

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

## GUIDE FOR POTENTIAL 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. It is important that you comply with all Government requirements. Please check with relevant organisations where you are thinking of volunteering if you have questions.

### Key COVID-19 Takeaways for Current and Returning Volunteers

- Not all COVID-19 changes have suited all volunteers
- Some organisations have created new roles and activities during COVID-19
- Organisational processes are in place to protect clients, organisations and volunteers
- Many volunteer roles will require you to be fully vaccinated\*
- Volunteer roles are also likely to require you to undergo a police check
- Volunteers are required to do training about their roles including boundaries and privacy
- Volunteers are required to do 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

### QUESTIONS:

Make sure you ask them! This will help you to know more about what to do and how to make your volunteering a pleasurable and rewarding experience.

If a lockdown is in place, check to see if or how volunteers are allowed to visit or if you can communicate with your client by other means – phone, letters etc. Your volunteer manager will advise you by the channel designated by their organisation of any new arrangements.

### VACCINATIONS:

**Do I need an influenza vaccination?** Yes, this is a government mandated requirement for staff and volunteers in aged care settings and part of your organisation's compliance requirements.

**Do I need COVID-19 jabs?** Yes\* – you will need to keep up to date with Government requirements on COVID-19 vaccinations.

### Can I volunteer without being vaccinated?

Normally, no, if you visit in person.\* Protecting clients/residents from viruses and other illness is paramount. Ask your volunteer manager about online volunteering opportunities if you are unable or unwilling to get vaccinated.

**What does a Volunteer do?** Volunteers give their time freely to contribute to the wellbeing of aged care clients and are an important contributor to the aged care workforce. They may visit on a regular basis – once a week or a fortnight, in residential care or in client's own homes; they may assist staff and allied health professionals with recreation activities like arts and craft, music and art therapy; they may help with day centre/ elder care centre activities; they may drive a bus to take clients on outings; assist with church services or pastoral care visits; or drive clients to and from medical appointments; they may help clients to write letters to family and friends or to write their life history; some may speak the first language of a client and share memories with them; they may help clients to learn how to use computers and tablets so they can talk to family who may be unable to visit or are overseas or listen to music or movies; they may bring their dog or other pet (perhaps chickens!) to spend time with clients or they may play the piano for singalongs; they may deliver meals on wheels and in many other ways. Volunteers are not paid (apart from some small expenses incurred while volunteering with the Community Visitors Scheme)

Some volunteers may be supported in their volunteering by their own support workers.

### So, what do I have to do to become a volunteer in aged care?

Depending on the organisation, once you have completed an application, you will be interviewed by the Volunteer Manager and you will have to undertake some training (online or in person). Based on your

\* Check Government Directions for exemptions and requirements



interests, you will be carefully matched with a client or an activity. The volunteer manager will organise police checks and advise about appropriate driving tests and licence requirements (for volunteer drivers). You will also be expected to have met all influenza and COVID 19 vaccination requirements.

You will usually be asked to commit to volunteer by visiting on a regular basis that suits both the client (resident) and your own lifestyle. Depending on the organisation you choose, you will receive appropriate training and induction on what you can and cannot do as a volunteer. Community Visitor Scheme (CVS) volunteers must agree to a memorandum of understanding including a code of conduct before being accepted as a volunteer visitor.

In aged care settings, you might choose to assist with supervised social activities, offer clients some company or a service, like driving to appointments, or one on one attention for a short time each week or fortnight.

**Remember, you are not 'just' a volunteer. You play an important role in supporting your organisation's person-centred care model.** Volunteers make a difference through social interaction which helps to reduce the sense of isolation that many clients experience.

#### **I have skills – can I use these when I volunteer?**

You may have professional skills or training, but there are limitations on what organisations can ask volunteers to do. You should have a conversation with your volunteer manager or co-ordinator before you step into doing something which really should be done by a paid staff member.

You will still be required to do the training modules that your organisation provides to guide your volunteering in the aged care context.

There may be other specific volunteer opportunities where you can use your skills, if you let the volunteer manager know.

