

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Advancing volunteering participation in Queensland

Cancer Council Queensland submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

Introduction

As the state's leading non-government for-purpose cancer control organisation, Cancer Council Queensland appreciates the opportunity to provide a comprehensive response to the Queensland Government's Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering. Cancer Council Queensland welcomes the establishment of a dedicated ministerial portfolio for volunteering to provide leadership and address complex sector challenges.

The submission highlights the critical contributions and far-reaching benefits of volunteering within Cancer Council Queensland (CCQ), outlines key challenges impacting volunteer engagement and retention, and provides targeted recommendations for government action to strengthen, sustain, and expand the volunteer sector.

CCQ exemplifies the profound impact of volunteering on both individual and societal wellbeing. Volunteers are integral to CCQ's mission, providing crucial support services such as peer support, patient transport, and fundraising to support our frontline services and programs. With a 1:25 employee-to-volunteer ratio, the majority of CCQ's services are enabled, supported, or directly delivered by volunteers.

CCQ offers a diverse range of volunteering opportunities, allowing individuals to contribute based on their skills, interests, and personal connection to the cause. Volunteers serve in essential roles, including Transport to Treatment drivers, phone-based and hospital-based peer support, wig and turban service volunteers, student and research interns, office administration, and accommodation lodge volunteers in Cairns, Rockhampton, Townsville, Toowoomba, and Brisbane. Additionally, local branch volunteers and major event teams for Relay for Life and Daffodil Day help drive fundraising and community awareness. Each of these roles are essential in ensuring that Queenslanders affected by cancer receive the care, support, and resources they need.

So many of our volunteers bring a lived experience of cancer to the organisation that is crucial to CCQ operating with integrity and fulfilling our mission to ensure that no Queenslanders faces cancer alone. Our volunteers' firsthand understanding of the challenges faced by

individuals affected by cancer—including patients, caregivers, and families—uniquely equips them to provide empathetic and practical support.

Whether formally engaged in peer support programs or contributing through roles such as patient transport drivers, local branch volunteers, or those assisting in our wig and turban service, volunteer lived experience provides a deep sense of solidarity and comfort to those impacted by cancer.

The presence of lived experience through volunteers within our organisation provides invaluable insights into how we can best support Queenslanders affected by cancer, ensuring that programs and services remain relevant and responsive. They enable us to foster a stronger, more compassionate network of care across Queensland.

Beyond direct patient interaction, volunteers with lived experience also play a critical role in CCQ's community awareness and education campaigns. Volunteer stories and perspectives strengthen the credibility of our public messaging, help to dismantle stigma, and contribute to cancer prevention efforts. Importantly, they also enhance the effectiveness of CCQ's outreach in underrepresented communities, ensuring that culturally and socially diverse experiences are reflected in our support services.

Indeed, volunteering is a critical mechanism for ensuring that health promotion, treatment, and end-of-life care are delivered in a way that is deeply embedded within local communities. Through our volunteers, who have established trust and strong connections within their communities, we are able to provide place-based interventions and support that complement the healthcare system, reaching individuals who may otherwise face barriers to access.

Volunteers at CCQ not only contribute their time and expertise but also benefit from personal growth, skill development, and a strong sense of social connectedness. Research has consistently shown that volunteering fosters a deep sense of belonging and community cohesion, reducing social isolation and loneliness. Studies on community participation highlight that volunteers experience enhanced psychosocial connections with the communities they serve, reinforcing positive mental wellbeing and resilience.¹ Particularly among older adults and individuals facing health challenges, volunteering has been shown to provide demonstratable health benefits.² As highlighted in the *Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032*, 'By building more inclusive, accessible and connected communities

¹ Talò, C., Mannarini, T., & Rochira, A. (2014). Sense of community and community participation: A meta-analytic review. *Social indicators research*, 117(1), 1-28.

