

VOLUNTEERING IN AGED CARE SETTINGS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA: GOOD PRACTICE DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND

GUIDE FOR CURRENT AND RETURNING VOLUNTEERS

Important: this is a generic guide based on data collected from volunteers and volunteer managers in a range of aged care organisations in Western Australia. It includes some reference to COVID-19 and it is important that you comply with all Government requirements. Please check with your supervisor/volunteer manager if you have questions about any of the contents.

Remember, you are not 'just' a volunteer. You play an important role in contributing to the quality of life of your clients, supporting your organisation's service provision and the success of their person-centred aged care model.

Aged care settings are many and varied and include volunteering in a lot of different roles and support organisations. This guide is aimed at volunteers who visit clients or assist with therapy and other support activities for clients of aged care in residential and home care settings.

If you feel like you are getting too much information, not enough information, delayed information or the wrong information please get in touch with your volunteer manager – they want to hear from you.

Key COVID-19 Takeaways for Current and Returning Volunteers

- Not all COVID-19 changes have suited all volunteers
- Volunteers add value in aged care settings – in many important ways
- Volunteer self-care is important
- Keeping up to date with all organisational communications helps everyone
- Some organisations have created new roles and activities during COVID-19
- Organisational processes are in place to protect clients, organisations and volunteers
- Most volunteer roles will require you to be fully vaccinated
- Volunteers must update their training about roles including boundaries and privacy
- Volunteers must update their training about infection control and PPE
- Volunteers are expected to keep up to date with all relevant health directives
- Volunteers are also expected to keep up with organisational communications
- Volunteers need to keep their organisation informed about their availability
- Volunteers may not always be able to have access to information about clients
- Volunteer MoUs and Codes of Conduct establish rules and boundaries for all
- Your respectful interaction with staff is just as important as with clients





Diversity and inclusion in volunteering

You will come across many different perspectives amongst volunteers, staff and clients from different backgrounds and experiences. There are many people from diverse cultures, sexualities and gender identities, indigenous people and different physical capabilities living, working, and volunteering in aged care settings. Empathy, equity and inclusion are vital to providing optimum person-centred care for aged care clients and to making your volunteering experience as enjoyable as possible. It is especially important to pay attention to these diverse needs when volunteering in aged care settings and if you let them know about any specific needs, preferences or skills, the volunteer manager will be able to carefully match you to individual clients and activity groups. Chat to the volunteer manager about how you can contribute.

Changing capabilities

Sometimes, volunteers experience changes in their circumstances and may feel they are less capable of what they have committed to do as a volunteer. It helps if you have a chat with your volunteer manager about reducing your hours or the demands of your role, for instance, if you can no longer undertake volunteer driving duties or visit your client as regularly. They understand the value of volunteering to your life and may be able to offer you a different, or less demanding volunteer activity which you might enjoy in the future.

Advocacy – your role

Sometimes residents/clients may have a gripe with how they are treated by family, staff or other residents; you are there as a neutral party and can listen to their story. Sometimes there may be substance to their issues, other times it may be a factor of their failing memory or other health condition. Remember to be objective. It is not your role to discuss incidents with care staff or the resident's family members. If you have genuine concerns about a resident's remarks/situation, you should report them direct to your volunteer manager. Confidentiality rules apply and you may not hear about any relevant action taken following your report.

Your skills in volunteering

Sometimes you may have skills or training above the level of volunteer activity you are asked to be involved in, but there may be limitations on what organisations can ask volunteers to do - you should have a conversation with your manager or co-ordinator before you step into doing something which really should be done by a paid staff member. There may be a volunteer opportunity where you can use your skills if you let the organisation know – or you may be able to contribute your knowledge and experiences in some other way that you find fulfilling.



THINGS TO REMEMBER WHILE VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering at an aged care site

- **Role of Volunteers:** Volunteers play an important role in aged care sites adding a layer of social and emotional support for clients.
- **Am I up to date?** Things change constantly, particularly around COVID 19, and you should regularly check current policies, newsletters or notices from your organisation about any changes they have put in place for volunteers.
- **Is my resident available today?** Sometimes they might not be well enough, or they may have been moved to a more intensive care situation. Check to find out if your client is available and you can go to visit them. If you visit on the weekends, make a note of who you need to report to at that time.
- **Do I know who to contact?** Make sure you know the names and work contact details of your site's volunteer supervisor, the volunteer manager and other key staff that you may need to talk to; for instance, security staff on weekends.
- **COVID-19 check in** Don't forget to check in using the required processes.
- **Site check in** Remember to follow any process required at your site. You may need to check out too!
- **Access** Find out which entry and exit doors you can use and if you need to ask for an exit code.
- **PPE and infection protocols** Make sure you follow all site rules about infection control including mask wearing and sanitising.
- **Check messages** Regularly check messages from your volunteer manager and follow any processes set down for visiting your client by your organisation.
- **Boundaries** Remind yourself about any restrictions or boundaries which may apply to your role as a volunteer, such as no feeding or lifting clients or handling money. These are in place to protect your client and you.

