

Let's reduce the burden of volunteer screening in WA

Statutory checks required in WA for a number of volunteer roles include Working with Children, NDIS Screening and Aged Care. Volunteering WA supports the need for screening to provide a safe and non-discriminatory environment for organisations, staff, volunteers and clients.

However, VIOs and volunteers in WA consistently report that the cost of statutory volunteering screening is excessive and that the administration creates a significant barrier to volunteering.

- **The community sector relies on volunteers – 3 out of every 4 workers in charities in Australia are volunteers¹**
- **Overall rates of volunteering in WA are in sharp decline with a loss of over 22% of formal volunteers in the past six years²**
- **As an example, the number of volunteers in residential aged care in Australia has reduced by 49% in the past five years³ - a huge loss of social activity support and companionship.**

The loss of volunteers adversely impacts community vibrancy and cohesion, family support and the personal health and mental wellbeing of volunteers and their clients alike. COVID-19 and the NDIS are accelerating the loss of volunteers and the need for new volunteers – and screening.

Volunteering WA has identified opportunities to improve statutory volunteer screening in WA by:

1. Removing the charge

Volunteer Working with Children (WWC) and NDIS screening checks are free in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, SA and the ACT.

In 2018, South Australia went further to make all volunteer checks free⁴ – including National Volunteer Police checks. The checks are still undertaken to protect the community.

Recent discussions at the Volunteer Community Reference Group with the Minister for Volunteering, Hon. Reece Whitby MLA, highlighted the boost this would provide for volunteers and organisations. Preliminary indication is that the financial cost to the State Government would be relatively low.

2. Improving processes

Some other states and territories have streamlined into a single “Working with Vulnerable People” check and invested in improved platforms and processes. It is important that State Government reviews of platforms and processes are accelerated and open to the involvement of the community sector.

3. Facilitating portability

It is timely to explore the use of technology to facilitate portability of screening checks in WA.

¹ <https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/reports/australian-charities-report-7th-edition>

² <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release#voluntary-work-and-unpaid-work-support>

³ <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/09/2020-aged-care-workforce-census.pdf>

⁴ <https://screening.sa.gov.au/fees-payments>

The following Peak Bodies in WA have endorsed this Issues Brief:

Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia
Advocare
Alcohol and Other Drug Consumer and Community Coalition
Child and Family Alliance
Community Employers WA (CEWA)
Community Legal WA
Connect Groups
Consumers of Mental Health WA
Council on the Ageing (CoTA) WA Inc
Ethnic Communities Council (ECC)
Financial Counsellors Association (FCA)
Health Consumers' Council WA Inc (HCC)
Injury Matters
Linkwest
Local Drug Action Groups Inc (LDAG)
Men's Health and Wellbeing WA
Mens Shed WA
National Disability Services (NDS) WA
Noongar Family Safety and Wellbeing Council
Peel Community Development Group
People With Disabilities WA Inc (PWDWA)
Playgroup WA
Shelter WA
Social Reinvestment WA
Stopping Family Violence
Volunteering WA
WA Association for Mental Health (WAAMH)
WA Network of Alcohol & Other Drug Agencies (WANADA)
Western Australian Council of Social Service
Western Australian Council of Social Service (Louise)
Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing
Youth Affairs Council of WA (YACWA)