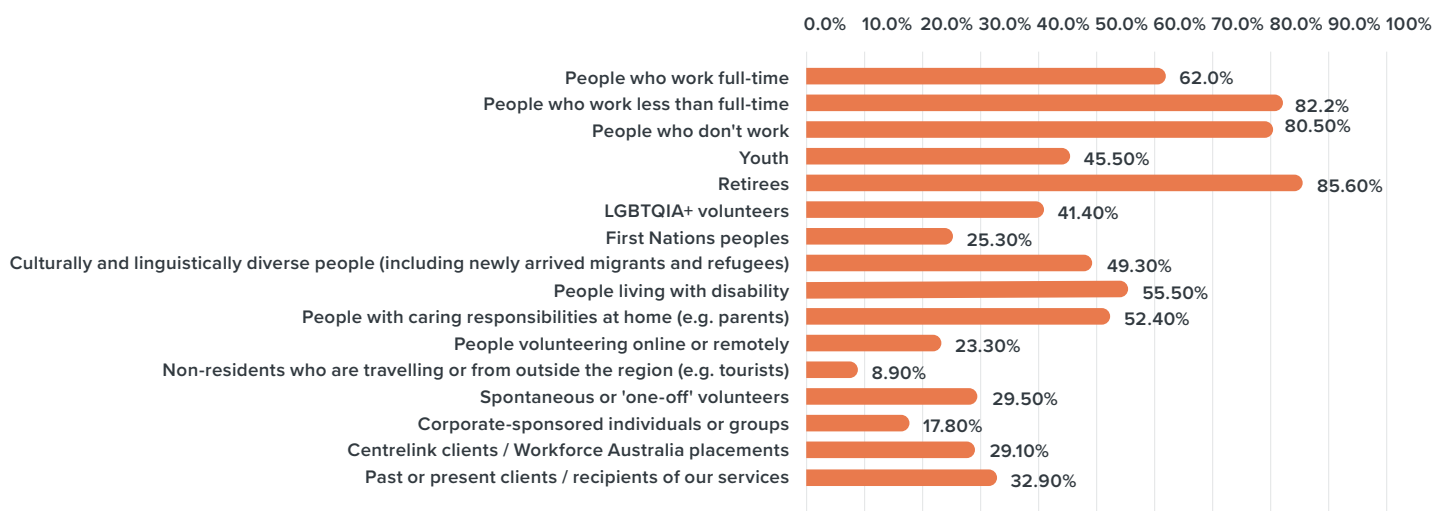


Figure 5: Volunteer Characteristics (in VIOs)

# Volunteer recruitment

VIOs report a shift in how they attract volunteers, reflecting a notable change from the 2020 report. Previously, posters, flyers, and formal platforms such

as SEEK were among the most used channels. In 2024, recruitment is now more reliant on personal networks and personal digital media:

**Family and friends**  
are the most effective channel

**Social media**  
now outpaces traditional advertising

**Word of mouth**  
from participants or service users is key.

**Volunteer Resource Centres and online search tools**  
were used by around 24% of respondents.

These trends suggest that personal connections and appropriate digital presence are now central to successful recruitment.

# Volunteer engagement and retention

## Most common engagement methods:

- Team-building (79%)
- Public praise (78%)
- Training (73%)

## Less common:

- Employment pathways (30.5%)
- Perks/gifts (34%).

On average, organisations lost more volunteers than they gained in the past year, with a net loss of 2.2%.

Retention challenges are consistent across sectors and are particularly acute for smaller organisations. **Burnout** and **competing life priorities** were the most cited reasons for volunteers stepping back.

Focus Groups reported they expect a significant decline in 3-5 years of volunteer numbers as age, burnout and other factors affect volunteer groups

"It's not just about getting people in the door – it's keeping them."

# Challenges facing VIOs

VIOs identified the following as the most critical volunteer-related issues for their organisation:

**78% physical**  
**75% mental**

Volunteer health and safety

**68%**  
Volunteer retention

**68%**  
Organisational inclusion and culture

**68%**  
Access to funding

**62%**  
Risk and legal obligations

Despite volunteers reporting average monthly costs of \$235, only 44% of VIOs offer any form of reimbursement.

Structural barriers such as red tape, inaccessible systems, and financial stress are limiting both volunteer and VIO participation. These challenges

contribute to the broader issues of recruitment and retention.

When asked about the factors causing people to stop or reduce their volunteering, both survey and focus group participants highlighted three key drivers:

**1** Change to work or family circumstances

**2** Too much paperwork or red tape

**3** Burnout



# Impact of COVID-19: Volunteer-Involving Organisations

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on volunteering in Australia.

Despite the vital role volunteers played in delivering essential services and supporting community wellbeing, volunteering was largely absent from strategic government responses.<sup>4</sup> A lack of

infrastructure and investment meant many programs were suspended or severely disrupted without adequate support.

<sup>4</sup> Volunteering Peak Bodies' submission to the Commonwealth Government's COVID-19 Response Inquiry:

<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/download/199/2023/47693/december-2023-submission-to-the-commonwealth-government-covid-19-response-inquiry.pdf>



## A hidden frontline

While much attention focused on the disruption to volunteer programs, the efforts of those leading them were often overlooked.

