

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

GUIDE FOR SENIOR MANAGERS AND BOARDS

This guide is designed to inform senior managers, executive and board members of organisations which have volunteer programs in aged care settings. It is hoped this will assist with better understanding the role and contribution of volunteers and their managers to

person-centred care. Important: this is a generic guide based on data collected from volunteers and volunteer managers in a range of organisations. It includes some reference to COVID-19 and it is important that you comply with all Government requirements.

Key COVID-19 Takeaways for Senior Managers and Boards

COVID-19 has exposed many pre-existing pressures in volunteer involving organisations

Volunteer related takeaways

- Volunteers at times felt left out or cut off by organisational communications
- Volunteers need to know who to contact and how – not just during business hours
- Volunteers wanted to hear from their organisations
- Specific risk management approaches for volunteers helped keep volunteers engaged
- Many volunteer managers put in unpaid overtime to keep volunteers engaged
- New and creative volunteer roles kept volunteers in touch with clients
- Volunteers often volunteer at more than one site/organisation
- Some volunteers are vulnerable due to age, health or loneliness
- Clear policies about volunteer rights and responsibilities helped access, PPE, vaccinations, client communication, communication about clients
- Reporting on volunteer activities should include stories as numbers are insufficient
- Inclusive approaches to recruitment and retention will diversify the volunteer base
- Many organisations reported a decline in volunteer numbers

Volunteer management related takeaways

- Managers of volunteers put in additional UNPAID hours to keep volunteers engaged
- Managers now have to navigate additional vaccination requirements
- Managers of volunteers worked with volunteers to develop new roles and activities
- Managers of volunteers had to adapt communications for staff to fit volunteer needs
- Volunteer advocacy, boundaries and communications policies came under scrutiny
- Some organisations had not included volunteers separately in critical incident planning
- Some managers of volunteers fit this role into other roles with limited time or recognition
- Onsite supervisor and co-ordinators of volunteers need to be recognised for their role
- Program funding is an important focus for organisations – including funding managers
- Volunteer management is more complex than managing paid staff



About Volunteers: A Volunteer is someone who gives their time freely to contribute to the wellbeing of aged care clients. Board members in many aged care settings are volunteers, although the focus of this guide is on service provision volunteers.

Volunteers in aged care settings are largely service delivery volunteers involved in

- Companionship
- Activity support
- Driving
- Food preparation
- Gardening and maintenance activities
- Pet care and pet visits
- Entertainment
- Clerical, and administrative roles

There are also volunteers who are involved in specialist volunteer roles:

- Dementia care support volunteering
- Palliative care volunteering
- Advocacy volunteering
- Faith focussed volunteering
- Board membership
- Supported volunteering
- Other specialised roles - such as hospital liaison.

Volunteers may volunteer directly with your organisation or their organisation may work with yours to have volunteers come to your clients – in residential aged care or in their own home.

Community Visitor Scheme (CVS): Providers in this government funded scheme match aged care clients with suitable volunteers who visit on a regular basis, either in the client's home, retirement villages, or in residential care. The CVS program focusses on social interaction for target groups.

Supported volunteering: Some volunteers may be supported in their volunteering by their own support workers. Some clients may be supported by other volunteers to volunteer themselves. Supported volunteers will have specific activities allocated to them which suit their ability and may require accommodation to enable their volunteering. This may be organised by the manager of volunteers in consultation with the frontline manager/site supervisor.

Volunteer engagement: Volunteers choose to volunteer and enjoy giving their time to help others. They are not paid, are screened, receive training, have boundaries, and many sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) before volunteering. Volunteers may need to be able to claim expenses be able to keep volunteering and CVS programs require this. They may also enjoy the benefits of volunteering in the form of regular social connection. The personal benefits are often as great as the assistance they offer. Peer to peer volunteering by seniors plays an important role in aged care settings.

Importantly, however, they are not 'just' volunteers as they play an important role in supporting your organisation's person-centred care model. They can make a big difference to individual clients through social interaction and related activities which can help to reduce the sense of isolation for many clients in aged care settings. They also enhance the work of paid care staff.

While volunteers contribute their time for 'free', they require good management and this needs to be fully funded to achieve your goals. Volunteer management is more complex than managing paid staff.

Above all, volunteers enhance the person-centred approach to care. Theirs is not a paid 'care' role and should not impinge on what staff are required to do as part of their employment – nor should they replace paid workers.

Volunteer Management, Support and Co-ordination

"Volunteer managers and coordinators are important but often unrecognised and inadequately supported." (DPMC, 2011). Managing volunteers is a complex and demanding role and volunteer managers, should be well supported and acknowledged. They play a vital role in recruiting, training and matching volunteers with aged care clients and contributing to the successful delivery of person-centred care. They do need to be valued as key staff members in your organisation. This can be achieved by:

- Recognition of the importance of ongoing provision of adequate budgets for managing volunteer activity and allocating staff to support/ supervise volunteers on your various sites. While volunteers give their time freely, it costs money and appropriately skilled staff to manage them.
- Recognition of the contribution of volunteers and their managers to the success of your ethos of person-centred care through including them in your corporate branding and reporting.
- Recognising the importance of the right person in the job of volunteer manager, including knowledge and skills related to volunteering and to the aged care sector.
- Considering where the volunteer manager is located in the organisational structure, how their role fits with other roles such as onsite managers, and volunteer co-ordinators, as well as managers of paid staff.
- Monitor employment conditions and hours of work – including expectations about out of hours work and keeping volunteers engaged
- Supporting ongoing training opportunities for volunteer managers and on-site volunteer supervisors.

