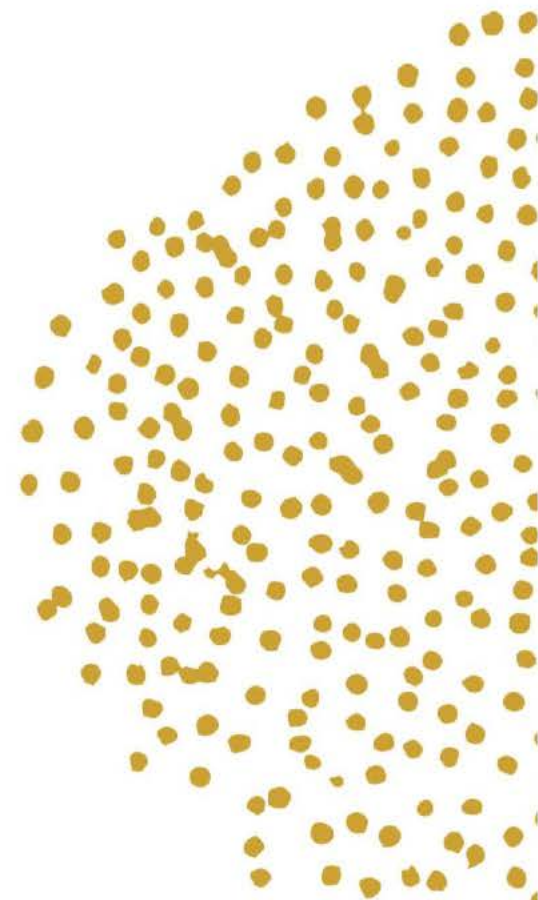
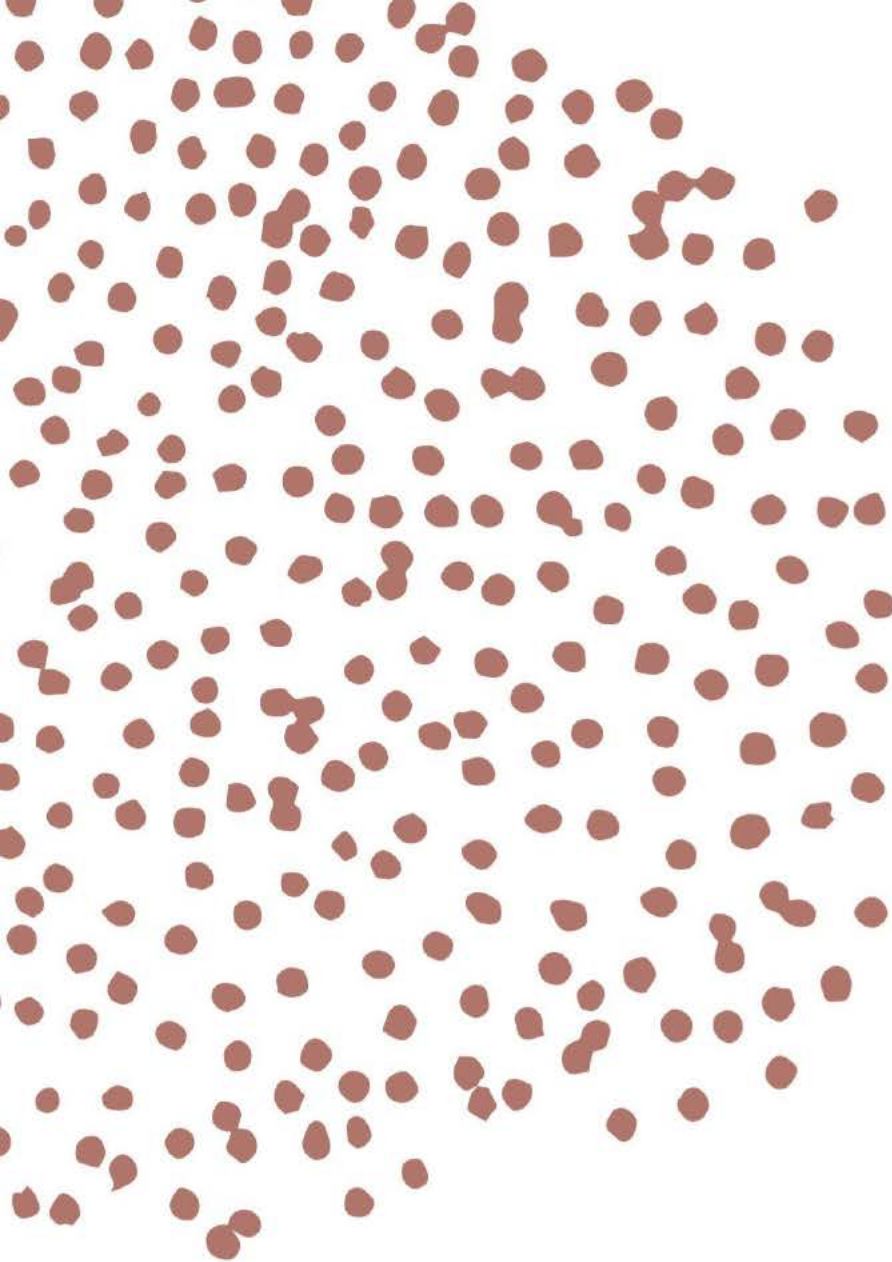


