

Volunteering Victoria Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) on the Victorian Government's management of the COVID-19 pandemic

Volunteering Victoria submitted to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee of the Victorian Parliament on the response of the government to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Over 1.5 million Victorians volunteer in a sector hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, significantly disrupting the majority of our state's volunteer programs and services. At the same time, volunteer-involving organisations have demonstrated remarkable resilience and ability to adapt to continue to serve Victorian communities, often with limited resources and managing under great uncertainty.

Not only does the volunteering sector play a critical role in delivering good outcomes for Victorians, volunteers are also necessary for the delivery of essential services provided by the Victorian Government.

"Having a second wave of the pandemic emerge, we see this submission as a key opportunity to shine a light on the impact of the pandemic on the volunteering community and to focus attention on how best to support the sector going forward," says Scott Miller, Chief Executive of Volunteering Victoria.

"In our submission we urge the Victorian Government to fundamentally improve its support for the volunteering sector immediately, and to help future-proof the sector in the case of further pandemics," he adds.

Our submission makes the following four recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Improve communications, consultation and engagement with the volunteering sector. Building on the good work and collaboration between Volunteering Victoria and the Victorian Government, organisations in the volunteering sector seek more two-way communication and ongoing opportunities to advise government about the impacts of decisions on their workforces.

Recommendation 2: Establish a short-term taskforce to reinvigorate volunteering, while the broader strategic framework for the sector is implemented. The biggest concern from the volunteering sector is about maintaining engagement with volunteers throughout restrictions and ensuring the volunteer workforce returns as we emerge from the pandemic. The speedy development of a Volunteer Revitalisation Action Plan will demonstrate vital leadership and support for the sector, and bridge the gap between the current crisis and the longer-term volunteering strategic framework under development by the Victorian Government.

Recommendation 3: Facilitation with digital transition for small volunteer involving organisations. Many organisations have minimal information technology capacity and volunteers with low digital literacy, which this is a barrier for engagement. It is now clear this pandemic will not be resolved in the immediate future. However, we have an opportunity to facilitate the digital transformation of the sector which will also help to keep Victorians civically engaged via volunteering.

Recommendation 4: Develop an emergency volunteer and spontaneous emergency volunteer framework – and resource its implementation. This is an ongoing issue for the volunteering sector and never has it been more evident than over the last half year, with the Black Summer 2019-20 Bushfires and now the COVID-19 Pandemic. Victoria needs resources to manage emergency volunteer and spontaneous emergency volunteer workforce, to provide regional support to local





councils and volunteer-involving organisations, and to build capacity to prepare for emergencies before they happen.

We look forward to working with the Victorian Government on behalf of our members and the broader volunteering community as we take the next steps to tackle the challenge of this pandemic.

MEDIA INQUIRIES:

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