

Supporting Leadership and Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Volunteering

In Australia, 1 in 5 people live with disability¹ and 45% of Australians will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime². The engagement of Volunteering Victoria with people with disability has highlighted the enormous benefits that volunteering holds for people with disability and the invaluable community contribution they make. While thousands of people with disability already volunteer across Victoria, we know that so many more face increased barriers to volunteering compared to people without disability, preventing them from actively participating and depriving communities of their unique skills.

People with disability experience high levels of interpersonal and structural discrimination and bias which impact on community and social involvement. Over one third of women and over one quarter of men have avoided situations because of their disability. Discrimination and stigma are most often experienced in the workplace³. Other identified barriers to volunteering for people with disability include a lack of accessibility in the physical environment and in information and resources, limited access to transport, and a lack of organisational support. The overall impact of such hurdles is clear with a recent study showing that social connectedness for people with disability is around 10% lower compared to people without a disability⁴.

At Volunteering Victoria, we have a commitment to [equity, inclusion, and diversity](#), soon to be embedded in our strategic plan. We are committed to growing and developing a volunteer sector that is accessible and values the unique contribution of people with a variety of abilities, strengths, and support needs.

Volunteering Victoria recently received Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) funding to increase opportunities for people to participate in the social and economic life of their broader community through volunteering. A core component of this funding is to break down barriers to volunteering for people with disability.

In the next year, we will be recruiting for lived experience reference groups for people with disability, First Nations peoples and newly arrived migrants. This will ensure that our programs and initiatives are informed by the issues and needs of the community and consistent with the principle of self-determination. If you identify as having a disability and are keen to get involved, please register your interest by contacting us at info@volunteeringvictoria.org.au. This will allow us to reach out to you directly when we start recruiting.

A Call to Action: 10 Steps to Improving Disability Inclusion in your Organisation

The theme of [International Day of People with Disability 2021 \(IDPWD\)](#) is ***Leadership and Participation of Persons with Disabilities toward an Inclusive, Accessible, Sustainable post-COVID-19 world***. Volunteers with disability are crucial to achieving this vision for inclusive and resilient communities. We encourage you to incorporate the following actions into your workplace practice to make volunteer programs and your organisation accessible and welcoming for people with disability:

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), [Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings](#), 2019.

² Better Health Channel, [Mental Health Statistics](#), 2021.

³ ABS, [Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings](#), 2016.

⁴ Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, [Stronger Together: Loneliness and social connectedness in Australia](#), 2021, p. 45.



1. Check that your organisation's documentation, policies, training and meetings are accessible for a variety of audiences.
2. Clearly state your commitment to disability inclusion through an [Inclusion Statement](#) or [Disability Inclusion Plan](#).
3. Check Volunteer Position Descriptions for unnecessary or inaccessible requirements.
4. Make connections with disability organisations and groups and promote your volunteer positions through these networks.
5. Ask your volunteers with disability if they have what they need to complete their role.
6. Incorporate self-reflective practice into your daily work life. Consider your attitudes, beliefs, and biases. Acknowledge your fear or gaps in knowledge.
7. Organise disability inclusion training for your paid staff and volunteers in 2022.
8. Speak up when you observe or hear discrimination.
9. Join the Volunteering Victoria [Inclusive Special Interest Group](#).
10. Finally, celebrate diversity and acknowledge the strengths and contribution of volunteers with disability.

If you have a positive story to celebrate or share, please reach out to us at:

info@volunteeringvictoria.org.au. Or nominate someone for a [2021 Volunteering Award](#): Inclusive Volunteering.

This IDPWD, we invite you to join us in working towards a diverse, inclusive, and accessible volunteer culture where "Volunteering is for Everyone."

Resources, guides, and checklists

- [Disability Inclusion resources, guides, and templates](#)
- [Videos, guides, and checklists for including people with cognitive disabilities](#)
- [Human Rights Victoria Disability Inclusion Checklist](#)
- [Is Your Organisation Accessible?](#) (Checklist)
- [8 Actions for Organisational Leaders To Promote Disability Inclusion](#)

Disability organisations and advocacy groups:

- [People with Disability Australia](#)
- [Women with Disabilities Victoria](#)
- [Voice At the Table \(VATT\)](#)
- [Disability Advocacy Resource Unit \(DARU\)](#)
- [First Peoples Disability Network Australia](#)
- [National Ethnic Disability Alliance](#)
- [MHVic \(Mental Health Victoria\)](#)
- [Inclusion Australia](#)
- [Vision Australia](#)
- [Deaf Australia](#)
- [Amaze](#)