## **Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

<b>Submission No:</b>	393
<b>Submitted by:</b>	Welcoming Australia
<b>Publication:</b>	Making the submission and your name public
<b>Attachments:</b>	See attachment
<b>Submitter Comments:</b>	



## Submission to the Inquiry into Volunteering

Welcoming Australia

27.02.2025

# About Welcoming Australia

Welcoming Australia is a national not-for-profit organisation committed to cultivating a culture of welcome and advancing an Australia where people of all backgrounds have equal opportunity to belong, contribute and thrive. Welcoming Australia operates through several networks, including Welcoming Cities, Welcoming Clubs, Welcoming Universities, Welcoming Workplaces and Welcoming Precinct. Additional information about Welcoming Australia's initiatives can be found below.



Welcoming Cities is a national network of 85 local governments who are committed to an Australia where everyone can belong and participate in social, cultural, economic and civic life. The 85 local governments represent over 48% of the Australian population.

Welcoming Cities recognises that, of all tiers of government, local councils are best placed to understand the complexity and diversity of their communities. Members of Welcoming Cities have unprecedented access to a community of like-minded Local Governments and community stakeholders through: Knowledge Sharing, Celebrating success, the Welcoming Cities Standard and accreditation process and Partnership Development.

Welcoming Cities is a Founding Partner of [Welcoming International](#) – a growing network of more than 300 municipalities across the world.



Welcoming Universities is a network to inspire and support Australian universities to develop a culture and practice of welcome, inclusion and belonging within their institutions, in the community, and across the higher education sector.

Historically universities have not been places of safety and inclusion for all, this is despite the fact that many universities having strong policies and researched focused on equity and inclusion. Welcoming Universities will become providers of choice to both domestic and international students. This model brings rigour to cultural diversity and inclusion, like existing accreditations for areas of diversity, such as gender (Athena Swan).

Currently the initiative has nine member universities, and is working on place based research projects, and a critical study into international student experiences across the university sector.



Welcoming Clubs embraces the power of sport and recreation as a vehicle for inclusion opportunity and belonging. The initiative involves collaborating with sports organisations, councils, facilities and clubs to promote diversity and inclusion, so our codes and clubs reflect the communities they aim to serve and support.

Clubs achieves this through the direct delivery of programs and activities in areas of high diversity and low access for families from migrant and minority ethnic groups (MMEG) including for children with intellectual disabilities, psychosocial trauma, autism, and additional support needs.

Clubs provides training, coaching and learning opportunities to more than 150 sports clubs representing more than 25 codes and activities.



Welcoming Workplaces, an initiative of Welcoming Australia, aims to enhance employer readiness in engaging, recruiting, and retaining a diverse workforce.

The initiative provides employers with the necessary knowledge, resources, networks, partnerships, and frameworks to effectively embrace and cultivate a diverse workforce. Creating inclusive and community-minded workplaces leads to greater worker retention and competitiveness in local, national, and international markets.

