

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Submission No:	248
Submitted by:	The Leukaemia Foundation
Publication:	Making the submission and your name public
Attachments:	See attachment
Submitter Comments:	

Parliament of Queensland
Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee
Parliament House, George Street
Brisbane QLD 4000



February 2024

Dear Secretariat - Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee,

Re: Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the *Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland*.

The Leukaemia Foundation is the only national organisation that represents the over 150,000 Australians living with blood cancer – including leukaemia, lymphoma, myeloma, myeloproliferative neoplasms (MPN), myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS) and amyloidosis. The Leukaemia Foundation has deep roots in Queensland, as we were founded by dedicated community volunteers in the early 1970s. From this solid foundation we expanded right around the country. We hold true to being community led and community driven as we serve all Australians with blood cancer with specialised outpatient support.

We provide the following free services to patients:

- Personalised information and support from highly trained Supportive Care Case Managers for patients and their loved ones alongside a range of health and wellbeing services.
- Accommodation near major hospitals around Australia and help getting to and from the many appointments that come with a blood cancer diagnosis. Accommodation is provided free of charge to patients in recognition that they are burdened by significant costs associated with treatment and relocation.
- Trusted information to empower people to navigate the road ahead, including critical education, support groups, booklets, newsletters, and online information.

The Leukaemia Foundation's research program drives rapid advancements in blood cancer treatments, encourages the careers of promising scientists, and helps give Australians access to global clinical trials. We advocate for better policies, better access to new and innovative treatments, better diagnostics and, ultimately, better outcomes so that more people live through blood cancer and live well.

In 2024, the Leukaemia Foundation amalgamated with Bloomhill Cancer Centre which has been providing cancer support services to the Sunshine Coast community for more than 25 years. Bloomhill is unique in providing an evidence-based, nurse-led model of care from a Wellness Centre in Buderim, Queensland.

Volunteers are a vital resource for our community led services. We engage volunteers to assist with service delivery, administration and community-fundraising events. The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the operating environment for the delivery of our in-person care and for fundraising.

We are now redeveloping our volunteer strategy to ensure it is fit for purpose across our range of digital and in-person services delivered through the Leukaemia Foundation and Bloomhill Cancer Centre.

Volunteers are vital to the success of Bloomhill Cancer Care and in financial year 2024, over 350 Bloomhill volunteers provided 79,027 volunteer hours which equated to a value of \$1,975,675. Bloomhill volunteers work tirelessly across many areas including to provide personalised support for those touched by cancer including client care and the wellness centre, and across our retail projects including the community café, cotton tree markets, and op-shops. They also provide invaluable support running our community events and in our garden.

This submission addresses the following Terms of Reference:

1. The current state of volunteering in Queensland and the value it contributes, including benefits to volunteers, organisations, communities and the State;
2. The views of volunteers, prospective volunteers and the volunteering sector on the current barriers to volunteering, including excessive legislative and regulatory burdens and other restrictions adversely limiting active volunteers;
3. The current experiences, motivations and challenges for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations and their recommendations for addressing challenges and improving the volunteering experience
4. The unique challenges experienced by people from diverse backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities and locations, and opportunities to improve volunteering participation, accessibility and experience for these groups;
5. The extent, effectiveness and efficiency of current government support at all levels for the volunteering sector in Queensland and sustainable opportunities for improvement;

Summary of recommendations:

- 1. Streamline volunteer screening and compliance processes:** Introduce a digital registration and matching system to simplify screening and compliance, reducing the administrative burden on volunteer managers and organisations.
- 2. Centralise open calls for volunteering opportunities:** Create a noticeboard on the State Government website to list volunteering roles, making it easier for individuals to find suitable opportunities across the State while reducing time, costs and resourcing spent by organisations to find suitable volunteers for specific roles.
- 3. Reduce financial barriers:** Initiatives such as transport subsidies and increased cost reimbursements for out-of-pocket expenses due to volunteering could significantly improve participation and lessen the cost of volunteering.
- 4. Implement a volunteer matching program:** Implement a program to match skilled workers with local volunteer opportunities to increase volunteer engagement and strengthen the workforce capacity of essential services, including those in health, aged care, disaster recovery, and community support.
- 5. Embed culture of volunteering through education:** Integrate volunteer programs into the public schooling system to get more young people involved and thinking about how best they can give back to the community now and in the future.
- 6. Promote the concept of 'active citizenship':** Encourage a culture of active participation in the community that strengthens social cohesion and enhances community wellbeing, promoting sustained engagement and shared responsibility.

