

# Volunteer Community Reference Group

31 August 2021

## Communique #4

The Volunteer Community Reference Group (VCRG) is established by under the direction of the Minister for Volunteering, Hon Reece Whitby MLA with Volunteering WA providing secretariat support. The group meets quarterly and met most recently on 31 August 2021.

In attendance were:

Representing	Name
Hon Minister for Volunteering	Hon Reece Whitby MLA
	Michael Watts
Not for profit / volunteering sector	Craig Spencer, St. John Ambulance, (Chair) Maija Hildebrand, Vinnies WA
Volunteering WA	Tina Williams, CEO Meredith Blais, Senior Policy Advisor
Volunteer Resource Centres	Elizabeth Acaon, Swan VRC Vicki Pollard, Peel VRC
Researchers	Dr Megan Paull, Murdoch University
Individual volunteer (consumer)	Esme Bowen
Department of Communities	Chad Stewart Sue Fielding
Local Government	Kelly McManus, WALGA

Absent:

Dan Mitchin – CEO, Chorus

Gemma Rapson - Woodside

The Chair welcomed Hon. Reece Whitby MLA, Minister for Volunteering. Minister Whitby reflected on challenges facing the volunteering sector, particularly due to COVID-19, and also on how encouraging it is to see volunteers and volunteer programs in action, across the State.

Topics discussed:

### 1. Volunteer Development Services (VDS) program

This review has been completed by the Department of Communities and decisions taken by the WA State Government to provide certainty to existing service providers through offering the opportunity to continue to deliver services for the next five years (subject to Government procurement processes). VDS program services to VIOs and volunteers will be predominantly delivered face-to-face to facilitate participation for all demographics where services currently exist. Surplus funding will be retained in the pool and Service Specifications will be made available.

## **2. Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) program**

An update on the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) program of the Commonwealth Department of Social Services was discussed. Focus areas are to deliver nationally consistent online programs and resources to build the capacity of VIOs and to assist VIOs in breaking down barriers to volunteering for three identified priority groups (people with disability, First Nations People and newly arrived migrants). The program will run for five years to June 2026.

## **3. Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs)**

Given recent decisions of the WA State Government and the Commonwealth Government, there are acknowledged gaps in coverage of VRCs in WA (particularly in the Perth northern metropolitan area, Wheatbelt, Kimberley and Pilbara regions). The Group requested that a map be made available to outline areas of coverage and gaps. There was further discussion on how best to promote and utilise capacity of seniors to volunteer.

## **4. WA Volunteering Strategy Action Plan 2021 – 2023**

The draft WA Volunteering Strategy Action Plan 2021 – 2023 was updated by the Department of Communities further to an out of session held with the VCRG. It was agreed that all partners would be approached to finalise actions and determine how goals could be achieved and measured. Final comments were invited from the VCRG after the meeting.

## **5. Public sector volunteering**

The Minister highlighted ongoing engagement on this matter at a Ministerial level as to how State Government Agencies can promote the value of volunteering to their employees.

## **6. Volunteer screening**

The Group discussed a paper that looked at the comparative cost and nature of State and Territory Governments' volunteer screening across Australia. Volunteer screening in many jurisdictions is free and in some cases streamlined into a single process for volunteering with vulnerable people. There are also options to improve the portability of screening across jurisdictions and VIOs. South Australia is seen as a leader with volunteer screening exempt from State Government charges since 2018. It was agreed that improvements in this area would address the WA State Volunteering Strategy focus area to reduce the financial and administrative burden of volunteering, for VIOs and volunteers alike. It was agreed that this area should be explored further.

## **7. COVID-19 vaccinations for volunteers**

By 17 September 2021 it will be mandatory for all volunteers and workers in aged care settings and some emergency service workers to be fully vaccinated. There is some concern with the impact on volunteer workforces and the need to ensure guidelines are clear and well communicated. Current State and national advice on this matter was circulated to the VCRG. It was agreed that the Committee will continue to monitor this issue.

## **8. Membership of VCRG**

It was agreed that a process will be run in 2022 to seek new one to two new members of the VCRG. This will facilitate renewal while providing continuity and building on relationships and the established work program.

More information on the Volunteer Community Reference Group, including Terms of Reference and membership is available [here](#).