#### **What will I get out of volunteering?**

Many people volunteer because they want to contribute – 'give back' - to a particular community or activity. This contribution is very valuable to aged care organisations and helps them to deliver support and companionship to their clients. In addition, the act of volunteering brings a personal sense of fulfilment for the volunteer through having done something to assist someone else. It is a good way to meet other people and getting out of your normal routine. Retired people or those who don't have paid employment find volunteering provides a rewarding regular activity when they need to show up, meet others and be part of something. Remember, what you might start off doing will evolve as time and connections increase.

**How can I become a volunteer?** Check the website of an organisation you are interested to know more about or the Go Volunteer website ([govolunteer.com.au/volunteering/in-wa](http://govolunteer.com.au/volunteering/in-wa)). What sort of volunteering do you want to do? Submit an application or express interest. The organisation will contact you for a personal interview to ensure you and the organisation will be a good fit.

#### **How many hours do I have to commit to each week?**

This will depend on the activity you choose to do and the organisation you volunteer with. CVS volunteers commit to do regular visits over 12 months. There are also opportunities for one off volunteering like assisting at special events.

**What if I want to go on holiday or can't be available one week?** Volunteer managers have systems in place to accommodate volunteers who like to travel, or for when volunteers are unwell. Consistency is important for volunteer managers to ensure that clients have visitors/ activity volunteers on a regular basis. They can be flexible if you give them plenty of notice. Make sure you let them know if you are sick and cannot volunteer that week!

**Do I have to sign a commitment/contract?** Usually, yes. This contract/memorandum of understanding will contain information about what you can and cannot do as a volunteer, your agreement to do training, the importance of adhering to confidentiality requirements and your commitment to the requisite activity. You will also have to agree to a police check.

**What about training?** There is important information you need to know about as a volunteer in an aged care setting and you will be advised about training when you start. Training is often via online modules which you can access from your own home or a library. You will need to register completion of this training with your organisation. Sometimes there is also additional in-person training alongside staff available to volunteers. You can ask the volunteer manager or your onsite supervisor if you have queries during your volunteer visits/activities.

**Is volunteering a pathway to employment in aged care?** Yes and no – some organisations will recognise volunteer experience, and others are willing to provide you with a referee report. If this is your goal it is worth a discussion at your volunteer screening interview.

**And if I decide volunteering is not for me?** Sometimes volunteers find they don't quite fit and decide to move on - all we ask is that you let your volunteer manager know. Sometimes a request for a different role or different duties can help a volunteer find a better fit. The key is to talk to the volunteer manager who can help to work out the best options for you

### Diversity and inclusion

Ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion for all people is a key tenet of person-centred care. It is especially important to pay attention to diverse needs in aged care settings including identifying and providing appropriate volunteers to visit and support individual clients and groups. For instance, options for volunteers with a disability, those who need wheelchairs or other support may be available. Volunteers and staff also come from diverse backgrounds and empathy, equity and inclusion are vital to provide optimum whole person-centred care in aged care settings. Not everyone will understand the different perspectives of volunteers, staff or clients from different backgrounds and experience and you will need to be aware of policies and processes in place in your organisation to support clients, volunteers and staff.

If you do decide to become a volunteer – or you are still undecided - you might find the guide for current and returning volunteers offers some more information which will be useful to you.

#### Importantly

– ask as many questions as you need to decide whether you want to volunteer in aged care.

**Most Important! We hope you enjoy your volunteer experience!**

Head to the Volunteering WA website to find your next volunteering role

[www.volunteeringwa.org.au/volunteer/finding-your-volunteer-role](http://www.volunteeringwa.org.au/volunteer/finding-your-volunteer-role)

Search for a volunteer position easily and quickly on the national volunteer database where thousands of positions are listed on behalf of organisations across Western Australia. Users can customise their search by specifying what industry they would like to volunteer in, how much time they can commit to and what location they are willing to travel to.



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This resource can be downloaded from [www.volunteeringwa.org.au/agedcare](http://www.volunteeringwa.org.au/agedcare)