

22 July 2020

Honourable Anne Ruston
Minister for Families and Social Services

Dear Minister Ruston,

Re: Future of the Volunteer Management Activity Fund

I am writing to you on behalf of our network of VMA funded Volunteer Support Services (VSS)¹ members. Our members have asked we convey their concerns about the process undertaken during the VMA Review.

On behalf of our members, we request your department:

- 1. Postpone any decision on the fund for 12 months**
- 2. Continue engaging with VMA funded Volunteer Support Services**
- 3. Formally recognise the value of place-based volunteering support services**

Postpone any decision on the fund for 12 months

COVID19 has had a devastating impact on the volunteer sector. Research undertaken by Volunteering Victoria in late March demonstrated 66% of Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) are delivering modified services to meet community demand and. Despite change in role availability and modified service delivery, during April and May, most VSS's reported an increase in demand from individuals looking for support and placement. VSS's have been responding to this demand despite a sometimes-reduced workforce.

Our members also argue that many community organisations will be reliant on their VSS local services to assist with recruitment once programs have re-commenced. Requirements to assist with planning to meet social distancing and occupational health and safety requirements for volunteers will be vital in the post-COVID19 environment.

¹ The Victorian Volunteer Support Network was established in 2003 as a voice to share practice amongst VSSs in Victoria. The list of 17 is included in Attachment A.



Continue engaging with VMA funded Volunteer Support Services

In February 2020, the discussion paper on the Report of the Evaluation of the VMA Funding was released. Consultation on this discussion paper was open from 13 February – 3 April. During that time COVID-19 has emerged as a national priority which has meant that continued consultation about the future of the funding has stalled for VSSs. This is of great concern for our VSS members, whose current support for the community might be at risk of ceasing if funding is discontinued. Their ability to make transition plans has been impacted by the lack of communication from the Department, and the national change in priorities. Postponing the funding decision 12 months would assist them in continuing to support community at this time.

Formally recognise the value of place-based volunteering support services

Our members want to see greater emphasis on the role that place-based Volunteer Support Services deliver for both volunteers and volunteer involving organisations (VIOs).

Volunteer Support Services have been funded by the federal government since 1992. These localised services provide individualised volunteer support and placement, and capacity building for small to medium VIOs.

Under the current funding arrangement VSSs have proved themselves agile and able to respond locally in times of their community's need. This has been especially critical in 2020 when communities have been dealing with the impact of the bushfires and more recently the social and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Place-based services have been critical in ensuring small to medium VIOs² get through the COVID crises while also supporting individuals who experience barriers to community participation³. This will prove to be of greater importance as more individuals than ever before experience social and economic barriers to participation as a result of COVID-19 shutdowns. In this environment, volunteering is uniquely placed to keep people connected and build community capacity – critical to our national recovery effort.

Should you wish to discuss the impact of placed based volunteering further, Volunteering Victoria and our network of VSS members would be grateful to provide you with further information.

Kind regards,



Scott Miller
Chief Executive

² MAC report: <https://www.volunteer.vic.gov.au/ministerial-council-volunteers#:~:text=The%20Ministerial%20Council%20for%20Volunteers,and%20strengthen%20the%20volunteer%20sector.>

³ This may include people with disabilities, experience mental health issues, CALD and newly arrived communities, communities traumatised by bushfire flood and other natural disasters, socially isolated, un/underemployed and newly retrenched workers and indigenous communities.

Attachment A: Members federally funded through the Volunteer Management Activity fund.

Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau

Ballarat Foundation

Bendigo Volunteer Resource Centre

Boroondara Volunteer Resource Centre

Campaspe Primary Care Partnership

Centre for Participation

Eastern Volunteers

South East Volunteers

Volunteering Geelong

Volunteer West

Volunteer Central Victoria

Volunteer Connect

Volunteer Skillsbank

Whittlesea Community Connections

