

**Submission to 10-Year Health and Social  
Care Workforce Strategy**  
to Department of Health (WA)

## Overview

This submission responds to consultation from the WA State Government on the development of a *10-year Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy* (the “Strategy”).

Volunteering WA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission for consideration and thanks the Department of Health for their leadership and coordination in this area.

This submission provides a brief background on Volunteering WA, the current state of volunteering in Western Australia and the role of volunteers in our health and social care workforces.

**In summary Volunteering WA welcomes the development of the Strategy and recommends:**

- 1. that the roles of volunteers in the workforce be expressly recognised in the Strategy;**
- 2. an investment in staffed volunteer coordinators / managers with access to training to improve the recruitment, retention and recognition of volunteers in the workforce;**
- 3. that workforce approaches be tailored to the unique characteristics of volunteers; and**
- 4. that there be an investment in research into the role of volunteers in the health and social care workforce to support future Strategy development and monitoring of progress.**

## About Volunteering WA

Established in 1988, Volunteering WA (VWA) is the peak body for volunteering in Western Australia. We work in partnership with government, community, corporate and educational organisations to provide leadership, advancement and promotion of volunteering to achieve the greatest impact for Western Australia.

VWA has a 34-year proven track record of providing and sharing effective, efficient and innovative volunteer support services to meet the ever-increasing demand in our state for general and emergency volunteering. Our purpose is to empower people and communities to enrich WA, and our vision is for a society in which everyone is inspired to make a difference.

Volunteering WA:

- represents volunteering across the State, including all volunteer involving organisations, and their 523,000 volunteers;
- supports over 750 member organisations to attract and manage volunteers and increase their capability and capacity;
- works closely with the Minister for Volunteering and the State Government to collaborate on the implementation of the State Volunteering Strategy 2018; and
- leads and hosts several events that celebrate and recognise the contributions of our volunteers, including the annual WA Volunteer of the Year Awards.

## Current state of volunteering in Western Australia

Volunteering in WA delivers many essential services, responds to and aids recovery from emergencies, helps to build strong and resilient communities, encourages economic participation, supports physical health, promotes psychological wellbeing and increases social inclusion and cohesion.

In 2020, 523,600 or 26% of all Western Australians volunteered through an organisation or group. There has been a significant reduction in formal volunteer participation in WA over the past six years, with over 151,000 fewer volunteers - a 22% reduction. This continues the trend first observed in 2019 (pre-COVID) and is consistent with national experience.

The loss of volunteer capacity in formal, organisationally-based volunteer roles is due to a number of reasons. Most prominent are that people feel more time poor, are fatigued due to the intense and prolonged nature of many emergencies (such as COVID-19 and bushfires), increasing requirements for training, administration and compliance and rising costs of living.

For example, almost half of the national aged care volunteer workforce was lost in 2020<sup>1</sup>.

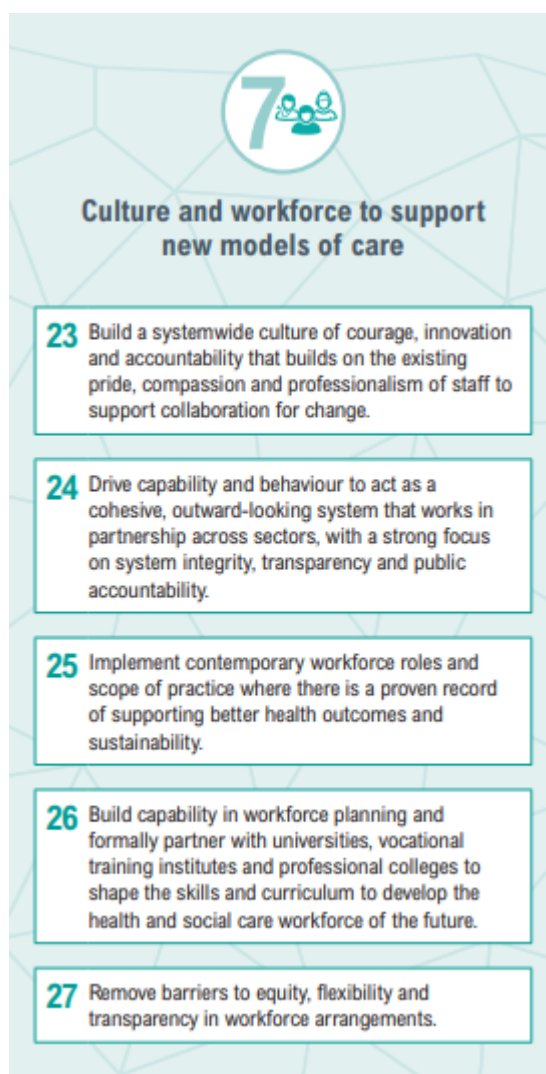
In addition to formal volunteering roles, there are even more informal volunteers giving time freely to support people outside of their immediate household.