1. The current state of volunteering in Queensland and the value it contributes, including benefits to volunteers, organisations, communities and the State;

Volunteering plays a significant role amongst the many diverse communities in Queensland providing social, economic, and personal benefits by strengthening social connections, supporting essential services, and fostering a sense of belonging. Between July 2022 and July 2023, an estimated 64% of Queenslanders aged 15 years and over volunteered equating to 719.8 million hours or an average of 21.6 hours per month.¹ The value of volunteering in Queensland in 2023 was \$117.8 billion and for every \$1 invested \$4.70 is returned.²

Despite its significant contributions, volunteering participation rates in Queensland have fallen by over 10% since 2020 which is consistent with other Australian States and Territories.³ Formal volunteering is down over 20% and informal volunteering is down over 15%.⁴ The barriers attributed to this decline in volunteering are multifaceted with the top three challenges during the last three years being a decrease in the number of volunteer hours, a higher requirement for volunteer training, and fewer people wanting to volunteer.⁵

While volunteering can provide significant benefits to volunteers and communities such as providing an increased sense of purpose and fulfillment, building social connections in communities, supporting vulnerable groups, fostering multicultural inclusivity, and helping younger generations to gain experience, training and life-skills, it also provides many benefits for organisations.⁶ Volunteering helps to increase workforce capacity to provide more programs to reach more people in need and allows organisations to scale their impact without added financial strain.

In the cancer care sector, organisations such as the Leukaemia Foundation and its amalgamation with Bloomhill Cancer Care heavily rely on volunteers to deliver essential services. Volunteers provide administrative support, patient transport, gardening, kitchen assistance, event coordination, concierge services, and retail and hospitality support in op-shops, community cafés, and markets like the Cotton Tree Markets. Volunteer contributions enhance the quality of care for patients and families, and significantly support the ongoing functioning of the organisation and its impact.

2. The views of volunteers, prospective volunteers and the volunteering sector on the current barriers to volunteering, including excessive legislative and regulatory burdens and other restrictions adversely limiting active volunteers;

Despite the significant value of volunteering, there are significant barriers to utilising this resource ranging from some legislative and regulatory burdens and administrative costs to organise a volunteer workforce.

Legislation and regulations can create barriers to participation, thereby limiting volunteer recruitment, retention, and engagement. Current regulations can increase administrative complexity, delay onboarding, and impose financial and resource strains on volunteer involved organisations. Legislative and regulatory barriers faced in Queensland are quite consistent with the challenges experienced across Australia.

Barriers associated with legislative and regulatory burdens that limit volunteering include but are not limited to:

- Delays in criminal checks and child safety checks, such as Blue Card approvals or renewals in Queensland, preventing volunteers from commencing their roles promptly.⁷
- Burdensome paperwork including training modules, multiple forms and checks that need to be carried out before a volunteer can start.
- Regulatory complexity and inconsistencies between levels of governments such as differences between local and State/Territory government with permit and event requirements, and between State and Territory governments, e.g. Blue Card in QLD, Working with Children Check in NSW which require volunteers moving interstate to reapply, creating unnecessary duplication.⁸
- Insurance costs to the organisation which can include public liability insurance, volunteer accident insurance, and professional indemnity insurance.⁹
- Work health and safety compliance burdens which includes risk assessments, training, PPE, and incident reporting, adding extra administrative work and requires staffing resources to manage.

