

MEDIA RELEASE



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Volunteering sidelined in Federal Budget

The Federal Budget has allocated no new funding to volunteering despite the devastating impact of COVID-19 restrictions. Two in three volunteers (66 per cent) stopped volunteering during the pandemic, amounting to an estimated loss of 12.2 million hours per week of volunteer work. This decline has had a profound and ongoing impact across the sector.

Volunteering Australia asked the Australian Government to support vital initiatives, as part of a *Reinvigorating Volunteering Action Plan*, that would safely revive volunteering. We are calling on the government to give this further serious consideration in the coming months.

Many volunteers, particularly older volunteers and others who are more vulnerable to COVID-19, are not returning and the costs of recruiting new volunteers can be significant. This is in the context of many organisations already hit hard by COVID-19, for example through having fundraising activities curtailed. The capacity to adapt volunteer programs and absorb higher operating costs, due to safe workplace requirements, is limited.

Chief Executive Officer of Volunteering Australia, Mark Pearce said, “The Federal Budget has failed to recognise the need to invest in reinvigorating volunteering. Without coordinated action and investment, volunteering will continue to suffer. This will have deep consequences for volunteers and the individuals and communities that they support. If volunteering is not reinvigorated, there is a knock-on effect to the wider charitable and not-for-profit sector – a sector which is vitally important in supporting communities through the COVID recession.”

“The Federal Budget has provided substantial and welcome additional investment in essential services but no acknowledgement that volunteers are integral to these services. For example, volunteers play significant roles in disability, health, community, and aged care services. The Government needs to think and act strategically about the volunteer workforce if essential services are to deliver the best outcomes for Australians.”

The Federal Budget did include continued funding for Volunteer Grants of \$10 million per annum. Whilst welcome, it falls well short of what is needed, and Volunteering Australia had called for the funding allocation to be restored to 2010 levels of \$21 million per annum. The Budget also included ongoing indexed allocation of funds to the Volunteer Management Activity (of \$6.301 million for 2021-22, \$6.358 million for 2022-23 and \$6.44 million for 2023-24). Some other highlights outlined in the budget that relate to the volunteering sector include:

- \$44 million allocated to replace Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) supplementation.
- Additional funding for aged care, including \$10.3 million for an Aged Care Workforce Council.
- Commonwealth Home Support Program funding extended for two further years.
- Investment of \$485 million towards mental health initiatives, which includes \$45.7 million over four years from 2020-21 to expand the Individual Placement and Support program (to assist vulnerable young people with mental illness to participate in the workforce) and \$6.9 million over two years from 2020-21 to support digital mental health services including the Australian Government’s mental health gateway Head to Health.
- \$4.7 million to the Australian Sports Foundation to increase the fundraising capacity of community sports clubs.

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