Behind the scenes, Leaders of Volunteers navigated operational upheaval, emotional strain, and a near-constant state of adaptation.

"There is a lack of understanding around the mechanics of what we do as Volunteer Managers and Coordinators. It has really been missed."

"We've lost a lot of really good Volunteer Managers and Coordinators. They weren't supported."

The result was a sector stretched thin. Many juggled the immediate crisis response with the long-term challenge of rebuilding programs – often without recognition, resources, or formal support. Some left the sector entirely.

Despite this, the resilience, dedication, and enduring care of Victoria's Leaders of Volunteers were pivotal in sustaining and rebuilding programs throughout and beyond the pandemic.

## Uneven recovery

Recovery has been far from uniform. Some sectors – especially health and aged care – continued to feel the effects of pandemic restrictions into 2024.

In contrast, others adapted more quickly by shifting to online or flexible models.

Even in more agile organisations, Leaders of Volunteers described the emotional and practical challenges of restarting programs, particularly when re-engaging volunteers who had been disconnected for extended periods.

“This year was the first year we’ve returned all our roles. And I know health services are still in the process. It’s massive.”

“We moved a lot of our application and training online... it freed up time to support those with lower digital literacy.”

“You can’t assume people will just come back. If they weren’t treated well, or felt forgotten, they won’t return.”

## Recruitment and retention challenges

Almost universally, volunteer numbers dropped sharply during the pandemic, and most organisations have not seen them return to pre-COVID levels.

Four in ten (41.8%) Leaders of Volunteers say **fewer people want to volunteer**, and those who do often **want to give fewer hours** (41.1%). Recruitment has also become more labour-intensive, and many former volunteers have moved on or lost confidence.

Younger volunteers, in particular, missed out on formative experiences and are often starting from scratch.

“Pre-COVID you didn’t need to do a lot of recruitment – people just gravitated. Now you need to constantly recruit.”

“Some of the young people now haven’t had real experience with real people – they’re using volunteering to build that back up.”

## Innovation, flexibility and micro-volunteering

While the pandemic created immense pressure, it also forced innovation.

Many organisations redesigned roles to be shorter-term, more flexible, and task-based, with 31.2% of respondents reporting an increased demand for flexible hours. While these shifts aligned with changing volunteer preferences, some services found it difficult to adapt. In particular, those delivering time-sensitive or face-to-face services, such as emergency relief or community transport, faced challenges in meeting demand with fewer available volunteers.

“We set it up like Airtasker for volunteers – people can tap in and out.”

“We’ve moved to more of a micro volunteering model...people are doing little jobs, and they feel like they’re making a huge contribution because they’re doing successful jobs. We’re getting things done.”

“I’ve tried to do the flexible thing... but people come in needing food now. I need people in shifts.”

## Systemic challenges and missed recognition

Throughout the pandemic, Leaders of Volunteers advocated for their volunteers and the value of volunteering itself, often without a seat at decision-making tables.

In highly regulated settings like health and aged care, administrative demands were heavy.

Leaders of Volunteers described carrying significant emotional weight, not only in maintaining services, but in supporting the wellbeing of their volunteers, many of whom experienced loss, isolation, and health anxiety.

Despite these challenges, many spoke with pride about their work.

"Many of our Volunteer Managers and Coordinators were redeployed to other areas... they were essentially told that their volunteers didn't matter."

"We had to rebuild programs from scratch... and volunteers had to do more training than staff. There's so much red tape in health."

"I was doing welfare checks, and you could hear it in their voices – they'd lost their mojo."

"COVID changed everything. But it also gave us the chance to rethink. We're part of a global reset, and now we get to decide what comes next."

## Re-imagining volunteering

Leaders of Volunteers were asked the question

"If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you change about volunteering?"

**Responders identified the following**  
(by frequency of mentions):

### 1. Reduce red tape and compliance barriers

Respondents want to cut unnecessary red tape that slows down how quickly and easily volunteers can start. They called for simpler systems for background checks like police, Working With Children, and NDIS clearances.

A common idea was a 'volunteer passport' – a single check system that would let volunteers move between organisations without repeating paperwork.

Many also said current admin processes delay recruitment and make onboarding harder than it should be. Streamlining these systems would free up Leaders of Volunteers to spend more time supporting people and less time on forms.

In an increasingly complex operating environment marked by rising costs and reduced income, organisations are under pressure to do more with less. In this context, achieving an efficiency dividend is one means to ensuring sustainability and effectiveness.

### 2. Ensure volunteering is properly recognised and supported

Respondents want stronger leadership and advocacy for volunteering. They called for volunteering to be included in government policy and workforce planning and better supported inside their own organisations as part of core strategy and decision-making. This means more staffing, more resources, and more flexible systems that support volunteers to succeed.

They also asked for better recognition of volunteers—both in public campaigns and inside organisations. Many felt governments and peak bodies should help raise the profile of volunteering.

At the same time, organisations need to show their volunteers that they're valued, not taken for granted. Recognition, they said, needs to be backed by funding and support if it's to be meaningful and sustainable.

"Recognition is good, but what we need is capacity. We're stretched to the edge."

## Re-imagining Volunteering (cont.)

### 3. Increase funding and financial support

Respondents consistently identified lack of or insufficient funding as a major barrier. In a perfect world they called for greater investment in volunteering from governments, businesses, and philanthropy.

