

Response to Inclusive Victoria: State Disability Plan 2022-2026

Volunteering Victoria

Volunteering Victoria commends the State Government on the new Inclusive Victoria: State disability plan 2022-2026 (the plan), particularly its emphasis on embedding established principles of disability inclusion and improving participation of people with disability in the workforce.

However, we echo the sentiments of the volunteer sector and our members in noting with disappointment the minimal reference to volunteering in the plan and the absence of our recommendations to improve disability inclusion through volunteering.

Specifically, we draw attention to two recommendations from our submission to the State Disability Plan:

Why inclusion through volunteering matters

At Volunteering Victoria, we value self-determination and autonomy for all people, and emphasise this for communities that have been marginalised and discriminated against. We advocate for a human rights informed approach, namely that people with disability should be able to engage in their communities in whichever way they choose and have equal access to the many benefits of volunteering including social connection, enhanced wellbeing, improved confidence, and skill development.

Currently, we know that this is not the case, as volunteer organisations do not have an equitable access to the methods and means of making their organisations more inclusive through adjustments to the physical environment, accessible technology, and inclusion training. Not-for-profit organisations that deliver essential community services and engage extensive volunteer workforces require government support and funding to ensure their programs are accessible to all communities. This will unfortunately not happen if volunteering is not appropriately considered in strategic plans and objectives.

Supporting disability sector volunteers

For people with a disability, their family members and carers, and service providers, the unique and distinct support that volunteers bring to their lives and that of their families is invaluable and critical.

Volunteers in the disability sector provide frontline support, delivering services for communities in a wide variety of contexts and providing critical support to paid workers including medical professionals, trained carers, and administrative staff. Volunteering is also a common pathway to employment, providing opportunities to gain work experience and develop skills. Many volunteers progress to training and paid employment within the disability workforce.



Recognising the extent and role of volunteers and building the capacity and capability of the volunteer workforce is critical to the functioning of the disability support system. Volunteering in the disability sector should be encouraged and promoted, and any barriers that may serve to discourage volunteering should be carefully assessed and balanced against the enormous value that volunteers contribute.

Volunteering in an Inclusive Victoria

We commend the State government's commitment to improving inclusion for our valued members of the community with disability, and, as Minister Carbin writes, the promise to "break down the barriers that limit people with disability from fully participating in all aspects of our community."

We look forward to the operationalising of this Plan over the next five years where Victoria's volunteers and volunteer organisations are included in its delivery. We look forward to working with government to achieve these goals.

Scott Miller

Executive Officer
Volunteering Victoria

Kerry Uren

CEO
Interchange Network

Background

Volunteering Victoria [submitted to the State Disability Plan](#) Consultation in April 2021. This submission articulated our position on the enormous benefits of volunteering for all communities, and our experience in implementing the successful [Victoria ALIVE project](#) in 2019. This project promoted disability inclusion in volunteering across the state and sought expert advice from people with disability, and carers.

Volunteering Victoria acknowledges the complex issues around volunteering for people with disability, namely the history of exploitation of people with disability for unpaid labour, their exclusion from the workforce, expectations to provide expert lived experience advice for free, and volunteering being promised as a pathway to employment.

These issues are not in line with the ethos of volunteering – that is, "time willingly given" and that volunteering should be a meaningful activity for all involved. Volunteering as solely an alternative, or pathway, to employment is a limiting view and conflicts with the motivations and benefits that drive most people to volunteer – social connection, purposeful activity, giving back to community, and wellbeing benefits. People with disability tell us that they share these motivations, and experience the same, if not greater, benefits.

