

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submission to the Queensland Government on Volunteering in Queensland Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this inquiry. Volunteering is an integral part of our communities, contributing immense value to organisations, individuals, and the State. However, there are critical issues that must be addressed to make volunteering equitable, accessible, and sustainable for everyone.

Barriers to Volunteering for Welfare Recipients A key barrier to volunteering is the systemic discrimination embedded in Centrelink policies. Many welfare recipients are eager to volunteer but are discouraged because their efforts are often not recognised as fulfilling mutual obligation requirements. This excludes countless opportunities for people to contribute meaningfully to their communities while maintaining compliance with government expectations. Moreover, volunteering often incurs significant personal costs. For individuals already surviving on below-poverty-line welfare payments, the cost of volunteering—such as fuel, vehicle maintenance, and other out-of-pocket expenses—is prohibitive. These financial burdens disproportionately affect welfare recipients, who are often made to feel undervalued and stigmatised by a system that treats them as less than equal citizens. This reflects a deeper cultural issue that requires urgent change.

Volunteering Costs and Exploitation Volunteers frequently provide not just their time but also their resources, skills, and expertise, often at significant personal expense. For example, in my own experience, I volunteered at a local radio station for several years. The preparation required to deliver high-quality programs often far exceeded the airtime itself, demanding hours of unpaid effort. Additionally, I contributed to Disability Week, Australia Day, Suicide Prevention Awareness, Veterans and RUOK events, providing audio, entertainment, and other services for the local council and community. Despite these contributions, I received no reimbursement or support to cover fuel, equipment maintenance, or other costs incurred. As a single parent with no additional breadwinner in the household, these costs were an added burden, making it even more challenging to balance volunteering with financial and family responsibilities. This experience also reflects a broader systemic issue where volunteers—and often women—are taken for granted. Women, in particular, are frequently relied upon to donate their time and expertise, whether through volunteering or unpaid work, yet their contributions are undervalued and inadequately supported. The lack of recognition and financial support for volunteers reinforces a culture where expertise, especially that of women, is devalued. Addressing this imbalance is crucial to creating a fairer, more equitable volunteering sector. This pattern of volunteers being taken for granted is widespread. It highlights the need for policies that ensure volunteers are respected, supported, and not exploited. Volunteers should not be expected to shoulder financial burdens while providing services that are vital to community wellbeing.

Recommendations for Improvement To address these issues, I propose the following recommendations:

- Recognise Volunteering Under Centrelink Obligations** Centrelink policies must recognise volunteering as a valid contribution toward mutual obligation requirements. This would not only encourage greater participation but also provide a pathway for welfare recipients to contribute to their communities without fear of non-compliance.
- Provide Financial Support for Volunteers** Introduce measures to offset the costs of volunteering, such as reimbursements for fuel, vehicle maintenance, or other out-of-pocket expenses. This would make volunteering more accessible, particularly for those on welfare or low incomes.
- Implement Cultural Change** Address the systemic discrimination and stigma faced by welfare recipients and volunteers. This requires a cultural shift in how we value and support those who give their time and resources to benefit their communities. Welfare recipients should not be made to feel inferior, and volunteers should not be

taken for granted. Monitor and Prevent Exploitation Establish guidelines to ensure that volunteers are not overburdened or exploited, particularly in roles that require significant time and resource commitments. Conclusion Volunteering is a cornerstone of community strength, but it must be equitable and accessible for all. Addressing the systemic barriers faced by welfare recipients and providing adequate support for volunteers will ensure a sustainable and inclusive volunteering sector. Thank you for considering this submission. I hope it contributes to meaningful change for the benefit of volunteers and the communities they serve.