

The Treasury  
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**RE: National Competition Policy - National approach to worker screening in the care and support economy**

Volunteering Victoria welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation and appreciates the extension of time to make this submission.

As the state peak body for volunteering, Volunteering Victoria represents a diverse network of volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs), and members across the state. We advocate for a thriving, inclusive volunteering culture and support organisations through advice, capacity building, and sector development.

Although time constraints have prevented detailed consultation with our full membership on the two options under review, our ongoing engagement with Victorian volunteers and volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) over many years provides clear insight into the challenges of the current screening landscape.

Feedback from across the sector consistently highlights that Australia's fragmented screening systems create unnecessary barriers to volunteer involvement. The process of obtaining required checks is often complex, inconsistent, and duplicative. For many potential volunteers, the ease—or difficulty—of securing a screening check determines whether they proceed with a volunteer role at all.

To reverse the decline in formal volunteering and strengthen the care and support economy, a **nationally consistent, accessible, and risk-proportionate screening system** is urgently required. This system should:

- Apply a **core set of national standards** across all volunteer roles and sectors.
- Be **simple, inclusive, and accessible** to people of all abilities, regardless of digital literacy.
- Be **portable and mutually recognised** across jurisdictions.
- **Remain free of charge** for volunteers, as is the case in several states.

This is an opportunity for governments to be courageous and innovative—developing a single, fit-for-purpose screening process that not only recognises checks across jurisdictions but ideally delivers **one national check** valid for both the care economy and other sectors requiring screening.

***Insights from the 2025 State of Volunteering in Victoria Report***

Volunteering Victoria's *2025 State of Volunteering in Victoria Report* (SoV Report) provides relevant evidence to inform this consultation.



**Wurundjeri and Bunurong Country**

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- Many older people, young people under 18, people with disability, and veterans contribute significantly through volunteering. However, current screening and training requirements already act as barriers for these cohorts.

*“While often well-intentioned in terms of safety and accountability, this evolution was seen as having unintended consequences: it creates a gatekeeping effect that can deter or exclude potential volunteers, particularly those already facing systemic disadvantage.” (p. 26)*

- The SoV Report describes the “*complexity of volunteering*” and the “*burden of administrative hurdles, compliance requirements, and formal procedures that can be discouraging.*”

*“Regulatory settings around volunteer engagement create onerous and inaccessible bureaucratic and regulatory processes that deter people from volunteering and limit the capacity of volunteer programs.”*

Formal volunteering is in sustained decline. This trend poses a particular risk to the **care and support economy**, which relies heavily on regulated, formal volunteering roles. Many small to medium VIOs report that they will simply not engage volunteers if screening requirements remain as burdensome and inconsistent as they are now.

COVID-19 exacerbated this problem. While volunteering participation in Victoria recovered to **58.9% in 2024**, this remains below the national average (64.3%), and much of the growth has been in informal or non-traditional settings.

*“A lack of consistency across sectors and jurisdictions adds to the complex and at times ambiguous regulatory environment for volunteering.”*

### ***Design Principles for an Effective National Screening System***

Screening requirements should be **designed with and for volunteers and the people who lead them**. The design should facilitate participation—not deter it.

#### **Key principles include:**

1. **Clarity and proportionality:** It must be clear which checks are required for which roles. Requirements should be risk-based and proportionate.
2. **Accessibility:** Processes must be user-centred, inclusive, and simple to complete.

*“Technology should simplify volunteering, not complicate it – by prioritising ease of use, offering support and training, and meeting volunteers where they are.” (SoV Report, p.73)*

3. **Portability:** Checks should be transferable between organisations and jurisdictions.

Volunteers called for “*a single check system that would let volunteers move between organisations without repeating paperwork.*”

4. **Affordability:** Screening must remain free for volunteers.
5. **Proportionate burden on organisations:** Administrative obligations must consider the capacity of smaller organisations, many of which are volunteer-run.

#### **The regulatory framework should account for:**

- The **individual volunteer**, who may have limited digital access, English proficiency, or mobility.



- The **organisation**, which may be entirely volunteer-run or resource-limited.
- The **volunteer leader**, who may be managing compliance without formal HR or administrative support.

### Balancing Protection and Participation

Volunteering Victoria recognises the importance of safeguarding vulnerable people and upholding public trust in the care and support sectors. However, regulatory design must also respond to the documented decline in formal volunteering. Systems that are overly complex or inconsistent will further erode the volunteer workforce that underpins the care economy.

We urge government to ensure that screening systems are both protective and enabling—mitigating risk without imposing disproportionate administrative, financial, or digital burdens on volunteers or VIOs.

Volunteering Victoria supports **Option 2: a single national check** across the care and support economy, designed to:

- Replace multiple sector-specific checks (NDIS, aged care, WWCC, WWVP) with a unified national process.
- Include volunteers and paid workers alike.
- Extend recognition to volunteers working beyond the care economy, avoiding fragmentation.
- Build on best-practice features of existing state systems.

If Option 2 cannot be implemented immediately, we recommend Option 1 (expanded mutual recognition) as an interim step, provided it includes a clear commitment and timeline toward full national standardisation.

### Conclusion

Volunteering Victoria strongly supports reform of worker screening to create a nationally consistent, inclusive, and user-friendly system that protects care recipients while enabling more people to volunteer.

**A single national volunteer screening system**, free to volunteers, proportionate to risk, and designed with user input, would deliver significant efficiency gains and reduce barriers to participation—helping reverse the decline in formal volunteering and strengthen the care and support workforce nationally.

Volunteering Victoria is available to assist in co-designing the system to ensure it meets the needs of both volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations.

We are happy to support the process in any way we can.

Yours sincerely



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