² Volunteering Queensland (2024). *State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024*, p111.

through volunteering, we can create better social, cultural, religious, spiritual, and place-based connections to environments and people, to drive social inclusion.’³

You do these things because you want to—because you enjoy them. Once you retire, it’s essential to have a hobby and engage in activities outside the house. Volunteering has been a meaningful part of my life for over three decades. I was a Deputy Captain in the NSW Rural Fire Service and a founding member of the NSW Rural Fire Service Association, where I helped establish a shop to raise funds in support of volunteer work. Now, at this stage of my life, I continue to give back by working with Cancer Council Queensland approximately 3 days a week (and up to five days a week during the pandemic) as a patient transport driver for our Charles Wanstall Apex Lodge. The connection I feel to the organisation’s purpose runs deep.

This role goes far beyond simply driving patients to treatment. We build strong, personal relationships with those we transport, offering them comfort and support during a difficult time. While we are not psychologists or doctors, if a patient needs to talk, we’re always there to listen.

The Transport to Treatment program—almost entirely volunteer-run—provides a critical service, offering transportation from accommodation lodges to hospitals (in Brisbane, that is primarily the Mater, RBQH and the PA), as well as from patients’ homes to hospitals. This service is so important for patients who are often very unwell and lack access to public transport. One regular patient I pick up from her home would have to take four different buses if this service weren’t available.

We operate on a tight budget and, as a rule, avoid toll roads unless absolutely necessary. However, during peak hours, bypassing tolls can add extra hours on the road each day. In some cases, patients have unfortunately arrived late to their treatment appointments because volunteers avoided toll roads. We also do airport pickups and drop-offs for our regional patients, and the organisation has to pay airport e-tag fees each time. It would make such a difference if the government recognised the importance of these kinds of health transport services and covered our toll costs when needed. The fees quickly add up.

Robert Till, Volunteer Transport to Treatment Driver, Charles Wanstall Apex Lodge; 31 years volunteer experience and former Institutional Banking Executive (St George Bank; ANZ; NAB; CommBank)

³ The State of Queensland, Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts, 2024. Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032, p.26.

When my husband was diagnosed with prostate cancer 10 years ago, we joined a local support group that ran out of the Cancer Council Queensland office in Brisbane. During one of these meetings, a staff member dropped in, saying they were absolutely desperate for volunteers. After my husband's surgery, we started volunteering 1-2 days a fortnight, packing and posting cancer information resources across the state.

We wouldn't do it if we didn't love it. There are people out there who have been diagnosed with cancer, and they need this information. If I were diagnosed and didn't have access to information, I would be desperate to find out as much as possible. The service we provide helps so many people and knowing that makes it worthwhile.

I'm a registered nurse by profession and have spent decades working with cancer patients since the 1970s, so I feel deeply connected to the mission. When my first-born was just five months old, I started working on the children's ward at the Holy Spirit Hospital on Wickham Terrace (now Brisbane Private Hospital). It was incredibly emotional work—many children on the ward had leukemia or had lost organs due to tumours, and sadly, many did not survive. Later, I worked in the gastroenterology department, where I again cared for many patients with cancer diagnoses.

While my main role at CCQ is packing and posting resources, I've also taken on other projects as needed. A few years ago, I did an audit of cancer support groups in Queensland to find out which ones were still active. Surprisingly, many were not. This work helped update the services directory that the 13 11 20 support line uses to refer patients and carers to the right support services.

I contribute in other ways, too. I have some qualifications in fashion design, so I spend a lot of my spare time making baby quilts that are sold at fundraising events like Daffodil Day.

Beyond my CCQ volunteering, I volunteer with Queensland Police Department at least one day a week (sometimes more). On top of that, family keeps me busy. Even though my grandchildren are young adults now, we help in supporting them with their studies with them living with us from time to time and doing 'taxi runs'.

Balancing everything can be challenging, and there are things that could be improved to make volunteering easier. I struggle with online training, especially logging in with usernames and passwords. I rely on my grandson for help, but my preference would be hard copy resources or face-to-face sessions. If a digital literacy program were offered to volunteers, I would participate (providing it was flexible). Better support would help volunteers like me who want to contribute but struggle with technology.