Volunteering in people's homes

- **Role of volunteers** Volunteers play an important role in helping clients to age successfully in their own homes.
- **Am I up to date?** Things change constantly, particularly around COVID 19, and you should regularly check current policies, newsletters or notices from your CVS organisation about any changes they have put in place for volunteers.
- **Is my client available today?** Sometimes clients might not be well enough for a visit, or they may have been moved to a more intensive care situation. Check with the CVS Manager prior to visiting to make sure your client is available and welcoming visitors.
- **Do I know who to contact?** Make sure you know the names and work contact details of your duty supervisor and volunteer manager and other key staff that you may need to talk to in an emergency.
- **COVID-19 check in** Make sure you keep a record of all visits because you will not have checked in via an app.
- **CVS check in** Your "homebase" will need to know when you are visiting under their auspices. Do you need to check out too?
- **Access** Make sure you know the protocols about accessing your client's home.
- **PPE and infection protocols** To avoid infection, make sure you have hand sanitiser on hand and, if currently required, wear a face mask when visiting your client.
- **Check messages regularly** check messages from your volunteer manager and follow any processes set down for visiting your client by your organisation.
- **Boundaries** Remind yourself about any restrictions or boundaries which may apply to your role as a volunteer, like no feeding or lifting clients, or handling money. These are in place to protect your client and you.

Volunteering at an aged care site (continued)

- **Reporting and records** Make sure you record any relevant comments about your visit in the volunteer register or online reporting system so the staff and volunteer manager can access them and follow up as appropriate? *Did they beat you at scrabble again! Or were they too sleepy to communicate?* The volunteer manager will have advised you about the processes of reporting any concerns and will contact family or others if required.
- **Keep it friendly** Remember to say hello to staff other volunteers and visitors such as family when you visit, it may help to increase your enjoyment when you feel recognised as a regular visitor and helps them to feel comfortable with you too.

Volunteering at an aged care site (continued)

- **Reporting and records** Report any issues or changes that you notice to the Volunteer Manager following your visit, in person, by email or using the online reporting system. *Was your client well? Did the house look uncared for? Were they ready to be picked up by car or did they have a fall or stumble?* The Volunteer Manager will have advised you about the processes of reporting any concerns and will contact family or others if required.
- **Keep it friendly** Remember to say hello to staff other volunteers and family when you visit, it may help to increase your enjoyment when you feel recognised as a regular visitor and helps them to feel comfortable with you too.

Boundaries: Regularly check the information booklet/ online training modules provided to you as a volunteer to reinforce your practice:

- Infection control measures, sanitising hands, wearing masks and other PPE.
- Not feeding residents/clients or assisting with drinks due to issues with personal safety, dysphagia and other health concerns.
- Not manually assisting residents/clients to get up from chairs or beds or into a wheelchair.
- Not getting involved with resident/client's money matters and personal business.
- Understanding that care staff may be busy caring for their residents/clients and may not appear to have time to listen or do more for individual residents.

It may be useful to revisit volunteer training modules from time to time to refresh your memory or to check for updates. While you may have personal lived experience of caring for an elderly person, it is important to remember that the aged care organisation has ultimate responsibility for the client's care and guidelines and boundaries should be respected in residential care and in homes.

- **Directly recruited volunteers** are engaged directly with the site at which they volunteer
- **Community Visitor Schemes (CVS)** provide opportunities for volunteers to visit people in their own homes or in residential care/ to assist with transport, day centres and other services.
- **Your agreement or commitment** outlines your activities and ensures you understand your commitment as a volunteer. Review any restrictions or boundaries required. Restrictions/boundaries are in place to protect both you and your client.

- **CVS MOU** Refer to your CVS Memorandum of Understanding or contract to understand your commitment as a volunteer and review any restrictions or boundaries required. These are especially important when visiting clients at home. Restrictions/boundaries are in place to protect both yourself and your client.

Communication about your availability: Let your supervisor/volunteer manager know if you are sick. You should stay home and only return when you are well again. Let them know too if you are planning on going away or have another commitment at your regular volunteering time. If you decide not to continue with your volunteer role, don't just not turn up, let your volunteer manager know!

Confidentiality: Confidentiality rules mean that staff cannot tell you details about your client's current condition other than to advise re availability for your visit. These rules are in place to protect the client, the organisation and you. This also means, however, that you may not hear about your client's failing health or even their death unless the person's family are willing to share this information with you. This can be difficult to deal with on a personal level. If you experience issues in this regard, check in with your Volunteer Manager who will advise re any counselling or other support available to you.

What about clients supported by National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)? Anyone volunteering to visit/ support an NDIS client in an aged care or home setting needs to meet NDIS requirements. Some aged care organisations have decided to require all volunteers to follow NDIS worker requirements so that NDIS clients are not disadvantaged in activities where volunteers may be involved. Check with your volunteer manager for more information.

Volunteer Self-care:

It is important to make sure you look after yourself and if you feel like you need some emotional support or someone to talk to about your volunteering, or you are finding your volunteer role physically taxing, check in with your volunteer manager or co-ordinator.

Looking after your own health, as well as practising the infection control measures, social distancing requirements and COVID check in measures are about volunteer self-care as well as caring for your clients.

Remember, if you are finding a particular client or role is difficult or uncomfortable, let your Volunteer Manager know and they may be able to offer another role. For instance, for some people, clients with dementia can be confronting and difficult to deal with on a regular basis. Maybe there is another role for you in the same organisation where you can share your volunteering gift.



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This resource can be downloaded from www.volunteeringwa.org.au/agedcare