## Role of volunteers in the health and social care workforce

The 2019 Sustainable Health Review Final Report<sup>2</sup> identified one of eight 'Enduring Strategies' as being "Culture and workforce to support new models of care".

We understand that the development of the 10-year health and social care workforce strategy responds to recommendation 26 of the final report to build capacity in workforce planning and the development of skills to support the health and social care workforce of the future.

*Figure 1: Enduring Strategy 7 from Sustainable Health Review Enduring Strategies and Recommendations, WA Dept of Health 2019*



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/2020-aged-care-workforce-census>

<sup>2</sup> [https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/~/\\_media/Files/Corporate/general-documents/Sustainable-Health-Review/Final-report/sustainable-health-review-final-report.pdf](https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/~/_media/Files/Corporate/general-documents/Sustainable-Health-Review/Final-report/sustainable-health-review-final-report.pdf)

The final report is almost entirely silent on the role of volunteers in providing health and social care services in Western Australia. However the statistics are startling and include:

	Number of people in WA	% people over 15 years in WA
<b>Undertaken unpaid voluntary work through an organisation in last 12 months</b>	523,600	25.6%
<b>Undertaken informal volunteering in the last four weeks</b>	614,100	30.0%
<b>Provided unpaid work / support to non-household members in the last four weeks</b>	926,900	45.2%
<b>Cared for a person with either a disability, long term health condition or old age in last 4 weeks</b>	225,300	11.0%

Table 1: Western Australian statistics from General Social Survey, ABS June 2021 (tables 6.1 and 6.3)

Looking more specifically at the health and social care services across Australia:

- almost 65,000 people volunteer in mental health and crisis intervention charities and not-for-profits;
- almost 60,000 people volunteer in charities and not-for-profits which identified people with disability as their main beneficiaries; and
- over 30,000 volunteers are engaged across Commonwealth aged care services.

The proportion of volunteers in the health and social services sector in Western Australia is expected to be higher than national averages due to increased reliance on volunteers to deliver services in regional areas.

The recent Upper House enquiry into the delivery of ambulance services in WA provides some insight into the depth of reliance and issues experienced by one example of the volunteer health workforce in our state.

### **Case Study** **Delivery of Ambulance Services in WA “Critical Condition”**

*The Legislative Council Standing Committee on Public Administration issued report 37 into the delivery of ambulance services in May 2022. Among other findings, the report noted that:*

- *there were 4,332 ambulance service volunteers in WA in 2020-21;*
- *the majority of ambulance services in regional areas are performed by volunteers;*
- *inter-hospital transfers and ambulance ramping are contributing to volunteer fatigue and loss of emergency response capacity; and*
- *volunteer qualifications are not recognised outside of St. John Ambulance WA.*

Recommendations pertaining to volunteers included:

- 28: The State Government investigate ways to provide volunteers with opportunities to access specific identified career pathways via TAFE or similar providers. For example, an accredited Certificate IV in nursing or paramedicine.
- 30: The Department of Health and St John Ambulance WA investigate engaging dedicated trainers to provide scheduled training for volunteers in regional areas to free-up Community Paramedics

## Recommendations

Volunteering WA makes the following recommendations:

### 1. That the roles of volunteers in the workforce be expressly recognised in the Strategy

As noted from the ABS data, there is a substantial volunteer workforce involved in the delivery of health and social care services that needs to be recognised in the Strategy. The contributions to all aspects of the health care sector should be an integral part of planning for the workforce.