Volunteering has become an important part of my life, and I feel privileged to be able to give back in different ways. Not only does it help others, but particularly in retirement, it is such an important aspect of enriching my life in providing mental and social stimulation.

Julie and Albert Lee, CCQ Pack and Post Volunteers

Most of us have a reason for taking on the role of volunteering. For our committee, we have been affected by cancer – either personally or through a family member.

Volunteering provides a sense of purpose, and an opportunity to give back. Volunteering also provides opportunities to help raise necessary funds for research or support. Volunteers provide community members access to information about the services and supports available.

Debbie Thorpe, CCQ Bribie Island Volunteer Branch Secretary since 2019 and former teacher of 41 years. Debbie also volunteers with Village Tails, an animal rescue group.

Judy Lee, CCQ Bribie Island Volunteer Branch Chairperson and volunteer for over 20 years. Judy also volunteers with the Bribie Island District and Community Association.

Recommendations:

CCQ's recommendations to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland align with the **National Strategy for Volunteering 2023–2033**, directly addressing key strategic objectives within the government's capacity to strengthen and sustain an effective volunteering sector in Queensland.

For the Committee's consideration, these recommendations specifically support the following objectives of the National Strategy:

[1.2 Make Volunteering Inclusive and Accessible](#)

[2.4 Enable a Community-Led Approach](#)

[3.3 Commit to Strategic Investment](#)

1. Reduce financial barriers for volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) through full or co-funding of volunteer insurance costs and background checks.
2. Subsidise VIO investment in Volunteer Management Systems (VMSs) to enable rapid cross-organisational volunteer deployment and streamline training, compliance, and reporting through a centralised and efficient digital system.
3. Rebates or full exemptions on toll/ e-tag charges for volunteer health transport services to allow drivers to take the most efficient routes without VIOs incurring extra costs.

4. Reduce administrative barriers for volunteers by implementing a streamlined background check system (extending beyond Blue Cards to Traffic and Criminal History Checks) that allow volunteers to transfer clearance across multiple organisations.
5. Explore investment in regional volunteering infrastructure, such as organisation-agnostic volunteer hubs, to enhance volunteer service sustainability and accessibility in rural and remote regions, providing communal IT resources for volunteers, and strengthen collaboration and resource-sharing among VIOs.
6. Invest in funding, training, and resources to VIOs to develop volunteer to employment programs for priority population groups, including First Nations people, persons with disabilities, newly arrived migrants, and unemployed youth.
7. Establish mutual incentives for nonprofits and corporate partners to enhance and expand employer-supported volunteering initiatives.
8. Prioritisation of a volunteering recruitment and legacy strategy for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games to ensure long-term community engagement across Queensland, including expanding the Volunteer Passport to recognise and incentivise non-sporting volunteer roles.

The changing nature of volunteering

Despite a statewide decline in volunteering participation, as reported by Volunteering Queensland, CCQ's volunteer cohort has surpassed pre-pandemic levels, reaching a record-high of over 5,000 volunteers.⁴ Our growth rate has also accelerated, nearing 650 new volunteers per annum.

However, the nature of volunteering has undergone a significant shift towards episodic and cross-organisational volunteering. While CCQ's overall volunteer numbers have increased, fewer volunteers are available for predictable, consistent hours, or what is referred to in the academic literature as the 'traditional' model of long-term high-commitment volunteering.⁵ CCQ engages a diverse, multi-modal volunteer workforce, encompassing traditional, intermittent, and cross-organisational volunteers. Anecdotal insights indicate that many CCQ volunteers actively contribute across multiple organisations or juggle formal and informal volunteering commitments, such as caregiving responsibilities. This shifting

⁴ Volunteering Queensland 2024, State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024, p7, p25 and p38.

⁵ McLennan, B. J. 2021. Emergency volunteering 2030: A sector-wide, snapshot view. Melbourne: RMIT University and Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC.

volunteer landscape highlights the need for adaptability in volunteer management strategies and greater investment in flexible, sustainable volunteering models to ensure continued community impact.