## Welcoming Precinct

Welcoming Precincts promote social cohesion and a sense of belonging for diverse communities, including migrant, refugees and receiving communities through sharing and celebrating cultural diversity, building connections and providing a space for people to feel safe to participate socially, culturally, and economically. Precincts are facilitated by local government in



This submission responds to the Queensland Parliament's Inquiry into Volunteering by presenting insights from a comprehensive analysis of CENSUS data and consultations with volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations, and representatives from Welcoming Cities, Welcoming Clubs, and Welcoming Universities. Our organisation recognises volunteering as a fundamental social cohesion and community resilience pillar. This submission highlights disparities in volunteering participation among diverse communities, identifies barriers to engagement, and provides evidence-based recommendations to ensure volunteering remains inclusive, accessible, and sustainable for all Queenslanders.

For further information on any points raised in our submission, please contact Welcoming Australia at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].



## Recommendations

### Leverage National Volunteer Week for Recognition and Engagement

Through targeted awareness campaigns and recognition initiatives, National Volunteer Week should be expanded to highlight diverse volunteering contributions, particularly from CALD communities. This would not only celebrate volunteers but also encourage greater participation by showcasing success stories and the impact of volunteering.

### Strengthen Pathways to Volunteering for CALD Communities

There is a need to strengthen pathways that connect CALD communities with formal volunteering opportunities. By integrating volunteering more effectively into settlement processes, new migrants will have greater opportunities to develop skills, build networks, and engage with their local communities.

### Ensure Sporting and Community Clubs Are Culturally Ready for CALD Volunteers

Sporting and community clubs must take proactive steps to ensure they are culturally inclusive and ready to welcome CALD volunteers. Implementing cultural competency training for clubs will help address barriers and foster more welcoming environments. The Welcoming Clubs' anti-racism training should be widely promoted and adopted as a standard requirement to create inclusive volunteer spaces.

### Endorse the Welcoming Cities Framework to Strengthen Local Council Volunteer Programs

Local councils play an essential role in volunteer engagement, particularly for CALD communities, and should be encouraged to adopt the Welcoming Cities accreditation framework. This will ensure councils are actively fostering inclusive and culturally responsive volunteering initiatives.

### Improve Government Outreach and Support for CALD Volunteer Participation

Government agencies should take a more proactive approach to engaging CALD communities in volunteering rather than relying on passive recruitment efforts. Establishing direct engagement programs, including in-person visits and community-led outreach, will build trust and increase participation.

### Foster Meaningful and Respectful Engagement with Young Volunteers

Young people's disengagement from volunteering is often linked to feeling undervalued and excluded from meaningful roles. To increase participation, the government and organisations must provide leadership and decision-making opportunities, ensuring young volunteers have a genuine voice in shaping programs. Volunteering initiatives should be designed with open dialogue and respect, addressing concerns and creating spaces where young people feel valued and empowered. Rather than one-off campaigns, sustained engagement will help build long-term trust and ensure volunteering is seen as a meaningful and rewarding experience for young people.

