

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 24 January, 2017



Volunteer Support Services: Building strong and resilient communities

Volunteering Australia has made a 2017-18 Federal Pre-Budget Submission including a series of recommendations to further strengthen the Government's commitment to volunteering, whilst also greatly strengthening the work of the sector to build strong and resilient communities.

Volunteering continues to play a role central to our identity as a nation, with 5.8 million Australians or 31 per cent of the population volunteering, making an estimated annual contribution of \$290 billion to our economic and social good. Volunteers are an integral part of the social capital of strong and resilient communities.

Volunteering Australia Chief Executive Officer, Ms Adrienne Picone said that the volunteering sector in Australia currently faces a period of significant change and uncertainty as the Government prepares to review the primary source of funding for volunteer support services, the Department of Social Services' Strengthening Communities Grants program.

"This review follows significant feedback from the sector reflecting our concerns around the future of this funding" Ms Picone said. "We need to ensure longer-term funding is provided to foster greater certainty and resilience in local place-based volunteer support services."

"Volunteer support services promote, resource and support volunteering in local communities across Australia. They provide infrastructure in communities to lead, enable and build capacity to recruit and retain volunteers in a wide variety of organisations and services. The role of volunteer support services in connecting and empowering local communities is vital now, more so than ever. For the first time in almost twenty years, the number of people formally volunteering in Australia was reported as declining in 2014, down to 31% from 36% in 2012. Volunteers are also being asked to support the work of the Government and its policy priorities in more and increasingly innovative ways including supporting the NDIS."

"The Government must continue to fund volunteer support services and other volunteer management programs in recognition of the far-reaching contribution that they make to building strong and resilient Australian communities" said Ms Picone. "Responsibility for the oversight of volunteering should also return to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in acknowledgement that volunteering touches every section of Australian society including, but not limited to education, emergency services, sport and recreation, arts and heritage as well as the social services."

"One of the Government's core priorities has been the generation of jobs and growth to lead more Australians into gainful employment. There is a clear established link between volunteering and the opportunity to gain paid employment, both for volunteers and for employers, and investing in well-structured volunteering programs is a demonstrable strategy toward encouraging job growth."

"Volunteering Australia is eager to work with the Government to ensure that the generosity of the Australian community as volunteers continues to be celebrated and supported. With the Government's support

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through ongoing funding to empower important programs like the Department of Social Services Strengthening Communities Grants, we can continue to deliver place-based local volunteer support services to connect potential volunteers with opportunities to give back in their communities. This in turn can support the Government’s priorities in delivering jobs growth, disability services, emergency services, and an endless list of other vital community programs” Ms Picone concluded.

The Volunteering Australia submission outlines 13 proposed budget measures and is endorsed by the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies. The full submission is available on the VA website:

https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1485229336201718FederalPreBudgetSubmissionFINAL.pdf

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