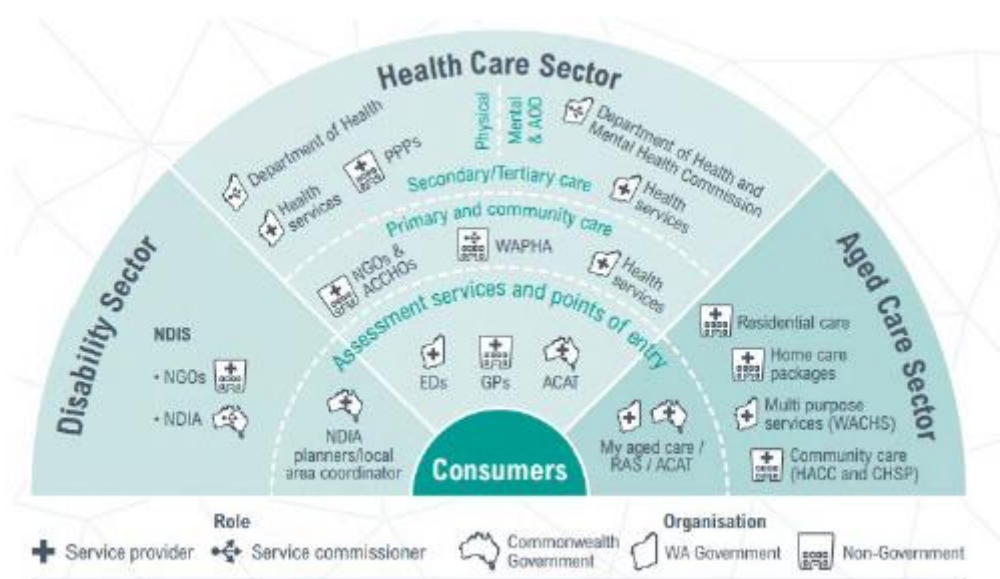


Figure 2: High level mapping of the health, aged care and disability sectors in WA from Sustainable Health Review Final Report, WA Dept of Health 2019 (adapted from Nous Group)

Increasingly, workforce strategies by Australian governments are reflecting and planning for the involvement of volunteers.

### 2. An investment in staffed volunteer coordinators / managers with access to training to improve the recruitment, retention and recognition of volunteers in the workforce

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety released its *Final Report: Care Dignity*

and Respect<sup>3</sup> in 2021. It noted that while volunteers comprised 16% of the total aged care workforce in Australia, there was a lack of dedicated and suitably trained staff to manage the involvement of volunteers.

In many cases, there were no staff with specific responsibility for volunteer coordination or spans of control were too big to be manageable. This leads to poor outcomes in terms of attraction and retention of volunteers and loss of benefits to patients. The final report included a recommendation to address this shortcoming in workforce planning for the sector.

#### Case Study

#### *Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety Final Report: Care Dignity and Respect Recommendation 34 (excerpt)*

*“From 1 July 2021, the Australian Government should promote volunteers and volunteering in aged care to support older people to live a meaningful and dignified life and supplement the support and care provided to them through the aged care system, whether in their own home or in a residential care home, by...*

*Assign(ing) the role of volunteer coordination to a designated staff member”*

Adequate funding is required for staffed volunteer manager and coordinator positions, for volunteer screening (which can be for multiple checks in healthcare settings), for volunteer vaccinations and to support the professional development of the volunteer managers.

The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement<sup>4</sup> provide a sound framework for supporting the volunteer sector in Australia. The Standards are adaptable to different organisational types and different forms of volunteering which reflect the diversity of the sector.

Volunteer managers and coordinators have specialised skill sets which support the recruitment and retention of volunteers in a manner that reflects the Standards. This recognises the different value proposition for volunteers who are increasingly seeking meaningful involvement in service design and service delivery in flexible and respectful volunteer roles.

