

Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee
Queensland Parliament
Cnr of George and Alice Streets,
Brisbane, QLD, 4000

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

National Seniors Australia (NSA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into volunteering. NSA is the leading advocacy organisation for older Australians. Through our research and advocacy activities, we work to improve the wellbeing of all older Australians.

Limited and incomplete understanding about volunteers

We welcome the inquiry as an opportunity to better understand the current state of volunteering in Queensland. We believe further research is required to understand how volunteering can be sustained and encouraged among all age groups, but specifically among older people.

There appears to be contradictory information about the prevalence and incidence of volunteering among older people. The *Volunteering in Queensland*¹ brief from the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers notes different findings between the *State of Volunteering in Queensland Report* and the *Volunteering in Australia* report.

We believe there is a lack of data and insights about volunteering. A key source of information about volunteering, is the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) General Social Survey² (GSS). However, given the last GSS was conducted in 2020, during the early stages of the COVID pandemic, it likely does not reflect the current situation.

NSA undertook our own research into volunteerism in 2022 drawing on our access to seniors via our annual National Seniors Social Survey. Our *Older Australians and Volunteering* report³, which surveyed 3,655 participants, asked several questions about participation in volunteering. It found that research into volunteering can be complicated by issues with self-reporting and undercounting because activities such as caring and ad hoc assistance provision are often not counted as volunteering.

¹ [Departmental brief by Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers - 6 February 2025.pdf](#)

² [General Social Survey 2020 - ABS](#)

³ [NSA-2022-Volunteering-Report-final-July.pdf](#)

Considering the above, we believe further research should be conducted to better understand volunteering in the post-COVID context to more accurately gauge the contribution of older volunteers in the community. This research should consider any future demand for volunteers, as the Committee has raised, due to the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games or natural disasters.

Seniors are a key volunteering group

We wish to draw to the attention of the Committee the significant volunteering activity undertaken by seniors. Our 2022 survey found that half of survey respondents volunteered some of their time, with 23% volunteering at least 5 hours per week.

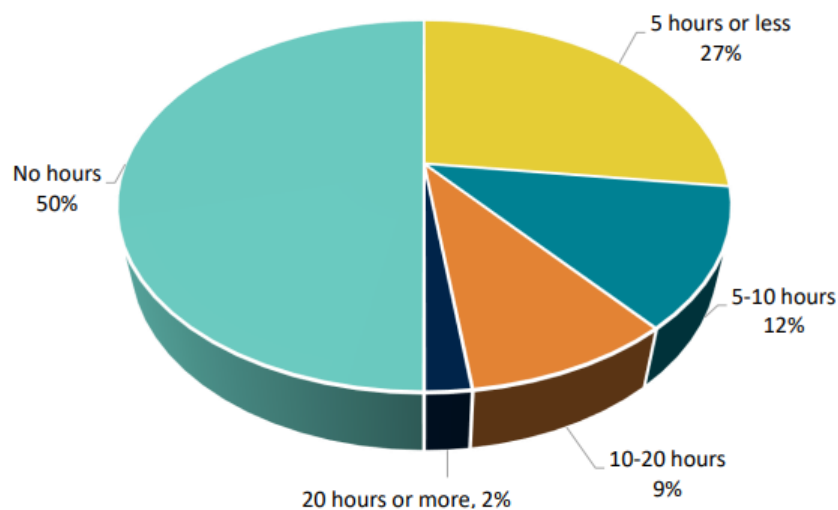


Figure 1 Number of hours participants volunteer per week (n=3655).

This volunteering took many forms, from supporting people in need, volunteering at schools, hospitals or aged care facilities, volunteering as part of clubs or societies, participating in community functions like Justice of the Peace, or caring for parents, partners, children, grandchildren, friends, or neighbours. These activities are critical to the functioning of society and the economy and yet are often undervalued.

While the ABS GSS data finds that participation in volunteering is highest for the age range 40-54 (likely associated with parents' involvement in kids activities) and implies that volunteering declines with age, the 2024 *State of Volunteering in Queensland* report highlights the importance of considering the amount of volunteering along with the rate of participation. According to the GSS, the number of hours contributed to volunteering increases with age (see Figure 2).

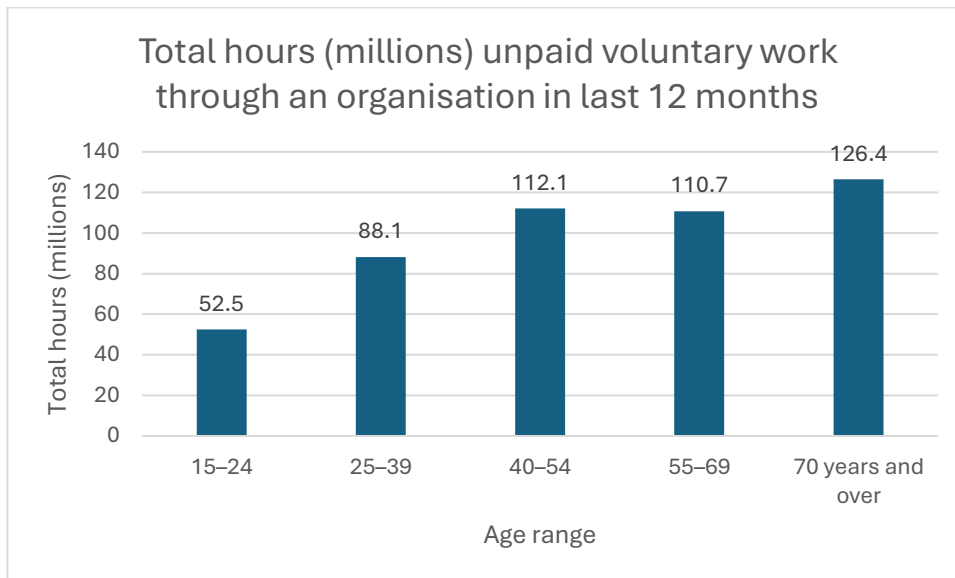


Figure 2. Data source: ABS General Social Survey 2020

The significant contribution of seniors to volunteering becomes even clearer when the hours of volunteering is adjusted for population (see Figure 3).

