

Hon Lizzie Blandthorn MP
Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers
Minister for Child Protection and Family Services

Ms Sheen Watt MLC
Parliamentary Secretary for Volunteers

7 December 2022

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

Dear Minister Blandthorn and Parliamentary Secretary Watt,

On behalf of the team and members of Volunteering Victoria, we congratulate you on your respective nomination as Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers and Parliamentary Secretary for Volunteers. These roles present an exciting opportunity for you to support and advocate for strong, vibrant, and inclusive volunteering communities across Victoria.

Volunteering is an essential part of active, healthy, and connected communities. The contribution of volunteers is invaluable to community sectors and their positive impact stretches across all Victorian communities. The collective wellbeing of our state is receiving increased attention following numerous recent social crises, including natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic. These events have had a significant impact on our physical and mental health, and economic and social wellbeing.

We commend the State Government on the development of the Victorian Volunteer Strategy (VVS), which acknowledges the critical role of volunteering in our communities and its environmental, social, cultural, health, and wellbeing benefits. The VVS identifies the need to strengthen the sector and address barriers to volunteering. With strong leadership, sustainable co-ordination, and equitable reinvestment, the benefits of volunteering can be maximised to achieve the vision for a thriving, healthy, and inclusive Victoria.

About Us

Volunteering Victoria is the state peak body for volunteering, focusing on advocacy, sector development, and the promotion of volunteering. We are a member-based organisation with over 450 individual and organisational members from all sectors and places in Victoria. We have a singular and specialised focus on volunteering. We see our role as leading the development of a collaborative, sustainable, thriving, and inclusive volunteering movement in Victoria.

Sector Context

Volunteers are the foundation of our communities, generously working to deliver essential community services and programs across all sectors. Volunteers give their time for free and for the good of their community, promoting inclusion, social cohesion, resilience, and recovery from emergencies and crises. The contribution of volunteers to society is invaluable through the benefits on individual and collective health and wellbeing including:

- Improved physical and mental health
- Greater social connections and increased social capital
- Skill development and pathways to employment
- Improved overall life satisfaction.



These benefits exist alongside the tangible economic contribution of volunteers that is in excess of \$58 billion annually to Victoria. While many volunteers give their time through formal volunteering, there is increasing acknowledgement of the contribution of those who give their time outside of organisations and through diverse forms of community giving.

Challenges and Barriers

Despite the significant contribution of volunteering and associated benefits, volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) face many barriers. The pandemic has amplified the decade-long downward trend in volunteering participation and volunteers are not returning to their previous roles. Many VIOs are encountering difficulties in maintaining their services and programs.

The known barriers to volunteer participation range from the impact of cost-of-living increases to poor and unstable resourcing of volunteer programs, a lack of volunteer infrastructure, and the inaccessibility of bureaucratic processes associated with volunteering. There is also an internationally identified need to promote greater equity and inclusion in volunteering and recognise diverse forms of community giving. The nature and diversity of these challenges require innovative and sustainable leadership and resourcing. Volunteering will not recover on its own and our communities will be much worse off without the contribution of volunteers.

Opportunities and Priorities

Government leadership and funding are essential to value, sustain, and grow a culture of community contribution. This can be achieved through:

- **Strengthening the volunteer sector** to harness the benefits of volunteering for collective wellbeing
- **Addressing barriers to volunteering** that contribute to the trend of declining volunteer rates and pose operational issues for organisations
- **Promoting inclusion and diversity** in volunteering to create more equitable and accessible communities.

Volunteering Victoria's [Election Priorities](#) and submission to the [2023-2024 State Budget](#) were developed in consultation with the sector and outline key recommendations and specific initiatives across these priority areas.

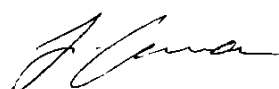
Our goal for volunteering in Victoria is to foster a culture where all Victorians have access to opportunities to engage in their communities and experience the benefits of volunteering. The focus areas and priorities of the VVS are aligned with this vision and the recommendations detailed in our State Budget Submission. We look forward to working with your government and learning more about your plans to deliver on the VVS.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this briefing further with you and your team.

Your sincerely,



Dr Antoine Guillemette
Acting Chief Executive



Jenna Chia
Senior Engagement & Indigenous Programs Officer