Respondents want funding for a range of things including:

- » Full-time, paid Leaders of Volunteers to ensure that organisations are not relying on unpaid or overstretched staff to manage volunteers.
- » Program expenses, particularly volunteer training and insurance.
- » Reimbursement funds to cover expenses incurred by volunteers.

Some respondents suggested tax incentives or other financial support for volunteers to reduce out-of-pocket costs and make volunteering more accessible for those who can't afford it. There were also calls for easier access to grants and greater government support at every level (local, state, and federal).

### 4. Improve attraction and retention of volunteers

Most Leaders of Volunteers want to grow their volunteer numbers and include people from more diverse backgrounds. They suggested making volunteering a stronger part of everyday life—especially through schools, universities, and workplaces. Public campaigns were also seen as important for raising awareness and showing that volunteering is valuable and rewarding.

To keep volunteers engaged, they emphasised the need to prevent burnout, offer better support, and make volunteer roles more enjoyable and sustainable.

### 5. Invest in training and capacity building

Respondents called for better training programs for both volunteers and those who lead them. They identified the need for structured, role-specific training to ensure volunteers feel prepared and confident, as well as formal training and development programs for Leaders of Volunteers.

Some noted that existing training packages do not adequately capture the complexities of the role of Leaders of Volunteers and are therefore not fit-for-purpose.

They want training to be more accessible, available in-house, at times appropriate for Volunteers (not trainers or training rooms), in person, and:

- » Portable or Standardised, so volunteers don't have to repeat the same "units".
- » Structured and role-specific, so volunteers feel confident and prepared in their roles.
- » Fit-for-purpose for Leaders of Volunteers, addressing the real challenges they face.
- » Focused on leadership skills, including physical, psychological, and cultural safety.
- » Designed to build capability, so volunteers can grow into leadership roles over time.

They believe better training will help reduce burnout, build confidence, and improve volunteer retention and engagement.



# Three-year outlook

## Most organisations expect their need for volunteers to grow:

- » Nearly 71% said they will need more volunteers over the next three years.
- » The smallest organisations (0–10 volunteers) were most likely to say they may not exist in three years.

Leadership stability is also uncertain:

- » Nearly 1 in 5 respondents said they will not be managing volunteers in three years' time.
- » Unpaid Leaders of Volunteers are:
  - More likely to say they'll continue in their roles.
  - But more likely to expect they'll reduce their hours.

These findings point to a critical need to strengthen the sustainability of volunteer leadership—especially in smaller and resource-constrained organisations.

**Table 3: Predicted Volunteer Leader Retention and Hours in Three Years' Time**

Predicted Status in Three Years	All Respondents	Paid VM	Unpaid VM
Still here, doing more hours	13.7%	12.1%	12.3%
Still here, doing about the same hours	35.8%	36.4%	38.4%
Still here, doing less hours	8.4%	4.7%	15.1%
Not here at all	18.4%	20.6%	13.7%
Don't know	23.7%	26.2%	20.5%

VM = Volunteer Manager



# Section 4: Implications



# The Gap in Expectations

A key insight emerging from this analysis is the disconnect between the perceptions of Leaders of Volunteers and today's volunteers' actual experiences and expectations.

While Leaders of Volunteers play a critical role in sustaining volunteering programs, the data suggests that in some areas, their understanding of what volunteers need and what is driving disengagement is limited or outdated.

## The motivation myth: Understanding the volunteer commitment gap

Across Victoria, Leaders of Volunteers report a shift in volunteer behaviour: a move away from long-term, altruistic commitment towards more transient and self-directed engagement.

Many express frustration that volunteering needs to be “sold” rather than being embraced as a civic duty.

But while these concerns are valid, the data tells a different story.

The surveys and focus groups reveal that the issue is not a lack of motivation: it's a mismatch between organisational expectations and how people want to give their time.

The vast majority of volunteers in Victoria are still driven by a desire to help, contribute meaningfully, and connect with others. This is especially true for younger volunteers, who described volunteering as a way to find community, meaning, and practical benefit, provided that the role fits around their life:

“It’s not about a job – it’s about doing something I care about that fits with my life.”

“You feel like you're making a difference, but it has to work with study, work, everything.”

“It’s hard to get people to stick – they try it once and then disappear.”

“The days of someone volunteering 20 years for a club are gone.”

In contrast, many Leaders of Volunteers report difficulty retaining volunteers beyond initial engagement, noting that people have a tendency to “dip in and out” rather than commit long-term:

There's a clear perception that volunteering now competes with other lifestyle demands:

“We’re competing with everything – people’s time, jobs, Netflix.”

Some Leaders of Volunteers also expressed scepticism about the motivations of newer volunteers:

“Some are just here to tick the box and leave.”

“People want to know: What’s in it for me?”

This sentiment may be contributing to recruitment challenges. According to the survey:

**41.8%**  
of Leaders of Volunteers believe fewer people want to volunteer compared to 2021.

**41.1%**  
said people now want to volunteer fewer hours.

**41.8%**  
said volunteers now require more training.

However, the public survey results are more optimistic:

Only **13.81%**  
of current volunteers say they’re not interested in doing more.