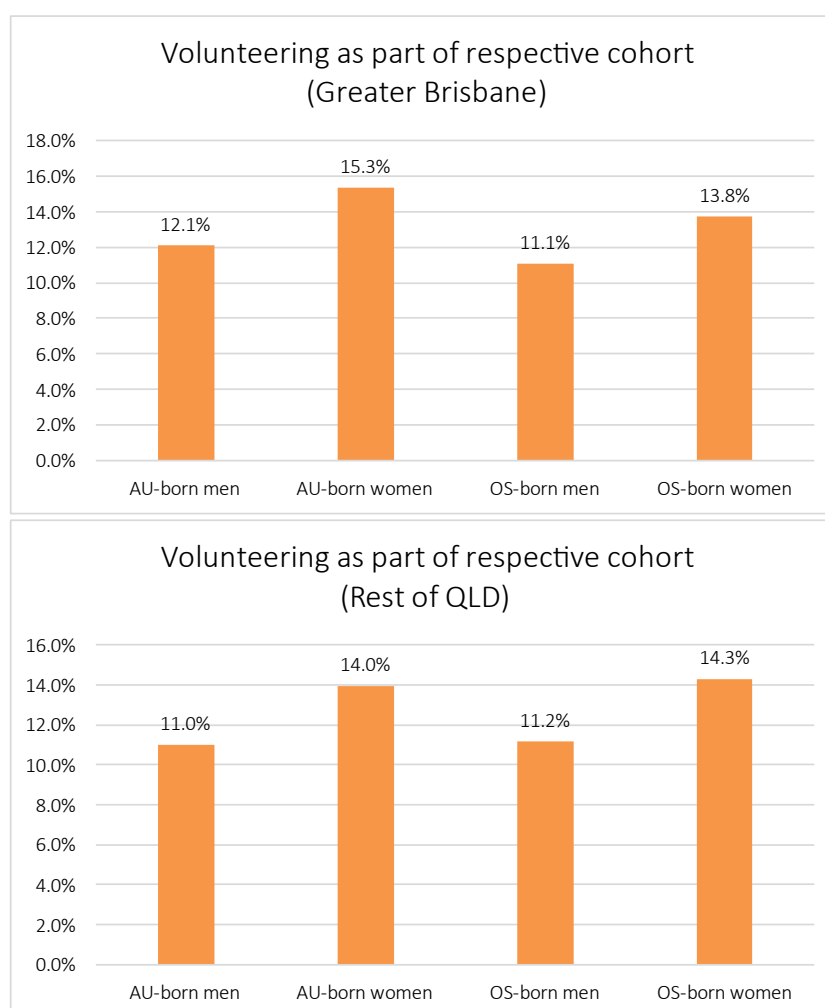
### Foster Sector-Specific Volunteering Strategies and Knowledge Sharing

The current approach to volunteering is often too generic, failing to account for the unique needs of different sectors. Volunteering policies should be tailored to specific industries,

recognising that sports volunteering differs from community service or environmental volunteering. Establishing knowledge-sharing platforms will allow organisations to exchange best practices, improving recruitment and retention strategies. Stronger collaborations between local governments, non-profits, and businesses will help create sustainable volunteering pathways, ensuring the sector remains resilient and responsive to emerging challenges.

## Data Findings

### Engagement in Volunteering



#### Key insights:

- Australian-born women have the highest volunteering rates (15.3% in Greater Brisbane, 14.0% in the rest of QLD), followed by overseas-born women (13.8% in Greater Brisbane, 14.3% in the rest of QLD).
- Both Australian-born and overseas-born men have lower volunteering rates, with overseas-born men having the lowest engagement in Greater Brisbane (11.1%) and slightly higher participation in the rest of Queensland (11.2%).
- Australian-born individuals volunteer slightly more than overseas-born individuals, especially in Greater Brisbane.
- The gap between Australian-born and overseas-born women is smaller than that between men. In fact, in regional Queensland, overseas-born women (14.3%) volunteer at a slightly higher rate than Australian-born women (14.0%).

The data highlights significant disparities in volunteering participation across gender, birthplace, and geographic location in Queensland. Women consistently volunteer at higher