While volunteering is defined as time willingly given for the common good without financial gain, it is not free to undertake. Both the volunteer and the involved organisation incur direct costs, and it is estimated that the average cost incurred by organisations for volunteering is \$5.09 per volunteer hour.¹⁰ These costs are attributable to the administrative load of managing volunteers, coordinating rosters and organising all necessary training, insurance, administration and paperwork, and ongoing oversight and support. Volunteer managers are essential in ensuring volunteers are adequately supported within an organisation.

In Queensland, the top three important issues and challenges were identified as volunteer retention, volunteer health and safety, and volunteer recruitment.¹¹ Without proper investment into volunteer management positions by organisations, burden then falls onto volunteers leading to poor clarity and expectations about their volunteering role, increased administrative workload, no dedicated point of contact, and difficulty with onboarding and training, ultimately leading to stress, burnout, and low retention and recruitment rates.

Additionally, to address these barriers adversely limiting active volunteers and volunteer involved organisations, the Queensland Government could look to streamline volunteer screening and compliance processes to reduce the delays in onboarding new volunteers. By introducing a digital registration and matching system to enable faster and more efficient placement of volunteers, it can greatly alleviate some of the administrative burden on organisations and volunteer managers.

3. The current experiences, motivations and challenges for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations and their recommendations for addressing challenges and improving the volunteering experience;

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted the way in which the Leukaemia Foundation utilised volunteer roles in the organisation. Pre-COVID, the Leukaemia Foundation engaged several volunteers nationally who undertook roles in administrative support, transport for patients to attend medical appointments, fundraising, and events. During the pandemic, public health concerns and the risk to immunocompromised patients changed the landscape of how supportive care and activities were undertaken which ultimately led to a pause in the volunteering program. Now in a post-COVID society and the new amalgamation with Bloomhill Cancer Centre, we are redeveloping our volunteer strategy to ensure it is fit for purpose across the services we deliver, in-person through our cancer centres and through online and digital channels.

The experience of volunteering at Bloomhill Cancer Centre in Buderim, Queensland has been exceedingly positive with >95% of volunteer retention rates. When first interviewed, volunteers are aligned with the right role for them based on their passion, purpose, and life skills to ensure they are connected to the role. Many Australians are affected by cancer each year, whether that be personally or through a family member or friend, and by aligning that experience with the impact that volunteering can have, a strong community can be fostered that support patients and our organisation in various ways. Volunteers are also acknowledged for their contributions, consider themselves part of the community, and participate in events and awards nights that celebrate their time and efforts.

However, the nature of volunteering is not without barriers and challenges. Cost of living pressures have hindered the time people have to volunteer¹², i.e. greater shift toward dual-income families¹³ and more individuals working past the age of retirement. Due to these financial and housing pressures, capacity to volunteer is significantly reduced as more attention shifts to financial security.¹⁴ This then leads to the decrease in volunteer recruitment which has been seen nationally over the past three years.¹⁵ With lower volunteer retention, heavier reliance on existing volunteers can lead to volunteer fatigue and burnout.

Queensland's older population is increasing, in fact it has more than tripled in the last 40 years with more than 900,000 people (17%) over the age of 65 years in 2023.¹⁶ By 2038, it is estimated that one in five (20.2%) Queenslanders are to be aged 65 years or over.¹⁷ Volunteering is

important in creating opportunities for social interaction, connectedness and meaningfulness for older Australians and those who are post-retirement are often quite ‘time rich’ and have more capacity to give back to their communities. Nationally, those aged over 55 years spent the most time volunteering on average in 2021, committing to over double the hours (263 hours) compared to those under 54 years of age (123 hours).¹⁸ While older generations are heavily involved in volunteering within communities, it can limit some roles and the organisation’s ability to utilise their contribution over a wider range of activities. Thereby it is essential to diversify the available pool of volunteers by stage of life and availability to ensure roles are suitable and safe for all volunteers to undertake.

Additionally, some people have reported either not being asked or not being aware of certain volunteer opportunities meaning there is room for improvement in spreading the word. People also said they could do more roles if there were more opportunities that were suited to their skills. Currently it is reported in Queensland that the most common recruitment channel was via word of mouth, therefore opportunities may not be known to those not as active in their local community.¹⁹ A noticeboard feature on the State Government website could list current opportunities for volunteering across the State and act as a one-stop-shop for people to find roles suited for them at a range of organisations. Promotion of roles and/or matching services can greatly reduce the time, costs, and resourcing spent by organisations to find suitable volunteers for specific roles.