Government investment in dedicated VMS platforms would assist in facilitating a more agile, shared volunteer workforce. Additionally, implementing a streamlined system for background checks across organisations, along with standardised compliance and health and safety training where appropriate, would significantly reduce administrative burdens for both VIOs and volunteers.

Addressing regional volunteer gaps

Volunteers in rural, regional, and remote areas face significant challenges in accessing structured volunteer service opportunities, limiting their ability to contribute effectively to their communities. Queensland's vast geography presents specific barriers, including long travel distances, limited volunteer coordination infrastructure, and fewer locally available resources. These challenges can result in volunteer burnout, reduced retention, a disconnect from statewide volunteer networks, and difficulties in activating community support. While CCQ provides services across the state and has accommodation lodges from Far North Queensland to Brisbane, many rural and remote communities have limited on the ground support.

CCQ recommends targeted, whole-of-government investment in regional volunteer infrastructure, including an investigation into the feasibility of a regional volunteer hub model. This approach could leverage insights from the Regional University Study Hub model, implemented by the Federal Department of Education, to assess the potential effectiveness in enhancing accessibility, coordination, and support for volunteers in rural and remote communities.

Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment and Skills Recognition

Volunteering is a valuable career advancement pathway, providing individuals with practical experience, transferable skills, and professional networks that enhance employability and workforce readiness. It offers an opportunity to acknowledge expertise beyond traditional education routes, particularly for those who gain industry-relevant skills through volunteering. However, despite the existence of a national framework under ASQA's guidelines, recognition of prior learning (RPL) for volunteer-acquired skills remains inconsistently applied.

While Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) provide an assessment pathway for volunteers to receive formal certification for their acquired skills, this opportunity remains largely underutilised by VIOs. Many VIOs lack the awareness and resources needed to

document volunteer-acquired skills in a way that aligns with RTO assessment requirements. Government support in equipping VIOs with the tools and training necessary to standardise skill documentation will not only streamline the accreditation process, but also serve as an incentive to attract a broader and more diverse volunteer base, from young adults in their early careers to mid-career workers looking to upskill or transition into new roles.

Incentivising volunteering—particularly among young people—is crucial to addressing the aging volunteer demographic. With fewer younger volunteers engaging in long-term, structured roles, investing in youth-focused incentives, such as formal accreditation, micro-credentialing, and career-linked volunteering opportunities, would encourage greater participation.

Priority Populations

For CCQ, First Nations volunteer participation is a key component in advancing health equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Our volunteers serve as trusted connections between CCQ and the community, playing a vital role in delivering culturally appropriate support, and raising awareness of front-line cancer support services available through the organisation.

To strengthen partnerships between CCQ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, a culturally safe volunteering-to-employment model could provide meaningful pathways into the workforce, while also fostering long-term engagement with essential health services. However, implementing such a model would require significant investment in resourcing, including expanding face-to-face training, dedicated program coordinators, and a co-designed and on Country approach that embeds appropriate ways of working. CCQ recommends that government investigate targeted funding and structural support to ensure such initiatives are sustainable and responsive to community needs.

There is the potential to extend such volunteering to employment initiatives to other marginalised populations to include people with disability, unemployed youth and newly arrived migrants. These communities often face systemic barriers to workforce participation, such as limited access to formal education and credential recognition challenges. By embedding structured volunteer programs into employment and training frameworks, volunteering can provide a stepping stone to workforce engagement for these groups, while strengthening social inclusion and economic participation across Queensland.

Harnessing the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games to Build a Lasting Volunteer Legacy

Expanding Queensland's volunteer workforce is not only essential for the successful delivery of the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, but also provides a unique opportunity to create a sustainable, long-term volunteering legacy. With just seven years to go, the need for a clear recruitment and legacy strategy is urgent—action must start now to ensure a strong and sustainable volunteer base.