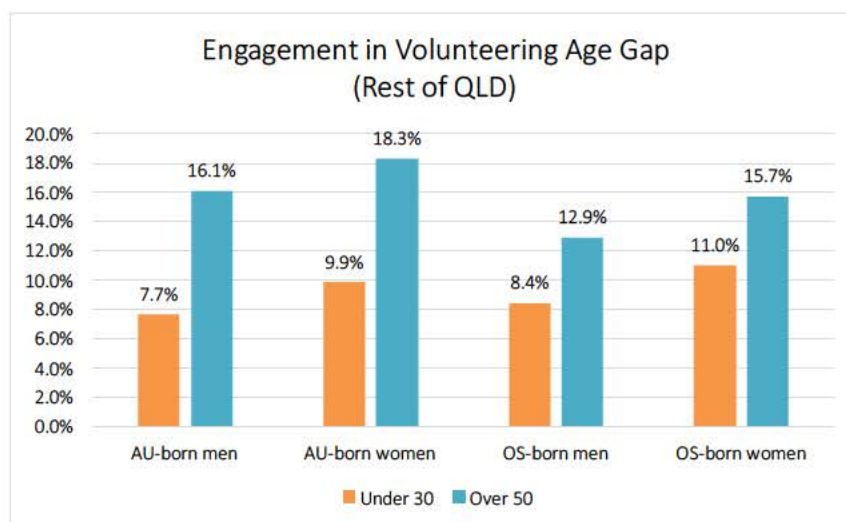
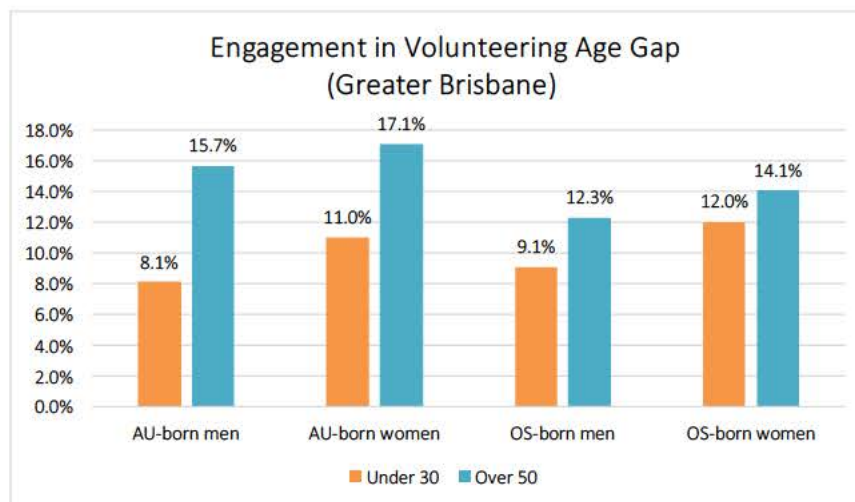
rates than men, regardless of whether they are Australian-born or overseas-born. Australian-born women report the highest levels of participation, followed closely by overseas-born women, while men—particularly those born overseas—volunteer at lower rates. This suggests that social and structural factors may influence men's engagement in community volunteering, potentially linked to workplace demands, differing social expectations, or a lack of targeted outreach and opportunities that align with their interests and availability.

There is also a clear distinction between metropolitan and regional volunteering trends. Women, whether born in Australia or overseas, tend to volunteer more in regional Queensland than in Greater Brisbane. This may reflect the strong role of community networks in regional areas, where informal social structures and greater reliance on community-led initiatives encourage volunteering. In contrast, Australian-born men volunteer less in regional areas than their overseas-born counterparts, suggesting that cultural or community ties might influence engagement patterns differently for men and women. Notably, overseas-born men have the lowest volunteering rates in Greater Brisbane, indicating potential barriers such as language proficiency, lack of awareness about volunteering opportunities, or limited social integration into established volunteer networks.

These disparities have important implications for policy and support strategies. Increasing volunteering rates among overseas-born individuals, particularly men, requires targeted outreach that enhances awareness and reduces barriers to participation. This could include multilingual information campaigns, culturally responsive volunteer programs, and structured pathways that connect migrants and refugees with volunteering opportunities aligned with their skills and interests. Addressing the gender disparity in male volunteer engagement may involve workplace-based volunteering initiatives, mentorship programs, and leveraging sports, business, and professional networks to create more accessible and appealing opportunities.



## Volunteering Age Gap



The data reveals significant disparities in volunteering engagement based on age and birthplace across Greater Brisbane and the rest of Queensland. Older individuals (aged 50 and over) consistently volunteer significantly more than younger individuals (under 30), regardless of gender or birthplace. This pattern suggests that volunteering participation is crucial to life stage, time availability, and community integration.

Australian-born women have the highest engagement across all groups, with older women volunteering at notably higher rates than younger women. In Greater Brisbane, 17.1% of Australian-born women over 50 volunteer, compared to only 11.0% of those under 30. This gap is even wider in the rest of Queensland, where 18.3% of older Australian-born women volunteer compared to just 9.9% of younger women.

