

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Introduction

This submission is presented by Suncare Community Services to contribute to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland. As a community service provider operating from Brisbane to Rockhampton, Suncare has firsthand experience of the critical role volunteers play in delivering essential services to vulnerable community members, particularly older Queenslanders.

Our submission is informed by comprehensive data collected through our July 2024 Volunteer Experience Survey, which achieved high engagement rates and provides valuable insights into the motivations, experiences, and needs of volunteers in community service organisations.

About Suncare Community Services

Suncare Community Services is committed to supporting older Queenslanders to live independently in their own homes and communities. Our volunteers are integral to achieving this mission, complementing our professional services with compassionate community connection.

Suncare's Volunteer Programs

Suncare offers volunteering opportunities across five distinct areas:

1. **Community Transport:** Volunteers provide essential transportation services allowing customers to attend medical appointments, visiting shopping facilities, and participating in social activities.
2. **Aged Care Volunteer Visitor Scheme (ACVVS):** Volunteers conduct regular (daily/weekly) visits to older Queenslanders, reducing social isolation and providing companionship.
3. **Meals on Wheels Delivery:** Volunteers ensure nutritious meals reach vulnerable community members who might otherwise struggle with healthy food preparation.
4. **Meals on Wheels Kitchen:** Volunteers assist in healthy meal preparation, ensuring quality and nutritional standards are maintained.

5. Activities and Outings: Volunteers provide companionship and facilitate social interactions to ensure the wellbeing of the community

Key Statistics

In 2025, Suncare's volunteer contribution has been substantial:

- 182 active volunteers across our programs.
- Nearly 21,000 hours of formal volunteering support provided.
- 5,724 customer transport services delivered.
- 9,090 volunteer visitor scheme visits conducted.

Our volunteer demographics reveal:

- Median age of 67 years.
- Gender distribution of 67% female and 33% male.
- Notable gender variance across programs, with Community Transport and Meals on Wheels delivery attracting a higher proportion of male volunteers.

Our July 2024 Volunteer Experience Survey provides additional context to these statistics:

- Distribution of volunteers across program areas: Aged Care Volunteer Visitor Scheme (37%), Community Transport (33%), Meals on Wheels Deliveries (13%), Meals on Wheels Kitchen (11%), and Activities and Outings (8%)
- 81% of volunteers are "promoters" of our volunteer program (would highly recommend volunteering with Suncare to others)
- 90% of volunteers report positive experiences across all measured dimensions
- 100% of volunteers report gaining a sense of accomplishment from their contribution
- 98% feel proud to tell others they volunteer at Suncare
- 98% believe Suncare makes a positive difference in the community
- Our annual volunteer replacement cost at Suncare is approximately \$1M

Contextualizing Suncare's Experience Within Queensland's Volunteering Landscape

The challenges and successes experienced by Suncare reflect broader trends in volunteering across Queensland. Research indicates that formal volunteering rates in Queensland have been declining, with the COVID-19 pandemic accelerating this trend. Despite this, the economic and social value of volunteering remains immense, with volunteers contributing billions to Queensland's economy annually.

The demographic profile of Suncare's volunteers mirrors state-wide patterns, with older Queenslanders forming the backbone of many volunteer programs. While this demonstrates the incredible contribution of seniors to community welfare, it also highlights concerns about volunteer sustainability and the need to attract younger participants.

Our Volunteer Experience Survey reveals important insights about retention and motivation:

- Volunteer tenure is diverse, with 27% having volunteered for less than a year, 24% for 1-2 years, 30% for 3-5 years, 10% for 6-10 years, and 7% for more than 10 years.
- Our Net Promoter Score of 80 indicates extremely high volunteer satisfaction and loyalty.
- Volunteers report strongest positive associations with impact (98% positive), feeling their contributions support Suncare's purpose (98% positive), and organizational alignment (94% positive).
- Areas where volunteers indicate opportunities for improvement include training (particularly the desire for regular, ongoing training opportunities at 43% positive), communication about changes (81% positive), and comprehensive orientation for new volunteers (82% positive).

Recommendations

Based on our experience and backed by data from our Volunteer Experience Survey, Suncare Community Services recommends the following actions to strengthen volunteering in Queensland:

1. **Enhanced Recognition and Support:** Develop structured recognition programs acknowledging the contribution of volunteers, particularly long-term participants. Our survey data shows that 93% of volunteers feel appropriately recognised and appreciated, highlighting the importance of recognition in volunteer retention.
2. **Improved Training Frameworks:** Establish dedicated funding and resources for comprehensive volunteer training programs. Only 43% of our volunteers reported satisfaction with opportunities for regular and ongoing training, representing our most significant area for improvement and likely reflecting a sector-wide challenge.
3. **Reduced Administrative Burden:** Streamline regulatory requirements and create standardised procedures for volunteer onboarding across the state. With only 82% of volunteers reporting satisfaction with orientation and induction processes, there is clear opportunity to enhance these initial experiences.
4. **Targeted Recruitment Strategies:** Implement campaigns specifically designed to attract diverse volunteer demographics, including younger Queenslanders and those from culturally diverse backgrounds. Our volunteer base shows strong representation of seniors (median age 67), indicating a need for inter-generational volunteering approaches.
5. **Enhanced Communication Practices:** Develop resources and training for volunteer-involving organisations to improve communication with volunteers, particularly around organisational changes. Our survey revealed that only 81% of volunteers felt adequately consulted about changes impacting them.
6. **Financial Support for Volunteer-Involving Organisations:** Increase funding for training, coordination, and support of volunteer programs, with particular emphasis on volunteer coordinator roles who serve as vital links between organisations and volunteers.
7. **Technology Integration:** Invest in digital platforms that facilitate volunteer matching, training, and management, making the volunteering experience more accessible and efficient while improving data collection on the sector's impact.

Conclusion

Volunteering is not merely a nice-to-have addition to Queensland's community services; it is an essential component without which many vulnerable Queenslanders would face significant hardship. Suncare's experience demonstrates both the immense value volunteers provide and the challenges in sustaining volunteer programs.

Our Volunteer Experience Survey confirms the profound personal benefits experienced by volunteers themselves. The fact that 100% of our volunteers' report gaining a sense of accomplishment from their contribution, 98% feel proud of their volunteering, and 98% believe they are making a positive difference highlights the reciprocal nature of the volunteering relationship. This reciprocity is critical to understand when designing policy frameworks to support the sector.

We also note that different volunteer programs experience different challenges and require tailored approaches. Our data shows variation across service types, with training and support satisfaction ranging from 69% in Meals on Wheels Deliveries to 85% in Meals on Wheels Kitchen, indicating that a one-size-fits-all approach to volunteer management is insufficient.

We urge the Parliamentary Inquiry to recognise the critical role of volunteering in Queensland's social infrastructure and to implement measures that will ensure its sustainability and growth in the coming decades. With an aging population increasing demand for community services, supporting our volunteer workforce has never been more important.

Contact Information

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