Just **22.8%**  
of non-volunteers say they don’t want to volunteer at all.

**21.8%**  
of non-volunteers said they intend to start volunteering in the next three years.

These findings show that the core issue is not declining interest, but a need to rethink how roles are designed and supported.

Volunteers remain motivated, but they want flexible, purpose-driven roles that fit around their lives.

## Financial barriers: A misalignment with volunteer realities

One of the most striking disconnects between Leaders of Volunteers and volunteers lies in how financial barriers are understood and addressed.

In the Survey of Volunteer Managers, only **5.2%** of Leaders of Volunteers identified out-of-pocket costs as a significant issue for volunteer retention. Yet, across volunteer focus groups and survey data, cost consistently emerged as a **significant and growing concern**.

Volunteers described a wide range of everyday expenses that add up quickly, including transport, food, uniforms, and mandatory checks, making volunteering increasingly inaccessible without support.

"Public transport can get quite costly, and that’s the only way I can get around."

"I also have to do something about food because I’m out for like a good third of the day... So if I’m doing that every time I volunteer, it actually can get kind of expensive."

"Sometimes you have to buy specific clothes you might not have for some roles... and they’re not gonna supply me with any."



The survey data strongly backs up these experiences:

**32%**  
of volunteers  
identified costs as a  
barrier to participation

**20.6%**  
of current volunteers  
said they had reduced  
volunteering due to  
costs

**22.7%**  
of former  
volunteers cited  
cost as the reason  
they stopped  
altogether

**CALD**  
volunteers reported  
significantly higher  
monthly costs  
and lower rates of  
reimbursement

Despite this, cost appears under-acknowledged at the organisational level. While **30.2%** of Leaders of Volunteers acknowledged more direct and indirect costs to volunteers, only **15.2%** believed volunteers are claiming expenses more often, and **11.4%** said they are claiming less – indicating limited clarity or visibility into volunteers' financial experiences.

Meanwhile, only **44%** of VIOs offer any reimbursement. Even when available, volunteers often don't know about it or don't claim it:

"I didn't bother asking. I didn't know we could get reimbursed."

"The cost just ends up being on you, and if you're not getting anything back, you really have to want to be there."

On average, volunteers spend **\$235 on volunteering per month**, with transport and food as the top expense categories. In the current cost-of-living crisis, expecting volunteers – especially younger, CALD, and lower-income individuals – to absorb these costs is increasingly unrealistic.

This is not simply a matter of administrative oversight. It reflects a **broader systemic disconnect** between how volunteering is valued and how it is supported. Without a move toward transparent, accessible, and equitable reimbursement systems, cost will remain a **persistent and preventable reason** why people disengage from volunteering.



## Recognition and belonging: A disconnect in meaning and impact

Most Leaders of Volunteers agree that recognition is vital.  
In the 2024 Survey of Volunteer Managers:

**78.4%**

reported using public praise and acknowledgement as a retention strategy

**57.6%**

said that appreciation and recognition inside their organisation is critically important

**50.4%**

said that lack of recognition is not a significant issue for volunteer retention

This inconsistency suggests that while recognition is seen as a best practice, it may be **treated as a procedural or symbolic gesture** rather than something deeply personal or impactful. Many Leaders of Volunteers may assume recognition is already “handled,” without reflecting on how volunteers actually receive it.

Volunteer focus group data paints a more layered picture. Volunteers, especially younger people, clearly value recognition but don’t necessarily want grand or expensive gestures. Instead, they emphasised the power of **small, thoughtful acts** that make them feel seen and appreciated.

"There are definitely different ways of expressing it... like volunteer days and stuff where they have just like lunch days or things like that. I love those."

"Sometimes I'm at the office [and] they'll bring in biscuits or different lollies... I just love to sit down during a 10-minute break and eat a biscuit."

Recognition is also meaningful when tied to career advancement or visibility, such as LinkedIn referrals, certificates, or invitations to networking events.

"For appreciation, we got to meet the Lord Mayor during National Volunteer Week – just because we volunteered."

"I did one of my volunteering roles just to network and get a referral on LinkedIn."

While only 11.4% of all volunteers listed social status or reward as a key benefit, this figure rises to 18.1% among CALD volunteers. Additionally, 23.2% cited religious or cultural connection as a motivation, indicating that being seen and valued publicly carries additional weight in some communities. Despite this, culturally responsive or identity-based recognition was not widely discussed by Leaders of Volunteers in either the survey or focus groups.

**This reveals a subtle but essential disconnect: Leaders of Volunteers are investing in recognition, but often in ways that may not match what volunteers actually want.**

Some volunteers described feeling disappointed or overlooked – not because they weren’t thanked, but because the recognition **lacked authenticity, timing, or personal relevance**, and sometimes failed to reflect the effort they had contributed.

By better aligning recognition with what volunteers truly value, organisations can strengthen belonging and boost long-term engagement.

## Understanding volunteer exit: Gaps between data and perception

**Volunteer retention remains a top concern across the sector – 68.4% of Leaders of Volunteers identified it as a critical issue for their organisation.**

However, the data suggests that many Leaders of Volunteers may not have a complete understanding of why volunteers reduce or stop their involvement.

Leaders of Volunteers often attribute disengagement to external life pressures, like work, study, or family responsibilities.

