

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submission to the **Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland** by the Queensland Country Women's Association.

The Queensland Country Women's Association (QCWA) was born to improve the lives of Queensland women, especially those in regional, rural and remote communities. In 1926, Premier William McCormack described the Association as 'an organisation essential to the social wellbeing of the women...'. Since 1922, the QCWA has provided a safe space where women connect, collaborate and create a social impact across all communities.

The QCWA works to advance education, and social or public welfare for Queensland women by alleviating social isolation, promoting public health, providing aid, and acting as a voice.

Across three Regions, 20 Divisions and 220 Branches, the QCWA is the largest and most widespread women's organisation in Queensland. Our success comes from every member at every branch in every Division.

QCWA has over 3,500 volunteer members, with a full time equivalent of 17 of paid employees. In the 2023-24 FY, it is estimated there were 608,000 volunteer hours associated with activities delivered across Queensland. The replacement cost of these volunteer hours is estimated at \$25.6 million.¹

QCWA can offer valuable insights into the current state of volunteering in Queensland, and we welcome the opportunity to be able to propose ways to improve the sector's sustainability and effectiveness through the Queensland Parliament's Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland submission.

The QCWA has a strong presence in rural and remote communities. Volunteers play a critical role in supporting these areas, particularly where access to formal services is limited. Volunteers contribute to strengthening community resilience, ensuring social inclusion, and providing essential services to geographically isolated populations.

Key QCWA priorities and programs

Advocacy - Finding a Better Way

With the support of the QCWA State Executive Board and the volunteer member base, the Association embarked on a major advocacy initiative in support of a fast-growing group of vulnerable people in 2024.

Dedicated to improving lives through advocacy and providing opportunities for women around health, education, personal finances and community, the QCWA researched the causal effects on women's homelessness. As a result of this research the QCWA published a position paper to

¹ Volunteering Qld, Volunteer Replacement Cost Calculator <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/calculator>

declare the QCWA's stance on the subject and tabled recommendations around government policies and legislation in relation to gender bias that disadvantages women in the areas of employment, superannuation, education funding and healthcare provision.

This is an example of what an Association such as the QCWA can contribute to improving lives for women in Queensland (and Australia), with many volunteer hours spent tirelessly on this position paper and associated companion paper. Grassroots volunteer action is critical in raising awareness and advocating for change and meaningful action from government.

[Finding A Better Way Position Paper](#)

QCWA Country Kitchens

The QCWA Country Kitchens program is a health promotion program supporting communities across Queensland to adopt healthier lifestyle behaviours. It is a partnership between the QCWA and the Queensland Government, funded through Health and Wellbeing Queensland.

The Queensland Country Women's Association (QCWA) Country Kitchens program is a state-wide, community-based initiative aimed at supporting Queenslanders to develop their food and nutrition literacy through five key messages. The Country Kitchens program engages and builds the capacity of a volunteer workforce of QCWA members through a series of training modules to develop food and nutrition literacy and health promotion skills. These volunteers, in their role as Country Kitchens facilitators, are central to program delivery, and drive the implementation of community activities based on capacity and interest.

In 2023-24, there were over 1,400 community activities delivered by volunteers to improve the health and wellbeing of Queenslanders through food and nutrition literacy education. Over 29,000 community members were engaged with these activities; almost double the number that were engaged in 2022-23.

Public Rural Crisis Fund (PRCF)

The QCWA Public Rural Crisis Fund was established in 1990 and provides support for Queensland community members. The PRCF provides financial support to Queensland families and/or households in two circumstances: natural disasters such as flood, fire, cyclones or drought; or general financial hardship.

Since 2018, QCWA have distributed almost \$12.5 million worth of funding to support Queenslanders in need. This has been in the form of grocery vouchers to be used in local stores, payment of household bills, utilities and/or medical expenses.

In Kind Donations

QCWA volunteer members and branches collect and distribute in kind donations for those in need across Queensland and internationally. This includes donations for hospitals and aged care, such as toys, bunny rugs, bed socks and beanies and emergency toilet packs, items for communities in the

Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific, such as birthing kits, school supplies, hearing aids and reading glasses, as well as clothing and linen.

Other donations include packs for women and families in experiencing family violence, Australian Defence Force parcels, wildlife rescue items, clothing and other items for victims of natural disasters, such as fires and floods.

Almost 10,000 items were donated to community projects in 2023-24.