Without a well-structured strategy, the influx of volunteers recruited for the Games risks dissipating post-event, rather than transitioning into ongoing civic engagement. A statewide, multi-sector approach is essential to integrating sporting, community, health, and emergency response volunteering, ensuring volunteers recruited for the Games are supported to remain engaged in Queensland's broader volunteer ecosystem. Clear post-Games pathways, formal recognition frameworks, and ongoing engagement opportunities will maximise the social and economic benefits of volunteering beyond the Games themselves.

The 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games demonstrated the importance of a strategic volunteer legacy plan. While the event saw a surge in major sporting event volunteering, particularly on the Gold Coast and in high-profile events such as the Gold Coast Marathon, this engagement did not translate into long-term growth in club-based and community volunteering. Some local sporting clubs even reported a decline in volunteer participation post-Games, as resources and attention remained concentrated on elite sporting events rather than grassroots engagement.⁶

Similar challenges have been identified in global Olympic volunteering legacies. Research by Professor Leonie Lockstone-Binney comparing the Sydney 2000 and London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games highlights key lessons in volunteer legacy creation. Sydney's lack of a formal volunteer legacy strategy meant that post-Games volunteer engagement was left to organically develop within the sector, with limited long-term impact. Conversely, in London, while a structured legacy was attempted, existing volunteer infrastructure was bypassed, limiting knowledge transfer and integration into long-term community engagement. Lockstone-Binney's research underscores the importance of deep collaboration between

⁶ Ernst & Young Global Limited for The State of Queensland, GC 2018 Legacy: Beyond the Games report 2024, 2024. Available from <https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/ckan-publications-attachments-prod/resources/eed229fa-e623-4cf1-b0f2-0cb0298e4b52/gc2018-legacy-report-2024.pdf?ETag=f1909b86222ff20de6d678c3e58fffd4> (accessed 23.02.25).

Games organisers and key volunteering stakeholders throughout the third sector, leveraging their expertise to ensure a coordinated and enduring volunteer legacy.⁷

While the recruitment, retention, and management of volunteers is a core responsibility of the Brisbane Organising Committee for the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games (OCOG), as outlined in the Intergovernmental Agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the State of Queensland, CCQ strongly recommends the development of an independent volunteering legacy strategy, such as through Volunteering Queensland, and in collaboration with existing volunteer infrastructure.

A separate, dedicated legacy strategy will ensure a structured post-Games transition for volunteers, enabling their continued engagement in community, health, emergency response, and grassroots sporting initiatives.

CCQ also recommends the expansion of the proposed Volunteer Passport scheme, ensuring that volunteers gain recognition for their contributions across sporting, health, social services, and emergency response sectors.

Conclusion

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to highlight these critical issues and contribute to the ongoing discussion on strengthening and sustaining Queensland's volunteer sector. Volunteering is the backbone of community resilience, social cohesion, and essential service delivery, and continued investment in volunteer infrastructure, streamlined administrative processes, and adaptive engagement models will be key to ensuring its long-term sustainability.

We support and encourage the Committee's intention to hold in-community public hearings and would welcome the participation of our CCQ branch members. We also invite the Committee to engage directly with our accommodation lodge volunteers in Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Brisbane, and Toowoomba, to gain firsthand insights into the vital contributions volunteers make in providing equitable access to cancer treatment and support services for regional and remote Queenslanders.

⁷ Lockstone-Binney L, Holmes K, Shipway R & Smith K 2016, Evaluating the volunteering infrastructure legacy of the Olympic Games: Sydney 2000 and London 2012 (International Olympic Committee, Olympic studies Centre, Lausanne. See also Duignan M and Koutrou N 2022, Why the London 2012 Olympics had limited impact on volunteering across the UK? *The Conversation*, 28 July 2022. Available from <https://theconversation.com/why-the-london-2012-olympics-had-limited-impact-on-volunteering-across-the-uk-187305> (accessed 27.02.2025)

Please contact Dr Danielle Jackman, Cancer Council Queensland's Policy and Advocacy Specialist on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] for further information or to discuss this response in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Gardiner
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