These are certainly important factors: **42.1%** of volunteers who reduced their involvement cited these kinds of life changes. However, only **20.1%** of the Leaders of Volunteers identified these as critical issues. This shows that even the most commonly acknowledged reason among volunteers appears to be underestimated by the Leaders of Volunteers.

The discrepancy grows when emotional, interpersonal, and organisational factors are considered. Volunteers cited a range of internal issues that contribute to disengagement:

**22.5%**

**reported burnout** as a reason for reducing their involvement, but only **16.0%** of Leaders of Volunteers viewed it as a critical factor.

**11.1%**

of volunteers stopped due to a **lack of recognition**, compared to just **5.2%** of Leaders of Volunteers acknowledging this as a key issue.

**13.5%**

of volunteers cited **personality clashes**, while only **7.4%** of Leaders of Volunteers recognised this factor.

Many also cited structural and logistical challenges like **paperwork**, travel, and **accessibility** – issues not widely prioritised by Leaders of Volunteers

These differences become more pronounced when looking at specific volunteer groups. For instance:

- » CALD volunteers were slightly less likely to report burnout than non-CALD volunteers (16.5% vs 24.3%) but reported more interpersonal fit and recognition issues.
- » Volunteers with disability were more likely to report accessibility challenges and the cumulative burden of administrative requirements.
- » Young volunteers frequently mentioned role inflexibility and scheduling mismatches as barriers to continued engagement.

Despite this, focus group discussions with Leaders of Volunteers showed limited reflection on these group-specific barriers. Few Leaders of Volunteers discussed how needs might differ across volunteer demographics or acknowledged the importance of tailoring engagement strategies.

Some Leaders of Volunteers did share concerns about retention:

“Getting people in the door is not so hard; keeping them is.”

“The energy is there at the beginning, but then life gets in the way and we don’t always have a way to bring them back in.”

“It’s tough. You get them enthusiastic, and then the paperwork or the WWCC delays kick in – and by the time that’s sorted, they’ve moved on.”

“We’re asking a lot from people, and they’re burning out. It’s just not sustainable.”

These quotes highlight awareness of systemic issues and early disengagement, but also a lack of structured approaches to fully understand why volunteers leave.

Without mechanisms like exit interviews, feedback loops, or structured check-ins, organisations risk relying on assumptions rather than evidence to guide their volunteer engagement strategies.

“It just felt like no one noticed when I stopped showing up.”

## Flexibility as a core design principle

A clear pattern emerged across volunteer and Volunteer Leader focus groups: volunteering must become more flexible to remain viable and inclusive.

Leaders of Volunteers repeatedly spoke about changing expectations, particularly among younger and working-age volunteers, who increasingly seek **short-term, episodic, or remote roles** that can be integrated around study, employment, and family responsibilities.

Statewide survey findings confirm this shift in expectations: 31% of Leaders of Volunteers report that volunteers are seeking more flexible hours compared to 2021. **The traditional long-term, fixed-schedule model no longer suits many people's lives**, a sentiment echoed strongly in discussions with volunteers.

One sport sector Volunteer Leader reflected on how their volunteer management practices had to adapt:

“We’ve had to really change the way we handle our volunteers – it’s got to be more flexible now.”

Faith-based and regional community participants spoke about flexibility not just in time, but in how people engage, valuing informal, social, or behind-the-scenes roles just as much as official positions.

“Connecting and supporting your neighbour isn’t necessarily structured volunteering – it’s something you do when you can.”

Leaders of Volunteers in rural and regional areas also described how flexibility affects retention. In areas with small populations, organisations often depend on older volunteers who want to remain involved, but only if the roles are manageable:

“Older people that are retiring are not volunteering but taking care of grandchildren... older attendees hope to continue – depending on their health and if the roles stay manageable.”

This context matters. Volunteer roles that demand rigid timeframes or extensive onboarding often fail to engage a broader pool of people, especially those motivated by purpose but unable to commit long-term.

This suggests not simply a need to “offer flexible shifts” but to **rethink how volunteering is structured, recognised, and communicated**. Volunteers are still willing to give time, but only if the system respects and embraces their reality.

Leaders of Volunteers who offer **choice in tasks, timing, and even language of volunteering** (“helping” or “community support” instead of “volunteering”) find more success attracting diverse demographics.



## Embracing digital tools without losing people

Digital tools are reshaping how people engage with volunteering – but not without complexity.

While Leaders of Volunteers hold mixed views on the demand for home-based or online roles, volunteer feedback is largely supportive. For many, digital volunteering **increased accessibility**, particularly for

those who are time-poor, geographically isolated, or living with health or mobility challenges.

However, the success of digital volunteering depends heavily on user experience. Poorly designed or overly complex platforms can become barriers in themselves. Systems that fail to reduce that burden – or worse, make it more confusing – risk driving people away.

“She looked at the online portal and was so bamboozled she just gave up.”

“I believe that there is going to be a lot more digital volunteering in the future – but only if it’s easy to use.”

Connectivity issues, digital literacy gaps, and resistance to digital change – particularly in organisations with older volunteers – further complicate the picture. Even basic tasks like advertising roles can fall short when the platforms used don’t reflect where prospective volunteers actually spend time online.

