

Wanting to help in a crisis is a natural reaction. You might already be helping your neighbour by buying them groceries. Others form groups on social media, or convene informal community groups, to come together to support vulnerable members within communities. These types of voluntary work are known as 'informal volunteering'.

During these challenging time, it is important that we take care of ourselves and others. Organisers of any form of volunteering have a duty of care to volunteers and the people they serve. It is important to follow [government guidelines](#) at all times.

For volunteers

Consider these guidelines before you help your neighbour, or an elderly person or take part in other informal volunteering activities in your community.

Your safety - your number one priority

Do not put yourself at risk. If you are feeling sick or un-well, do not help others. By protecting yourself, you are already supporting your community by reducing the spread. Follow government guidelines for infection control around hand washing and social distancing. For more information on these guidelines, visit the [Victorian Government's physical distancing page](#).

Be clear about your activities

Be clear about what activities you will be doing and what the expectations and boundaries are around the role. Consider starting small so that you can understand the scale of your undertaking and how best to sustain your volunteering efforts. Be careful that you do not overstretch yourself as COVID-19 outbreak may go on for a long time.

Our advice during COVID-19

Our collective aim is to reduce the spread of COVID-19. We are therefore urging people to exert caution in embarking on informal volunteering. Individuals need to consider issues of privacy and self-care and avoid putting themselves and others in the community at risk.

This means adhering to recommended social distancing guidelines and other official guidance as it emerges in the coming months.

Identify yourself

Offer to show people you are helping around your community a form of ID with photograph and clearly presented name, especially if you are interacting with vulnerable people.

Consider joining already established groups

While you might just want to get out there and get volunteering, consider joining already established groups operating in your area. [Find mutual aid groups in your area](#).

Volunteering hygiene

You may need to access and wear protective clothing and gloves, carry water and handwash especially if you are handling shopping/money.

Set expectations

Be aware that not everyone will want help and may be wary of people they are unfamiliar with. In the current situation, there are many limitations; age, health, location and varied.

Get creative with your duty of care

Think carefully about the role you are about to undertake. Safeguarding people from abuse, harm and infection is paramount so you need to think about safe methods that protects everyone. For example, consider taking shopping lists over the phone, dropping shopping bags at the door without entering peoples' homes and using other methods of payments other than cash.

Emergencies

If you witness harm or abuse or need to refer an issue you cannot deal with, contact [Victoria Police](#) or call 000.

Talk to a volunteer-involving organisation

If you are looking for further support in your area about informal volunteering and questions, [get support in your area](#).

Informal volunteer Initiatives

Here are a few volunteer management practices to consider if you are working to get an initiative together.

Prepare for the unexpected

At times, people will express a desire to informally volunteer with your initiative but not actually come through. A lot of these people might have not volunteered before. Consider how you will manage this and how it will affect your plans.

Do not involve sick volunteers

Volunteers should be encouraged to be aware of their own circumstances and any underlying health condition. These may be mild but can be exacerbated by volunteering or may in risk other members of the communities.

Consider writing a short role description

This ensures that everyone is on the same page. This provides clarity when deciding who is or isn't suitable for the volunteer role. A simple role description will include the following: role/title, approximate number of hours required, location, purpose, supervision, duties, skills.

Managing excess/shortage of volunteers

Sometimes, the number of volunteers available might be greater than what is needed, or vice versa. Volunteers often complain about "not having enough for me to do". Consider how you will manage these changes. More information can be found on our [guides page](#).

Volunteer burn-out and your duty of care

We all want to do the right thing, but sometimes, the right thing is to take a break. During a crisis, volunteers may become more aware of isolation and loneliness that some people experience.

It is important to make sure that volunteers are not pushing themselves too hard or taking on more than they should. Make sure that volunteers always have knowledge of any COVID-19 updates through [government websites](#).

Emergencies

Make sure your volunteers know what to do in an emergency. Provide essential contact details prior to volunteers commencing with their duties.

More information

For more information on volunteering during COVID-19 go to <https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/covid19-forvolunteers/>

For more information on volunteer management during COVID-10 go to <https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/covid19voluteermanagers/>