Men, particularly Australian-born men, have the lowest volunteering rates in both age groups. Young Australian-born men have the lowest engagement in volunteering across all demographics, with only 8.1% participation in Greater Brisbane and 7.7% in the rest of Queensland. Even among those over 50, their engagement is significantly lower (15.7% in Greater Brisbane and 16.1% in regional Queensland) than women of the same age group. This

highlights a persistent gender gap in volunteering, where women are more likely to engage in community service roles than men.

For overseas-born individuals, the age gap is present but less pronounced compared to their Australian-born counterparts. Overseas-born women show relatively strong participation across both age groups, with younger women volunteering at higher rates (12.0% in Greater Brisbane and 11.0% in the rest of Queensland) than young men. Older overseas-born women still volunteer at the highest rates (14.1% in Greater Brisbane and 15.7% in the rest of Queensland), indicating that cultural or social expectations around community involvement may play a role in engagement.

These findings suggest the need for targeted interventions to boost volunteering participation among younger individuals, particularly young men, with the lowest engagement rates. Additionally, efforts should be made to engage older volunteers more effectively, particularly overseas-born individuals who may face barriers such as language, cultural differences, or limited awareness of volunteering opportunities.

## Consultation Findings

The consultations revealed significant challenges affecting volunteering engagement across different communities and sectors. While volunteering remains a crucial pillar of social cohesion, various barriers—including bureaucratic red tape, financial costs, and lack of cultural inclusion—lead to declining participation. These discussions highlight the urgent need for systemic reform, increased government support, and more inclusive approaches to volunteering.

### Declining Volunteer Numbers and Burnout

Many organisations reported a sharp decline in volunteer participation, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, which created a “lost generation” of volunteers who have not returned. The shrinking pool of volunteers has increased the burden on those who remain, leading to burnout, especially in sectors with high administrative demands.

- Some volunteers contribute excessive hours each week to sustain operations, making it unsustainable in the long term.
- Increasing regulatory requirements, such as the time needed to obtain a BlueCard, liability concerns, and administrative reporting, discourage participation.
- In some cases, paid staff within organisations add to the workload of volunteers rather than reducing it, further frustrating them.

### Barriers to Formal Volunteering in CALD Communities

While many culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities engage in high levels of informal volunteering, they remain underrepresented in formal volunteering roles. Many individuals do not feel welcomed into structured volunteering programs despite a willingness to participate.

- Some groups have actively offered their support to formal volunteering organisations but have never received a response, highlighting a lack of cultural awareness and potential discrimination in engagement strategies.
- Volunteering is understood differently across cultures, and the Australian model of structured, formal volunteering may not resonate with all communities.
- Government and mainstream organisations rarely engage directly with diverse communities to encourage participation, missing opportunities to build inclusive volunteer networks.

### Financial Costs as a Barrier to Volunteering

The cost of volunteering is a significant deterrent, particularly for individuals from low-income backgrounds. While volunteering is often framed as a social good, it comes with financial burdens, making participation inaccessible for many.

- Volunteers frequently incur costs such as transport, parking, uniforms, and equipment without reimbursement or support.
- The expectation that people will volunteer their time without financial assistance assumes privilege, reinforcing inequalities in who can afford to engage in volunteering.

### Need for Incentives and Recognition

Several participants highlighted the need for greater recognition of volunteers and incentives to encourage broader participation. Without tangible benefits, attracting and retaining volunteers is becoming increasingly difficult.

- Volunteering expos and national recognition weeks should be leveraged to increase visibility, promote success stories, and create recruitment opportunities.
- Volunteering could be better integrated into employment pathways, particularly for migrants, who often use volunteering as a stepping stone into paid work.

### Challenges in Engaging Young Volunteers

There have been reports of hostile attitudes toward young people volunteering, further discouraging participation.

- Many organisations fail to adapt volunteer opportunities to younger generations, relying on outdated models that do not align with young people's skills, interests, or availability.
- Negative stereotypes about youth engagement in communities create barriers to participation, reinforcing intergenerational divides.