“But I’m going to be honest, I don’t see a lot of volunteering opportunities come up unless, you know, my mum sends me a link from Facebook, from community groups and stuff, and I have an account. I just don’t really use it.”

“I think it would be really good if opportunities were better advertised and not just on Facebook because I don’t think a lot of people my age use Facebook. So I think using more age appropriate social media to our age group (TikTok, Instagram, that sort of thing) could definitely be more beneficial in getting more people involved in volunteering.”

What’s clear is that **digital isn’t a fix-all – but when done well, it can open doors. The most successful organisations use technology to simplify volunteering, not complicate it** – by prioritising ease

of use, offering support and training, and meeting volunteers where they are, both on and off the screen.



## Positioning volunteering as a pathway to growth

Volunteering is more than altruism for many volunteers, especially younger people, job seekers, and newcomers to communities.

It is a **strategic, future-oriented activity**, a way to gain practical experience, build confidence, and expand professional networks. This was a strong theme across the volunteer focus groups, with participants consistently linking their volunteer work to career aspirations or personal development.

“It kind of started off with the social justice club at school... but it helped me build confidence and skills for uni and work.”

“So I guess in terms of future, there will be ways that volunteering could help with career stuff too.”

Survey data backs these views: over a third of volunteers, over a third of volunteers (**34.6%**), and and more than **40%** of younger volunteers, identified future skills and experience as a key benefit. In this sense, volunteering functions not just as service to others, but as **a form of informal education and capacity building**.

Despite this, many Leaders of Volunteers don't appear to recognise or actively support this motivation. Across all focus groups, there was notable silence from Leaders of Volunteers on topics like career pathways, resume building, or structured skills development. In the survey, only 31% of Leaders of Volunteers mentioned volunteering-to-employment pathways as a strategy for retention, highlighting a missed opportunity.

This trend is also not limited to formal skills. Volunteers spoke passionately about the **personal growth** they experienced – a sense of belonging, confidence, and purpose that came through leadership roles, group involvement, or being trusted with responsibility. When acknowledged and supported, these developmental benefits can make the difference between a fleeting volunteer experience and a lasting commitment.

**Organisations seeking to engage younger and emerging volunteers would benefit from reframing volunteer work as a dual-purpose opportunity: a contribution to the community and an investment in the volunteer's own journey.**



# Strengthening the sustainability of volunteer leadership

Behind every volunteer is someone recruiting, training, and supporting them. Leaders of Volunteers – both paid and unpaid – are the backbone of the volunteering ecosystem, yet their critical role is often overlooked.

While much of the public narrative around volunteering focuses on the experiences and motivations of volunteers themselves, the people who recruit, coordinate, train, and retain them are under increasing strain.

Survey data reveals a **potential leadership cliff**: nearly one in five Leaders of Volunteers (**18.4%**) say they will no longer be in their role within three years, rising to **20.6%** among paid Leaders of Volunteers. A further **23.7%** are uncertain about their future. Unpaid Leaders of Volunteers, often responsible for complex tasks without compensation or structural support, reported high attrition rates and burnout.

Despite this, discussions in focus groups gave very limited attention to the experiences or needs of Leaders of Volunteers. While volunteer burnout and recruitment challenges were common themes, the personal toll on those leading volunteer teams – the **emotional labour, administrative pressure, and lack of recognition** – was often implicit, rather than directly acknowledged. This omission extended to the survey design itself: while it gathered data from Leaders of Volunteers, it included very little about their working conditions, challenges, or wellbeing,

limiting a fuller understanding of what sustains or discourages them in their roles.

What did emerge clearly was a **strong call for investment in training and capacity building**, not just for volunteers but also for those who lead them. Respondents described a need for fit-for-purpose, role-specific leadership training, including skills in volunteer engagement, psychological and cultural safety, conflict resolution, and organisational strategy. Several noted that existing training programs fail to capture the complexity and emotional demands on Leaders of Volunteers, especially in high-responsibility settings like health, emergency services, and youth engagement.

This training gap affects immediate performance and shapes the entire leadership pipeline. Without appropriate preparation, volunteers may feel ill-equipped to move into coordinator or committee roles, exacerbating succession challenges and contributing to burnout<sup>5</sup>.

**In short, the sustainability of volunteering depends heavily on the sustainability of its leaders. Ensuring that Leaders of Volunteers are equipped, supported, and valued is not an ancillary concern – it's fundamental. Investing in their growth and wellbeing will not only reduce turnover but will also build stronger, more resilient volunteering programs overall.**

<sup>5</sup> Kragt, D., Wilson, S., Newstead, T., & Forner, V. W. (2022). Without leadership there is no volunteering: The importance of strategic investment in leadership development in Australia.





# Conclusion





# Conclusion

Victoria's volunteers continue to be one of the state's greatest strengths. In 2024, over 3.3 million people gave their time, contributing 732 million hours – the equivalent of more than \$18 billion in donated labour.

This is not just a number; it is a powerful expression of care, generosity, and commitment that strengthens every corner of our society. From neighbourhoods to schools, aged care to climate response, the impact of volunteers is immense and irreplaceable.

