

# WA's 1.5m volunteers not only a force for good



By Tina Williams 15/03/2024 - [BUSINESS NEWS](#)

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Most people would say that Western Australia's volunteers are priceless, but they are actually worth a fortune. \$64 billion a year, in fact.

That is the value they bring to the WA economy, according to [Volunteering WA's State of Volunteering Report](#), the largest survey of volunteers and volunteer managers ever conducted in Western Australia.

The volunteer workforce, at 1.5 million Western Australians, is greater than health, mining, construction, retail or education sectors, representing the largest industry by employment in WA.

Volunteers are not only a force for good, but they are also a force in their own right.

The report found 32 per cent of people over 15 volunteered formally with organisations and about 42 per cent of people volunteered informally in the community. The formal organisations include our well-known and vital bushfire volunteer groups, the iconic St John Ambulance, within aged care, sport and across a plethora of community service groups and organisations. Informal volunteering ranges across every part of our communities; from delivering meals to a sick friend and providing transport to the supermarket for an elderly neighbour to helping with a fundraising sausage sizzle.

All up, the contribution made by our state's 1.5 million volunteers, equates to a whopping 400 million hours of time, contributed freely, each year across WA.

And Western Australians punch above their weight when it comes to volunteering, with the overall rate of volunteering in WA estimated by the report at 65.1 per cent of the population, significantly higher than the overall rate of volunteering in Australia which stands at 56.7 per cent.

The contribution young people make to the WA community via volunteering is enormous, with people under 25 in WA volunteering at a higher rate, 78.2 per cent, than any other age group. The engagement of youth volunteers in WA is also considerably higher than in the rest of Australia, which stands 70.5 per cent. And of all age groups, more of our young people say they intend to maintain or increase their volunteering commitment over the next three years.

Since 2019 we have been concerned about a decline in volunteering. What we are seeing in this report, is that volunteering is showing encouraging signs of post-pandemic recovery.

But recovery is patchy. Organisations most hard hit by recent government reforms – emergency services, disability, youth and aged care – are more likely to report acute shortages of volunteers. Finding ways to lessen the administrative burden on these organisations, is critical for their long-term viability.

With the enormous contribution volunteers make to this state, we need to make it easy and rewarding to volunteer. Time and money are precious and reported as the greatest barriers to more volunteering in WA. Volunteers currently pay 77 per cent of all costs of their volunteering – an unsustainable contribution, particularly with the current cost of living pressures.

At [Volunteering WA](#), we are inspired by the hundreds of millions of hours contributed by our state's volunteers and the thousands of organisations that make it all happen. We will continue to advocate for a strong sector because of the value we know it brings to our lives, our communities and to Western Australia.

Volunteering is identified as a pivotal contributor to community well-being, accounting for a 14.7 per cent increase in workplace productivity, and for every dollar invested in volunteering, a huge \$4.70 is returned in benefits to the community, a return on investment that is the envy of any industry.

With a sector as large and impactful as volunteering is to Western Australia, we implore policy makers to consult with volunteers and volunteer involving organisations on matters that affect them; to reduce costs and barriers to participation whenever possible and to recognise the enormous contribution volunteers make to the fabric of our state.

The WA State of Volunteering Report should give the community hope that volunteering will continue to play a significant role in tackling the many challenges we will face in the future.

The work we put into nurture volunteering now, will pay dividends for generations to come.

- [Tina Williams](#) is the chief executive at [Volunteering WA](#).