Volunteering WA can provide training and support for volunteer managers in the health and social care workforce, including access to accredited training at a Certificate IV level.

### **3. That workforce approaches be tailored to the unique characteristics of volunteers**

There are some characteristics of voluntary organisations and the nature of volunteering, which are helpful to understand:

- volunteering is a much broader construct than simply ‘unpaid work’;
- there are a range of settings, motivations, rewards, conditions, costs and benefits that may be significantly different to paid employment;
- half of all charities have no paid staff and rely on volunteers to coordinate the involvement of

<sup>3</sup> [https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/final-report-volume-1\\_0.pdf](https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/final-report-volume-1_0.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.volunteeringwa.org.au/volunteer-management/national-standards->



other volunteers; and

- it is not unusual for volunteer to staff ratios to exceed 35:1.

Any workforce strategy that considers volunteers should reflect these differences and specifically consider ways to develop a culture that supports volunteers and seeks to grow their contribution. Specific solutions will reflect different settings (clinical and otherwise), the nature of the role (skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled) and volunteer characteristics. Some of the general issues to consider include:

- creating a culture that genuinely values, involves and respects volunteers;
- minimising unnecessary bureaucracy;
- tailoring training;
- reimbursing out-of-pocket expenses;
- fostering communications including prompt resolution of any issues or conflict; and
- recognising and celebrating volunteer contributions.

We find that it is helpful for State Government announcements to report separately on settings for volunteers. For example, the introduction by the WA State Government in 2021 of mandatory vaccination requirements for some roles and workplace settings specifically mentioned (or excluded) volunteers. This assisted greatly with communicating with the sector and volunteers, so that they understood the impacts and expectations.

In some cases, consideration of volunteers may also lead to tailored approaches.

### Case Study

#### *Work Health and Safety Act 2020 (WA)*

*The Work Health and Safety Act 2020 legislation was introduced as part of a national program of statutory harmonisation.*

*It provides an excellent example of how the Act specifically considered volunteers as part of the workforce and also tailored approaches to suit.*

*In general, organisations that involve volunteers are subject to the Act, with volunteers having responsibilities under the Act. However there were also concessions made in consideration of the specific nature of volunteering. These include:*

- *The Act does not apply to voluntary organisations that do not have any paid staff*
- *Volunteer Board members are not 'officers' under the Act, and cannot therefore be held personally liable for any breach of the Act.*

*In addition, the Department of Mines Industry Regulation and Safety supported the sector during the introduction of the Act. This included the development of a specific Guide to Work Health and Safety for Volunteer Organisations, hosting a webinar and answering questions from the sector and a presentation at the State Volunteering Conference in 2021.*

4. **That there be an investment in research into the role of volunteers in the health and social care workforce to support future Strategy development and monitoring of progress.**

We understand that the Department of Communities is currently compiling a report currently on volunteer engagement across the WA State Government, as part of reporting on progress of the WA Volunteering Strategy<sup>5</sup>. This report is expected to be released later this year and may assist in understanding any direct engagement of volunteers in the health and social care workforce in WA.

Volunteering WA is funding a research project led by ECU into “*University students’ experiences of volunteering to support older adults in hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative case study*”<sup>6</sup>. This research reflects on volunteers with skills in nursing, medicine and psychology and is due to be released in December 2022. We would be pleased to share the findings with the department.

We believe that further research to understand the current role of volunteers in the health and social care workforce will support the development of the Strategy and monitoring of progress.

### **In closing**

Volunteering WA very much appreciates the opportunity to provide this submission for consideration.

We look forward to continuing to work with the WA State Government to support the delivery of essential health and social caring services across WA. If we can be of further assistance, please contact our Senior Policy Advisor Meredith Blais on [meredith@volunteeringwa.org.au](mailto:meredith@volunteeringwa.org.au).

Kind regards,



**Tina Williams**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Volunteering WA**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2021-06/WA-Volunteering-Strategy.PDF>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.volunteeringwa.org.au/about/research-and-innovation#collapseTwo>





**Empowering people and communities to enrich Western Australia**

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