This report reinforces what the National Strategy for Volunteering 2023–2033 has already made clear: **the volunteering ecosystem must evolve.** It must become more inclusive, flexible, and well-supported. We must embrace new models, recognise informal and digital contributions, and invest in the leadership and infrastructure that sustains this work. These national objectives are not abstract – they are echoed in the lived realities and urgent challenges documented across Victoria.

The road ahead requires navigating disruption. Traditional systems must let go of outdated assumptions and adapt to changing lives.

## Volunteers want to help - but they expect purpose, support, and respect.

They are telling us, clearly, how to build a stronger future. It is now up to organisations, government, and the community sector to respond.

Victoria has the potential to lead the nation in redefining volunteering for the next decade. With strategic investment, volunteer-orientated policy and systems, cross-sector collaboration, and a renewed commitment to inclusion, we can create a system that honours the past while meeting the future head-on.

The evidence is clear: the future of volunteering will be more flexible, inclusive, and digital.

Now is the time to match that momentum with an entire volunteering system that actively welcomes and adapts to the change.



# Appendices



# Appendix A: Terminology

This report has adopted the terminology section from the National Strategy for Volunteering, which was co-designed with the Australian volunteering ecosystem.

## What is Volunteering?

Volunteering is a fluid concept with various expressions and interpretations. This report has adopted Volunteering Australia's definition of volunteering as 'time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.' This *definition* captures both formal and informal volunteering.

It is acknowledged that the concept of volunteering is not universally understood. In First Nations communities, the term 'community giving' is often used to describe what might otherwise be considered volunteering, and in some cultures, there is no equivalent word for volunteering.

Not everyone agrees on terminology, and terminology is often context-dependent. The terms used in this report are based on commonality of use, but they are not exhaustive. Some terms may be foreign to some readers, and alternative terms may be used to mean the same thing in different contexts.

## Important definitions

<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics
<b>CALD</b>	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
<b>Formal Volunteering</b>	Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place within organisations and groups (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way.
<b>Informal Volunteering</b>	Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place outside a formal organisation or group. This includes assisting people in the community, excluding one's family members. For example, looking after children, property, or pets; providing home or personal assistance; or giving someone professional advice.
<b>Leaders of Volunteers</b>	Other common titles for this role include Volunteer Manager, Volunteer Coordinator, Manager/Coordinator of Volunteers, and Leader of Volunteer Engagement.
<b>VIO</b>	Volunteer-Involving Organisation
<b>Volunteers</b>	Those who give their time willingly for the common good and without financial gain.
<b>Volunteering</b>	Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.
<b>Volunteering Ecosystem</b>	A network of people, organisations, institutions, and agencies all working for the collective viability and recognition of volunteering in Australia.
<b>Volunteering Infrastructure</b>	The enabling governance, operational, and technological structures and systems that provide capacity and capability for the volunteering ecosystem.
<b>Volunteer Management</b>	The function of managing, leading, and supporting volunteers. <i>Also referred to as Volunteer Coordination and Volunteer Leadership.</i>

# Appendix B:

## Quantitative data collection

The 2024 Victorian Public Survey instrument used built upon the 2023 public survey instruments used by state and territory volunteering peaks to conduct their own State of Volunteering research throughout 2023. The survey was conducted between September and October 2024.

The new instrument incorporated refinements identified by the researcher (Institute of Project Management) and Volunteering Victoria, and new areas of inquiry identified by Volunteering Victoria. The survey instrument was kept as close as possible to the 2023 survey tool to allow for comparison with other state and territory data.

Responses to the Public Survey were drawn from an online panel of Victorian residents aged 15 years and over. As respondents to the Public Survey were paid for their participation, very strict qualification criteria were applied to their responses.

Quotas were used to ensure a representative cross-section of Victorian residents across gender, age, and location. A weighting scheme was applied to household income to mitigate potential income-based biases and bring the proportion of responses in each income quintile closer to an equitable 20% representation, noting five income categories.

### Location

Responses to the postcode question were reclassified by location as Major City, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote, and Very Remote, in line with the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS).

The Remoteness Structure involved joining three datasets sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics: Mesh Block codes mapped to postcodes, Mesh Block codes mapped to Statistical Areas Level 1 codes, and Statistical Areas Level 1 codes mapped

to Remoteness Areas. When a conflict arose with a postcode covering multiple Remoteness Areas, it was designated as belonging to the smaller Remoteness Area.

### Threshold for statistical significance

The threshold for statistical significance was set at less than five percent ( $p < 0.05$ ). This means that any relationship labelled as “significant” has less than a one-in-twenty chance of occurring randomly.

### A/B testing

It was observed early in the data collection that Victorian rates of volunteering participation were coming in lower than expected based on national 2023 findings. An A/B test was conducted to test the impact of instrument changes on rates of self-reported participation.

Total respondents:  $n = 2,541$

2024 Survey instrument:  $n = 1,300$

2023 Instrument (similar to that used by other states and territories):  $n = 1,241$

The difference in the rates of volunteering participation between the two instruments was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.186$ )

### 2024 Volunteer Manager survey

The 2024 Volunteer Manager survey also mirrored the volunteer manager survey instrument used by other state and territory volunteering peaks in 2023, with additions identified by both the Institute of Project Management and Volunteering Victoria. The survey was conducted between October and November 2024. 326 respondents completed the survey.

