

18 October 2021

Hon James Merlino MP

Deputy Premier

Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health

RE: Briefing on the role of Volunteering Victoria and the crucial need to support Victoria's volunteers

Dear Hon. James Merlino,

On behalf of the team and members of Volunteering Victoria, we congratulate you on your appointment to Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers. This portfolio presents opportunities for you to support and advocate for a strong, vibrant, and active volunteering sector in Victoria.

As the state emerges from another extended lockdown, your strong support for volunteering is critical to promoting the value and power of volunteers in our state's recovery. Volunteers have and will continue to be at the forefront of so many initiatives that contribute to the improvement of social cohesion. Volunteers make our communities stronger, safer, and more liveable.

About Us

Volunteering Victoria is the state peak body for volunteering in Victoria, focusing on advocacy, sector development and the promotion of volunteering. Our role is to lead the development of a collaborative, sustainable, thriving, and respected volunteering community in Victoria.

Volunteering Victoria promotes volunteering that is diverse, inclusive, and accessible, encouraging resilient communities and empowered and active Victorians. We continuously strive to find new and creative ways to engage organisations and individuals in meaningful volunteering.

With an estimated 2.3 million volunteers across Victoria, volunteering is both ubiquitous and impactful. The State of Volunteering in Victoria Report (2020) found that volunteering represented \$58.1 billion in value for the Victorian economy, or a net return of approximately \$3.70 on every dollar invested. In many ways, volunteering is the lifeblood of our communities, as it is essential for the delivery of crucial services, including those provided by state and local governments.

Yet, effective, and meaningful volunteering comes with resourcing needs. Our sector requires expert leadership of volunteers, clear and coherent policy, and regulations and legislation that both protect volunteers while maintaining realistic compliance on volunteer-involving organisations.



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Our challenges

Over the last two years, the ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis has had an enormous impact on the volunteering sector in Victoria. This recent decline is compounded by the existing downward trend in volunteering participation prior to the pandemic. Overall, the sector is currently facing a trilogy of systemic challenges:

- An increase in demand for services of volunteer-involving organisations and the not-for-profit sector;
- A funding crisis; and
- A collapse in volunteer participation.

In June 2021, the [COVID-19 Community Sector Impact Survey](#) found that almost two-thirds of organisations reported a drop in volunteers. The latest lockdown has further exacerbated this crisis.

Among the top challenges confronting the sector are:

- The widening digital divide and the risk of creating barriers for the participation of large cohorts including remote areas, regional and CALD communities;
- The need for enhanced legislative improvements to protect volunteers;
- The threat to place-based support services due to shrinking funding; and
- The economic and cultural barriers preventing the participation of First Nations peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

These challenges present a risk to our strong culture of volunteering and the wide array of benefits for communities and individuals.

Our opportunities and priorities

COVID-19 community recovery can be a catalyst for bringing communities back together through deliberate and innovative support, and investment in the volunteering sector.

The Victorian Volunteer Strategy, which will be finalised in the coming months, already shows the goodwill of the Government towards the sector and its commitment to promoting a flourishing volunteering culture across the state. COVID-19 community recovery should notably entail:

- Long-term investment in [weVolunteer](#) to support Victorian communities on the road to recovery and provide the Government with an increased capacity to plan and coordinate the growing trend of spontaneous volunteering;
- Strengthening the capacity of local government and place-based volunteering support services to meet local community needs;
- The development of inclusive multicultural volunteering materials, workshops, and training opportunities.

Community recovery from COVID-19 represents a unique opportunity to encourage better ways to create a fairer, more just State. As Victoria re-emerges from the lockdown, we have the chance to make rebuilding and revitalising communities a tenet for our collective actions. With adequate funding and support, volunteering can be key to Victoria's community recovery. At Volunteering Victoria, we are committed to this vision of the future, and we look forward to working with you to making it a reality.





We would be delighted to discuss this BIM further with you and your team. I can be reached at 04 7770 0806 or scott@volunteeringvictoria.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

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