- Supporting the provision of up-to-date training for volunteers and staff who manage them. This cannot be a once off as compliance and other requirements change on a regular basis and new volunteers join the organisation all the time.
- Ensuring management or co-ordination of volunteers is specified in the roles of staff who have site-based responsibilities - onsite supervision or co-ordination of volunteers – including day to day volunteer engagement and requirements for reporting back to volunteer managers and other staff.

Your Board: In many aged care organisations the board members are also volunteers. Recognition of their volunteer status and the important contribution they make is important.

Contrasts between Boards and senior management reported in this study included:

- Clear communication about Board members being vaccinated
- Clear communication about Board actions on COVID-19 risk management
- Board visibility at facilities and in volunteer events
- Board communications specifically referring to volunteers as well as paid staff

Compared to

- Distant Boards who did not seem to know much about the volunteers, volunteer managers or volunteer program in their organisation.

Your workforce:

- Volunteers contribute to the person-centred care capabilities of your workforce
- Staff/volunteer interactions contribute to the engagement of volunteers
- Staff and volunteers sometimes need to be reminded to be respectful

Potential questions for your board and senior management

- Does our risk management plan include volunteers?
- Does our insurance set up cover volunteers – even during COVID-19?
- Does our outbreak management plan specifically mention volunteers?
- Do we have a clear policy on volunteer vaccinations?
- Do we have clear infection prevention and control guidelines which include volunteers?
- Do our communications clearly include volunteers?
- Do we need separate volunteer communications?
- Does our website specifically include volunteers?
- Does our structure recognise the role of the volunteer manager(s)?
- Do we have specialist volunteers in our organisation?
- Does the tone from the top send clear messages about the importance of volunteers?
- Is our organisational culture inclusive and welcoming to all?
- Do our volunteers see this board as engaged and interested?

COVID-19

Volunteers are expected to comply with all vaccination requirements and organisations are responsible for checking.

During COVID-19 lockdowns:

During the COVID-19 restriction periods, new forms of volunteering developed including sending letters to residents, phone calls, visiting through windows and using computers and tablets to converse or play games from afar.

Some organisations reduced the hours or stood down managers of volunteers, while others were unaware of the additional unpaid hours contributed to their organisation by their paid volunteer manager to keep volunteers connected and engaged with the organisation and with clients. Some of the challenges faced by organisations beyond COVID-19 are associated with having fewer volunteers return, or with pre-existing issues and concerns having been exposed by the pressures of COVID-19.



Enduring changes coming out of COVID-19

Communications – volunteer managers have made changes to the way they keep their volunteers up to date and encouraged volunteers to go online to keep themselves informed.

Diversity in volunteer age groups – many organisations found that active volunteers over 70 stepped back from volunteering and did not return. Managers are now seeking to have a wider age range in their volunteer cohort. Managers are also seeking to increase diversity in cultural backgrounds, languages, engaging volunteers with disabilities and from LGBTQI+ backgrounds.

Less paperwork – organisations found the need to streamline the paperwork required to be signed by volunteers while still meeting insurance and compliance requirements.

New forms of volunteering have stayed - remote volunteering such as providing social support via video chat, phone calls and letters have attracted new volunteers.

New volunteer roles – some facilities have developed new roles for volunteers such as screening of visitors, writing letters, remote and online interactions with clients, daily phone calls

Online induction and training - many organisations developed additional online induction and training modules for volunteers. A mix of face-to-face interaction with other volunteers and online modules for asynchronous training are operating in many organisations. There is still a need for some face-to-face training in part because it puts volunteers in touch with each other.

People new to volunteering - where volunteers were recruited during the “emergency lockdown”, managers looked for ways to keep those volunteers engaged into the future. A proportion of these ‘new’ volunteers have been found to fall away once lockdown and other COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted.

Vaccinations – volunteers need to be vaccinated in accordance with government requirements

Variations in lockdown procedures - Some sites owned by national organisations implemented semi lockdowns in their premises in WA when further interstate lockdowns occurred. Some volunteers were restricted from visiting clients for extended periods of time. There were varied interpretations of state health advice

Video interviews – while face-to-face interviewing is back, many organisations have been able to change to online/video interviews for initial screening. Face-to-face connection still gives the best indication of whether a prospective volunteer is the correct ‘fit’.

Remember, they are not ‘just’ volunteers.

Volunteers make a big difference to individual clients through social interaction which can help to reduce the sense of isolation that many clients in aged care settings experience.

Volunteers play an important role in contributing to the quality of life of your clients, supporting your organisation’s service provision and the success of the person-centred aged care model.



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