Respondents came from all parts of Victoria, a variety of sectors and from very small to very large organisations. A reasonable cross-section of respondents was achieved, and in the absence of more reliable sources, a number of population-level inferences are drawn from the survey data.



Both surveys employed condition logic to ensure only relevant questions were shown to respondents, answer options were randomised to reduce position bias, and where appropriate, numeric entry fields were capped with logical limits to prevent the inadvertent overstatement of value.

## Statistical methods

The selection of the statistical tools used by the Institute of Project Management to analyse the surveys depended on the nature of the data and the question being considered or the hypothesis being tested.

Descriptive statistics provided an initial understanding of the data's distribution and central tendencies, cross-tabulations explored categorical data associations, linear and binary logistic regressions addressed relationships and predictions, and TURF (Total Unduplicated Reach and Frequency) analysis optimised choice options.



# Appendix C:

## Qualitative data collection

Twenty-four (24) focus groups, held between October 2024 and January 2025, were conducted in-person and online (via Microsoft Teams and Zoom) to ensure participation from across Victoria.

Volunteering Victoria primarily engaged external facilitators to run each focus group, with a Volunteering Victoria staff member attending focus groups as an observer and to assist with focus group logistics.

### Focus group breakdown:

**6 with Leaders of Volunteers**  
**6 with primarily volunteers and;**  
**2 with non-volunteers.**

**In total, 225 people attended a focus group.**

**Table 4: Overview of Focus Groups**

### Volunteers

CALD – newly arrived in Victoria in the last eight years	Regional/rural
CALD – newly arrived in Victoria in the last eight years	Metro
CALD – established communities (lived in Victoria for 15+ years)	Metro
Emergency management (x 2)	Statewide (online)
Faith – Christian	Regional/rural
Faith – Sikh	Regional/rural
General (open to all volunteer types)	Regional/rural
General (open to all volunteer types)	Metro
Parent motivated volunteering	Metro
People with disability	Regional/rural
Politically-motivated volunteering	Statewide (online)
Sport (club level)	Metro
Virtual volunteering	Statewide (online)
Youth (x 2)	Statewide (online)

### Volunteer Leaders

Health leaders (predominantly regional)	Statewide (online)
Metro – all sectors	Metro
Regional – all sectors	Regional/rural
Rural – all sectors	Regional/rural
Sport Leaders	Statewide (online)
Volunteering Victoria Members	Statewide (online)
Non-volunteers (x 2)	Statewide (online)

Participation in focus groups was voluntary. Consent was obtained from all participants, and all data was de-identified to maintain confidentiality.

Open-text responses from the 2024 Survey of Volunteer Managers provided further qualitative insights to inform this report.

## Qualitative analysis

Qualitative data from focus group data was analysed by the University of Western Australia (UWA) research team using Reflexive Thematic Analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2022)<sup>6</sup> approach. The research team applied a combination of data-driven (inductive) and theory-driven (deductive) methods to identify key themes. Transcripts were reviewed in full, with significant quotes and insights grouped into emerging themes through manual coding.

Reflexivity was embedded throughout the process, with ongoing discussion and interpretation within the research team and in collaboration with Volunteering Victoria to ensure findings reflected the diversity of voices captured.

The analysis that this report draws on used an integrative approach, treating quantitative and qualitative data as equally valuable sources of insight.

Rather than positioning qualitative data as a supplement to survey results, themes were developed iteratively by UWA, with findings from focus groups and interviews helping to guide areas of statistical exploration, and vice versa. This allowed the research to uncover broad patterns of volunteering behaviour and the lived experiences and contextual factors that give those patterns meaning.

By moving between data types, the UWA research team sought to present a more holistic understanding of volunteering in Victoria that this report draws upon.

<sup>6</sup> Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Thematic analysis: A practical guide. SAGE Publications.

## Appendix D: Limitations


A number of limitations have been identified by respective research teams. Firstly, the design and collection of survey and qualitative data were undertaken independently from the analysis phase. As a result, some variables of interest could not be explored in depth due to limitations in how the data were structured or captured.

Secondly, while the dataset is broad and representative across key demographics, not all subgroups were equally sized, limiting the statistical power in some cross-tabulations, particularly for intersectional analysis (e.g., people with disability living in remote areas). Additionally, self-reported data may introduce bias due to recall errors or social desirability.

Thirdly, the Volunteer Manager Survey used a convenience sampling method. The survey was distributed and promoted to Volunteering Victoria's network of volunteer managers and the organisations that engage them. It is acknowledged that these networks are extensive but not a complete representation of every paid and unpaid volunteer manager in Victoria.

Given the vast and diverse landscape of volunteering in Victoria, the true demographic makeup of the state's population of volunteer managers remains unknown. Anecdotal evidence – supported by the survey returns – suggests a tendency for this group to skew older and female, meaning it cannot be assumed that the population of volunteer managers mirrors the demographic makeup of Victoria. Yet, without a population baseline of volunteer managers to compare the sample to, there is no reference point to weight the data against.

Lastly, qualitative data were collected through focus groups with volunteers and leaders of volunteers, providing rich insight but not intended to be generalisable to the broader population. Care was taken to ensure diverse perspectives were included, and findings were triangulated across data sources wherever possible.



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