

## **Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

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## Submission to the Queensland Government's Inquiry into Volunteering

MND Queensland welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Queensland Government's inquiry into volunteering. As the Volunteer Manager, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact that volunteering has on our organisation, the individuals we serve, and the broader community. This submission highlights the critical role of volunteers, the challenges we face, and our vision for improving the volunteering landscape.

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### 1. The Number of Volunteers and Their Impact

MND Queensland engages approximately 150 volunteers annually across a variety of programs, including:

- **Mobility Aid Delivery:** Supporting the distribution of essential equipment to clients with Motor Neuron Disease (MND).
- **Administration:** Assisting with essential operational tasks to keep the organisation running efficiently.
- **Client Support Programs:** Addressing unmet needs through services such as lawn care and life story documentation.

The contributions of volunteers are profound:

- They reduce reliance on paid staff, which lowers costs and enables us to allocate funding to critical client services.
- Volunteering provides meaningful opportunities for people to connect with and contribute to the cause of supporting those living with MND.
- Volunteers fill gaps caused by funding inequality and inadequacy, helping address essential needs that might otherwise go unmet.

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### 2. The Role of Volunteers in MND Queensland

MND Queensland provides care and support to people living with MND and their families, builds community connections, raises awareness, and advocates for research. Volunteers are indispensable to achieving our mission. They extend the capacity of our team, delivering critical services such as client support and equipment distribution, and enable us to remain responsive to the needs of those impacted by this devastating disease.

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### 3. Volunteer Support and Areas for Improvement

At MND Queensland, we strive to support volunteers through:

- A **dedicated full-time Volunteer Manager** to oversee recruitment, training, and coordination.
- A **recognition and reward program** to celebrate the contributions of our volunteers.
- **In-house training** to equip volunteers with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed.

However, funding limitations create barriers to providing optimal support. For instance:

- Volunteers share Office365 accounts and laptops due to insufficient resources, which impacts efficiency and limits their ability to work independently.
- Greater investment in technology and resources would enable us to enhance the volunteer experience and increase productivity.

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### 4. Trends in Volunteer Numbers

Our volunteer program was only established in August 2023, and we have observed growth that reflects our investment in this area. However, we anticipate challenges in sustaining growth given broader trends, including cost-of-living pressures and time constraints for prospective volunteers.

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## 5. The Growing Need for Volunteers

The need for volunteers at MND Queensland is increasing. As our organisation grows to meet the needs of the MND community, funding inequalities persist—particularly for older clients, who represent over half of our demographic and are often grossly underfunded. Volunteers are vital in bridging this gap and ensuring that no client is left behind.

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## 6. The Impact of Changes in Volunteer Numbers

- **If we had more volunteers:** We could expand support services to underfunded and unfunded clients, but this would also increase administrative costs and the need for additional resources such as equipment and software.
- **If we had fewer volunteers:** The organisation would face higher costs to manage and deliver services, reducing our ability to provide critical programs to the MND community.

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## 7. Barriers to Volunteering

From an organisational perspective, continuity and consistency are essential to delivering services effectively. However, several barriers hinder volunteer participation:

- Many volunteers struggle to commit to long-term, scheduled roles, which creates risk for time-sensitive tasks that the organisation cannot feasibly complete with paid staff alone.
- Cost-of-living pressures are delaying retirement or reducing the capacity of individuals to volunteer.

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## 8. Opportunities for Improvement in Volunteering

To strengthen the volunteering sector, we recommend:

- **Realistic expectations:** Recognising that charities cannot rely solely on volunteers to meet their needs.
- **Greater understanding at the government level:** Volunteers require management, training, and resources, making them far from a “free” solution.
- **Improved financial support:** Providing targeted funding for organisations to manage and resource volunteer programs.
- **Community education:** Promoting the benefits and rewards of volunteering to encourage participation.
- **Recognition of skill-building:** Acknowledging the broader contributions that volunteer programs make to skill development and workforce readiness.

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## 9. Personal Experiences and Lessons

In managing MND Queensland’s volunteer program, I have seen first-hand the profound impact of volunteering—not only on the individuals and families we support but also on the volunteers themselves. Managing volunteer programs across diverse roles, from social support to life stories and fundraising, has reinforced my belief in the power of community engagement to create meaningful change.

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned is the importance of flexibility and adaptability. Volunteers bring unique skills, experiences, and motivations, and fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment is essential for engagement and retention. A key aspect of my role has been ensuring volunteers feel valued, supported, and equipped to make a difference. This has included providing structured training, clear communication, and opportunities for volunteers to see the direct impact of their contributions.

Another lesson has been recognising the changing landscape of volunteering. Many people now seek short-term or skills-based volunteering rather than long-term commitments. To address this, I have worked on developing volunteer roles that accommodate varying availability while still delivering meaningful outcomes for our clients. By embracing flexible participation models, we have been able to engage a wider demographic.

A challenge within the sector is the increasing reliance on volunteers to fill service gaps left by funding constraints. While volunteers play a crucial role, they should complement rather than replace professional services. Advocacy for sustainable funding and structured volunteer management is critical to ensuring both ethical volunteer engagement and the best outcomes for clients.

On a personal level, leading volunteer programs has reinforced my passion for community-driven initiatives. Seeing volunteers build genuine relationships with clients and knowing that their support alleviates isolation, and hardship has been incredibly rewarding. The power of human connection in volunteering cannot be overstated—it strengthens communities, fosters empathy, and provides a sense of purpose to all involved.

Moving forward, I believe continued investment in volunteer training, recognition, and organisational support will be essential for sustaining and growing Queensland's volunteer sector. Ensuring that volunteers feel empowered, valued, and well-supported will ultimately lead to stronger, more resilient communities.

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MND Queensland remains committed to fostering a culture of volunteering that benefits both the individuals who give their time and the broader community we serve. We thank the Queensland Government for considering this submission and for taking steps to strengthen the volunteering sector.