4. The unique challenges experienced by people from diverse backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities and locations, and opportunities to improve volunteering participation, accessibility and experience for these groups;

Many young people lead fast-paced lives with work, study, social commitments, and young families making it difficult to commit to long-term volunteering. Traditional volunteer roles may not align with the digital skills and preferences of younger generations. The open-door policy at Bloomhill Cancer Care allows for flexible, short-term, and casual volunteering, making it easier for young people to engage. Roles that align with young people's interests such as working in cafés, op-shops, events, or remote administrative roles, have been seen to increase engagement and improve retention.

Improving access to cancer care for vulnerable populations, such as First Nations peoples and those who live in regional, rural, and remote areas, is a key principle that underpins the work we do at Leukaemia Foundation and Bloomhill Cancer Centre. Together we work with the communities we serve with lived experience embedded into service design and support programs through our consumer framework. In order to develop a formalised program to serve these populations, community participation and a volunteer workforce is crucial.

5. The extent, effectiveness and efficiency of current government support at all levels for the volunteering sector in Queensland and sustainable opportunities for improvement;

The Queensland Government could consider providing some incentives to volunteer in order to increase volunteer recruitment and retention, especially considering the cost-of-living crisis which is putting significant financial stress on families and the volunteer workforce. With participation rates down in the last three years, there is a larger untapped workforce in Queensland who, if better supported, could contribute to both care and community need. The Leukaemia Foundation sees the potential in formal volunteering programs to support our digital and in-person services. Initiatives such as transport subsidies and cost re-imbursements for out-of-pocket expenses due to volunteering could significantly improve participation.

One of the greatest challenges is to identify the diverse available pool of volunteers across various life-stages that can be aligned to roles that suit their passions, skills, and availability. An example of this is the Australian Volunteers Program that matches skilled Australians with partner organisations in different countries to contribute to achieving equitable outcomes.²⁰ A program similar to that effect including a way to register volunteers could be fostered within the State where skilled workers could be matched to available opportunities in local towns and communities in Queensland. This would not only increase volunteer engagement but also strengthen the workforce capacity of essential services, including those in health, aged care, disaster recovery, and community support.

To further engage younger generations, Bloomhill Cancer Centre has partnered with some local private high schools to give students experience in volunteering and a chance to see the impact it has on the community. Once graduated many of these students have come back and volunteered in more formal roles. Creating the opportunity to imbed the culture of volunteering into the public schooling system will get more young people involved and thinking about how best they can give back to the community in the many years to come.

There is also a current ongoing conversation regarding 'active citizenship' and its importance of motivating community participation. The term 'active citizenship' is broad term that refers to the practice of being engaged and responsible in one's community, that transcends being a passive member of society.²¹ In this context, 'active citizenship' highlights the importance of ongoing participation as a civic duty that strengthens and promotes social cohesion and enhances community wellbeing. Adopting and promoting this term can help to encourage and motivate local communities to actively participate in volunteer opportunities and for individuals to better see themselves as an integral part of the community's success, promoting sustained engagement and a shared responsibility culture.

Conclusion

In summary, by addressing these financial, logistical, and regulatory barriers, the Queensland Government can empower more organisations to recruit and retain volunteers, ensuring long-term sustainability in the sector. By introducing volunteer incentives, creating structured skills-matching programs, integrating volunteering into the education system, and reducing administrative burdens, Queensland can unlock the full potential of its volunteer workforce, ensuring that community and care needs are met well into the future.

We are pleased to offer these policy suggestions to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee and look forward to discussing our submission with you.

