

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submission to the Queensland Government's Inquiry into Volunteering

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Mater is a major recruiter of volunteers in Queensland

Mater Volunteers play an integral role in delivering compassionate care, enhancing the patient experience, and upholding Mater's Mission.

Mater Volunteers are not merely an auxiliary support—they are embedded within the care team, ensuring that Mater continues to provide exceptional, patient-centred healthcare for Queenslanders.

This submission highlights the value of volunteering, existing challenges, and opportunities for strengthening the sector, with a particular focus on Mater's statewide volunteering efforts and our commitment to innovation and inclusion.



1 Mater Volunteers in Queensland

Mater's volunteer services contribute more than **65,000 hours** of support every year across Queensland, enhancing hospital environments, promoting patient wellbeing, and fostering community connection.

Notable volunteer contributions include:



- The majority of Mater's 600+ volunteers interact directly with patients, providing companionship, wayfinding assistance, and practical support.
- Volunteers are embedded in services to enhance the patient experience and support healthcare teams.
- Mater Volunteers foster community cohesion, provide opportunities for skill development and community engagement, and support retirees, migrants, and students.

Observed trends and challenges in Queensland:



- **Volunteers post-COVID**
Volunteer numbers across Australia have declined by 30 per cent post-pandemic (Volunteering Australia). Throughout the pandemic, Mater volunteer programs continued within our hospitals (where safe and appropriate) to give valuable time back to our health workers who were under unprecedented pressure. The continuation of this service resulted in a strong retention rate, and a faster return of volunteer services post-pandemic compared with the industry standard.

2 Barriers to volunteering

A range of individual and systemic factors can impact volunteer attraction and retention rates.

Potential barriers to participation, including:



- Lack of personally preferred roles available.
- Insufficient flexibility to balance employed roles, family and other commitments
- Compliance requirements

Considerations for the Queensland Government:



- **Flexible and Inclusive Volunteering Models:**
Recognising that volunteers have different availability and commitments, opportunities should be diverse, structured, and responsive.

Experiences, motivations, and challenges for volunteers

Mater Volunteers are highly engaged, with 66 per cent of volunteers returning on a weekly basis primarily due to job satisfaction.

Volunteers are motivated by:



- **A sense of purpose**
Mater Volunteers derive a strong emotional reward from helping others.
- **Engagement and variety**
Roles are designed to provide valuable organisational outcomes that meet business requirements, diverse interactions, and meaningful patient engagement.
- **Professional and social benefits**
Volunteering at Mater offers skills development, career pathways, and social connection, particularly for migrants, retirees, and individuals seeking to begin their non-clinical knowledge of the healthcare environment.

Challenges faced by volunteers:



- **Digitisation and Changing Service Models:**
Increased automation and hospital digitisation impact the traditional role of volunteers in healthcare.
- **Older demographics:**
With an overrepresentation of volunteers over the age of 50, succession planning and tailored support are required.

Considerations for the Queensland Government:



- The development of volunteer leadership programs that may provide structured training and recognition.
- Improving formal recognition and incentives of volunteer contributions through government and peak body awards, certificates, and career-linked incentives.
- Enhancing digital literacy programs and inclusion strategies may assist volunteers adapt to technology-driven hospital settings.



4 Challenges for diverse volunteers

Mater's volunteer base is diverse, including people from different cultural backgrounds, age groups, abilities, and locations.

Challenges:



- **Migrants and people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds**
Some prospective Mater Volunteers face language barriers, lack local work experience, or struggle to have their skills recognised in Australia.
- **Younger volunteers**
Young people express interest in volunteering opportunities but require role flexibility that fits study and work commitments.
- **Volunteers with disabilities**
Limited opportunities in a health environment given the changing nature of clinical spaces and compliance training.

Considerations for the Queensland Government:



- Youth volunteering incentives, including further partnership with tertiary institutions to promote volunteering as a career pathway or augmentation to further professional development.
- Expanding accessibility and equitable access to meaningful volunteering opportunities, catering to diverse needs that transcend social, professional and age-related obstacles.
- Culturally inclusive volunteering strategies that embrace migrant Australians and provide a positive and welcoming introduction to volunteering experiences.

5 Government support and future opportunities

Streamlined processes, integration and a statewide approach could provide opportunities.

Effectiveness of current support



- While Mater does not require Queensland Government support, there may be opportunities to strengthen volunteer programs generally through integration across a range of government departments (e.g. health, community services, disaster management, etc).

Future considerations for government initiatives



- A coordinated, statewide volunteer growth and/or support strategy to increase or champion volunteer participation across Queensland.
- Develop a formal recognition and accreditation framework for recognising volunteer contributions, including micro-credentials and volunteer pathways.
- Leverage private sector corporate and community support to enhance volunteering capacity.

6 Volunteering and significant events in Queensland

The 2032 Olympic Games in Brisbane is an opportunity for broad community engagement.

Mater's expertise:



- Major events, such as the Brisbane 2032 Games present a unique opportunity for the Queensland Government to mobilise, train, and retain volunteers across Queensland.
- Mater Volunteers' comprehensive experience in workforce coordination and engagement could serve as a basis for broader community engagement efforts.
- Healthcare volunteering during major events must be properly resourced and supported.

7 Emergency response volunteering

Disaster preparedness and recovery management are essential.

Best practice models:



- Queensland must optimise volunteer engagement in emergency response by integrating volunteers into disaster preparedness and recovery efforts.
- Mater's structured volunteer programs could inform best practice models for emergency volunteering.

8 First Nations volunteering and Closing the Gap

Embedding indigenous communities in volunteering remains an area for improvement.

Mater's expertise:



- First Nations volunteering plays a vital role in health and community services but remains under-recognised and under-supported.
- Mater has demonstrated commitment with Indigenous communities through the implementation of Mater's First Nations Health Equity Strategy. An overview of Mater's ministries revealed a variety of initiatives that demonstrate First Nations health equity action is already embedded in our work.

Considerations for the Queensland Government:



- Expansion of First Nations-led volunteer programs.
- As Indigenous culture intrinsically support their own communities in a reciprocal cultural way the traditional 'volunteering' label isn't always applicable to Indigenous communities.
- Ensure that Indigenous volunteering initiatives align with Closing the Gap priorities.



Conclusion

Mater Volunteers are a fundamental part of Queensland's healthcare system, delivering compassionate care, operational support, and social connection.

With the right government backing, policy reforms, and funding initiatives, Mater and other volunteer-involving organisations can grow and strengthen Queensland's volunteering sector.

We welcome further engagement with the Queensland Government on this critical matter and appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry.