QCWA also provided donations in addition to the support provided as part of the PCRF. This has included the collection and provision of clothing, white goods, such as washing machines and refrigerators. These donations are often sourced locally from towns across Queensland and delivered by volunteers directly to community members.

Key barriers and opportunities

Ageing volunteer base

The QCWA volunteer workforce is ageing, with over 50 per cent of members aged 65 and above. This is consistent with broader trends (around half of Australia's volunteers are aged over 55, and older people are more likely to volunteer in welfare, community, and health settings²). Older volunteers, however, can have more health issues and may be unable to participate in the more physically demanding volunteer activities. They may also have caregiving responsibilities associated with extended family, ageing partners and other relatives. An older volunteer base is therefore a potential risk to volunteer organisations.

Attracting new volunteers

QCWA relies on word of mouth to recruit new members, with limited budget for formal member recruitment campaigns. Awareness raising campaigns delivered or supported by government could help attract volunteers. It was noted that potential volunteers, particularly young people, want a clear understanding of the role; the commitment; and the benefit to them (e.g. social connection, experience, giving back).

Creating pathways for youth to engage in volunteering in their local communities could help build the next generation of volunteers. Encouraging schools and universities to integrate volunteerism into their curriculum and providing recognition for volunteer efforts could support increased engagement with the sector.

² Volunteering in Australia – Key Volunteering Statistics 2024 update
<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Volunteering-Australia-Key-Volunteering-Statistics-2024-Update.pdf>

Costs

Out of pocket expenses are a barrier for some volunteers. Increased costs associated with travel, for example, can place a financial burden on volunteers. This is particularly relevant in rural and regional area where considerable distances may be travelled by volunteers to participate in volunteering activities.

Insurance and Regulatory Compliance

Volunteer organisations, including QCWA, often face uncertainties regarding insurance, including public liability coverage.

QCWA manage and maintain properties such as community halls, low-cost housing and holiday accommodation. Property maintenance and associated regulatory compliance is becoming increasingly challenging, particularly with the increase in costs associated with insurance. Volunteers act as caretakers for QCWA halls, which are a notable presence in many regional, rural and remote communities. They provide an affordable, safe space for community to gather. Increasing insurance costs have led to increased demand on volunteers to raise the necessary funds to pay for insurance, utilities and maintenance of these valuable community assets. This is done through fundraising and grants. Grant applications can be time consuming and require skilled support to ensure successful applications.

There are also some challenges in relation to Bluecard applications, particularly for those volunteers who have limited internet access and/or technological skills. There are also barriers for some volunteers in relation to the online application process and the requirement of a Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) Customer Reference Number, particularly those living in remote areas who cannot access a TRM customer service centre easily.

Technology and digital access

With the increasing use of technology in all sectors, the QCWA suggest ways that technology could enhance volunteer efforts, including digital platforms for matching volunteers with opportunities, online training, and communication tools to support remote volunteering.

Equitable access to technology to assist in improving the digital literacy and capabilities of volunteers is crucial to volunteer engagement, particularly in rural and remote areas. In Queensland, there are ongoing issues with reliable internet access, which is a barrier to the delivery of programs and services, including volunteer training and networking opportunities.

Training and Development

Ongoing training and development for volunteers is critical in ensuring they have the skills needed to effectively contribute to their roles, especially in specialised areas like disaster recovery, aged care, and youth services. Standardised training to cover broader skills, e.g. developing and delivering a presentation; finance; running meetings; and public speaking, could support volunteers in future volunteering or employment. Increasing training options and building skills and confidence may also encourage people to take up leadership roles within organisations.

Policy and Legislative Framework for Volunteering

Although QCWA recognises there is already an implemented Queensland Volunteering Strategy and associated Action Plan, the QCWA proposes the development of a comprehensive state-wide volunteer strategy that recognises and formalises the contribution of volunteers, outlining clear policies that protect and enhance volunteering efforts.

Engaging in discussions about the impact of national and state legislative frameworks on volunteering, such as working with local governments and service providers to better integrate volunteers into community-based programs, would be essential.

Our Vision at QCWA is an enriched life and equality for all Queensland women and our Mission is to provide a safe space where women connect, collaborate and create a social impact across all communities.

We are pleased to be able to provide our insight and a voice for Queensland women to the Queensland Parliament's Inquiry into Volunteering Queensland and we look forward to the outcome of the report later in the year.

If you have any further queries regarding the QCWA submission, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours faithfully



Tamara Stephensen
State President