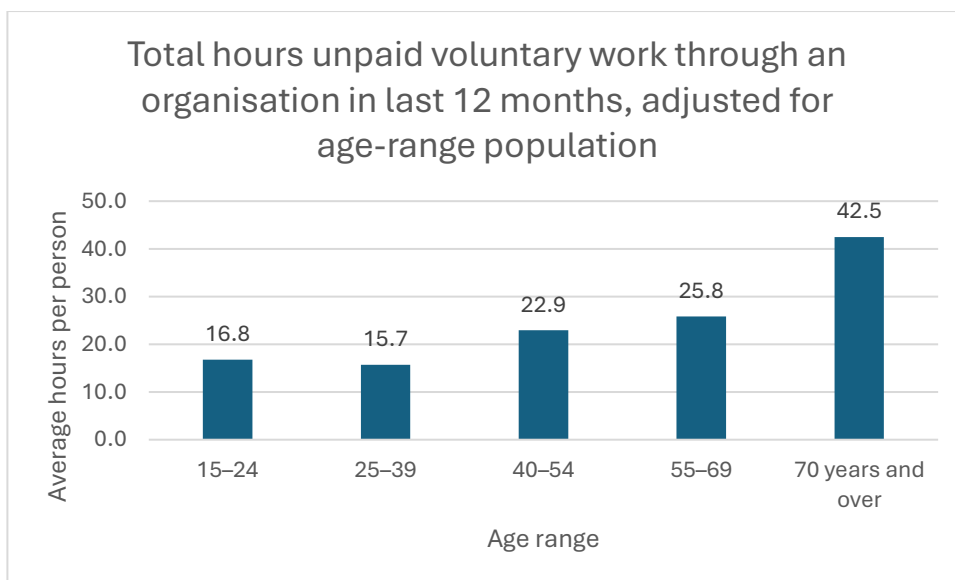


Figure 3. Data source: ABS General Social Survey 2020, ABS Population Clock⁴

⁴ [Population clock and pyramid - ABS](#)

While these statistics relate to volunteering through an organisation, it is important to note there are many other ways that people can volunteer their time, which are not captured in this data. For example, ABS statistics find the age group 55-69 has the highest proportion of people providing unpaid support to non-household members. While there is a decline in those aged 70 and over providing unpaid support, this likely relates to a shift from caring for others to providing care for partners or needing care themselves.

There are reasons seniors may not be volunteering as much as they would wish, with our *Older Australians and Volunteering* report finding that tensions between paid and volunteer positions, ageist attitudes, and red tape were factors discouraging volunteering. Anecdotally, there may have been a decline in volunteering among older people because of fears about the impact of volunteering on health from experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Administration experience matters

A potentially under-recognised aspect of volunteering is the administrative contribution of volunteers. Many volunteers, including seniors, give their time to community groups and organisations by sitting on committees and serving in offices such as chair, treasurer, or secretary. This organisational capacity is key to the ongoing function of many groups, such as sports and recreation organisations. As with many areas, this is one where [Experience Matters](#). These volunteers provide an important contribution and are a source of institutional memory.

We are concerned about a decline in the number of people willing to do this kind of volunteering service. As the *Volunteering in Queensland* brief says, the complexity of operating environments is increasing, and administrative and regulatory rules may not be fit for purpose.

We would recommend the Queensland government consider supporting volunteering in Queensland by providing training and support in the administrative side of volunteering along with finding ways to reduce the burden of administration on community organisations.

Impact of changing payment methods

We are also concerned by the potential impact on volunteer-related groups of a decrease in the availability of cash and the pending end to cheques.

In November 2024 the federal government announced its *Cheques Transition Plan*⁵, with a ceasing of issuance of cheques by 30 June 2028. However, we note that banks are already winding down the availability of cheques. This is of a concern to our members for personal use, but we expect it will also impact the payment methods of volunteer organisation.

We have thus far been disappointed by the transitional support for those currently using cheques. Banks are not meeting the government expectations set out in the cheques plan and are generally just directing their customers to use online banking. As one example, Suncorp stopped allowing otherwise valid cheques to be deposited from 14 February 2024⁶.

The federal government has also announced an intention to mandate cash acceptance for essential goods and services. However, the proposed mandate is extremely limited. In our view this will not adequately support cash as a payment method, which will remain important for small volunteer organisations with need for small and informal payments.

There are clearly many different factors impacting on participation in volunteering among seniors and other aged cohorts. NSA would like to see greater attention paid to building the evidence base to understand these challenges and identify solutions.

NSA's would welcome any opportunities to use its community and research capacity to contribute to understanding and improving volunteerism among older people in Queensland.

Yours Sincerely



Chris Grice
Chief Executive Officer

⁵ [Cheques Transition Plan: Winding down Australia's cheques system](#)

⁶ [Cheques & Payment Options | Suncorp Bank](#)