Please contact Tim Murphy, General Manager, Blood Cancer Partnerships for further details at

[REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Chris Tanti
Chief Executive Officer

-
- ¹ Volunteering Queensland. (2024). *State of Volunteering in QLD* (p.28). <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/State-of-Volunteering-in-Queensland-2024-Report.pdf>
- ² Volunteering Queensland. (2024). *State of Volunteering in QLD* (p.20). <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/State-of-Volunteering-in-Queensland-2024-Report.pdf>
- ³ Volunteering Queensland. (2024). *State of Volunteering in QLD* (p.38). <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/State-of-Volunteering-in-Queensland-2024-Report.pdf>
- ⁴ Volunteering Queensland. (2024). *State of Volunteering in QLD* (p.38). <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/State-of-Volunteering-in-Queensland-2024-Report.pdf>
- ⁵ Volunteering Queensland. (2024). *State of Volunteering in QLD* (p.8). <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/State-of-Volunteering-in-Queensland-2024-Report.pdf>
- ⁶ Volunteering Queensland. (2024). *State of Volunteering in QLD* (p.111). <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/State-of-Volunteering-in-Queensland-2024-Report.pdf>
- ⁷ McGregor-Lowndes, M., et al. 2017. *Individual giving and volunteering. Giving Australia 2016 report* series commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. Brisbane, Queensland: The Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies, Queensland University of Technology, Centre for Social Impact Swinburne, Swinburne University of Technology and the Centre for Corporate Public Affairs
- ⁸ McGregor-Lowndes, M., et al. 2017. *Individual giving and volunteering. Giving Australia 2016 report* series commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. Brisbane, Queensland: The Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies, Queensland University of Technology, Centre for Social Impact Swinburne, Swinburne University of Technology and the Centre for Corporate Public Affairs
- ⁹ McGregor-Lowndes, M., et al. 2017. *Individual giving and volunteering. Giving Australia 2016 report* series commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. Brisbane, Queensland: The Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies, Queensland University of Technology, Centre for Social Impact Swinburne, Swinburne University of Technology and the Centre for Corporate Public Affairs
- ¹⁰ Volunteering Queensland. (2024). *State of Volunteering in QLD* (p.76). <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/State-of-Volunteering-in-Queensland-2024-Report.pdf>
- ¹¹ Volunteering Queensland. (2024). *State of Volunteering in QLD* (p.52). <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/State-of-Volunteering-in-Queensland-2024-Report.pdf>
- ¹² *National Strategy for Volunteering 2023–2033*
- ¹³ McGregor-Lowndes, M., et al. 2017. *Individual giving and volunteering. Giving Australia 2016 report* series commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. Brisbane, Queensland: The Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies, Queensland University of Technology, Centre for Social Impact Swinburne, Swinburne University of Technology and the Centre for Corporate Public Affairs
- ¹⁴ Volunteering Australia. (2023). *National Strategy for Volunteering 2023- 2033*. (p.22). <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/National-Strategy-for-Volunteering-2023-2033.pdf>
- ¹⁵ Volunteering Queensland. (2024). *State of Volunteering in QLD* (p.38). <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/State-of-Volunteering-in-Queensland-2024-Report.pdf>
- ¹⁶ Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services. (2024). *Who are older Queenslanders?* (p.1) https://www.dcssds.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/3561/population-fact-sheet.pdf
- ¹⁷ Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services. (2024). *Who are older Queenslanders?* (p.2). https://www.dcssds.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/3561/population-fact-sheet.pdf

¹⁸ Biddle, N., Boyer, C., Gray, M., & Jahromi, M. (2022). Volunteering in Australia: The volunteer perspective. In Volunteering Australia, Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods, Curtin University, Griffith University, & University of Western Australia, *Volunteering in Australia 2022 | the Volunteer Perspective*. (p.12), <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>

¹⁹ Volunteering Queensland. (2024). *State of Volunteering in QLD* (p.56). <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/State-of-Volunteering-in-Queensland-2024-Report.pdf>

²⁰ The Australian Volunteers Program. (2025). *About the program*. Australian Government Initiative. <https://www.australianvolunteers.com/about-us/>

²¹ Inside Political Science (2025). Active Citizenship: Definition, importance and examples. *Inside Political Science*. <https://insidepoliticalscience.com/active-citizenship-examples/>