



Submission to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and  
Exploitation of People with Disability

Response to the Issues paper on Promoting Inclusion

May 2021

## Submission to the Disability Royal Commission

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### Overview

This submission responds to the Promoting Inclusion Issues Paper. We would like to highlight the following:

- Volunteering offers opportunities for social, economic, and cultural inclusion. An inclusive society gives everyone the right to these opportunities.
- People with disability can enjoy the many benefits of volunteering. This includes offering a sense of purpose, the ability to 'give back', and the development of skills and confidence.
- However, various barriers to volunteering for people with disability persist. These can be physical, attitudinal and cultural. Further priority and investment in breaking down these barriers is needed.

We encourage the Royal Commission to consider the important role of volunteering in creating an inclusive society. As the national and State/Territory peak volunteering bodies, we believe volunteering must be inclusive of all in society. All members of the volunteering ecosystem – peak bodies, volunteer support services, volunteer involving organisations, corporates and governments – need to commit to and invest in breaking down barriers to inclusion for people with disability.

We urge the Royal Commission to recommend that volunteering be incorporated into the Action Plans coming from the new National Disability Strategy - to foster greater inclusion of people with disability and to facilitate pathways to paid employment.

### Introduction

#### About the Royal Commission

The Disability Royal Commission was established in April 2019 in response to community concern about widespread reports of violence against, and the neglect, abuse and exploitation of, people with disability.

One of the Commission's areas of investigation is to examine what should be done to promote a more inclusive society that supports the independence of people with disability and their right to live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. The Issues Paper<sup>1</sup> on Promoting Inclusion is inviting input on what makes an inclusive society and how it can be promoted.

#### About this submission

We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Disability Royal Commission. This submission addresses key questions highlighted in the Promoting Inclusion Issues Paper. We are aware that the Royal Commission is also conducting hearings into pathways and barriers to open

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<sup>1</sup> <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/promoting-inclusion>

## Submission to the Disability Royal Commission

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employment for people with disability<sup>2</sup>. Some of the contents of this submission is relevant to those inquiries given the important role that volunteering can play in supporting pathways to employment.

This submission was drafted by Volunteering Australia in collaboration with the State and Territory peak volunteering bodies. In drafting this submission, we reached out to members of the volunteering sector who live with disability. This included input from members of the Participant Advisory Group of the Inclusive Volunteering Pathways to Employment Program<sup>3</sup> and insights from co-design workshops with people with disability held during the development of Volunteerability<sup>4</sup>.

This national submission complements additional submissions made by Volunteering ACT and Volunteering Tasmania.

We have considered the questions in the Issues Paper and would like to share information in relation to the following areas:

- a) What are the characteristics of an inclusive society?
- b) What are the barriers that prevent inclusion?
- c) How does volunteering support the inclusion of people with disability?
- d) What value does volunteering bring to the lives of people with disability?
- e) How can volunteering be more inclusive of people with disability?

### Background: volunteering and people with disability

People with disability are active members of the volunteering sector. Official statistics estimate that in 2019<sup>5</sup>, around 1.5 million people with a disability volunteered through an organisation in Australia (this is 24% of all volunteers.) Around 1.8 million people with a disability volunteered informally in their communities (27% of all volunteers who volunteer informally) in the four weeks prior to the 2019 General Social Survey (GSS) being undertaken.

However, volunteering has taken a huge hit during COVID19 and at its height two out of three volunteers<sup>6</sup> stopping volunteering. Data is not available for the impact on volunteers with disability, but wider evidence<sup>7</sup> suggests that the impact is likely to be more severe than those not living with disability. We also know that people with disability face long-standing barriers to participating in

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<sup>2</sup> <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/rounds/public-hearing-9-pathways-and-barriers-open-employment-people-disability>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.volunteering.com.au/inclusive-volunteering-program/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.volunteeringsa-nt.org.au/volunteers/volunteerability>

<sup>5</sup> See Table 4 of GSS 2019 data downloads <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release#data-download>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/new-research-the-experience-of-volunteers-during-covid-19/#/>

<sup>7</sup> See evidence presented at the disability Royal Commission and here <https://www.smh.com.au/national/covid-has-revealed-some-uncomfortable-truths-about-australia-and-people-with-disability-20200915-p55w00.html>

## Submission to the Disability Royal Commission

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volunteering. In this submission, we highlight these challenges and offer suggestions for how volunteering can be more inclusive of people with disability.

### Response to the Promoting Inclusion issues paper

#### What are the characteristics of an inclusive society?

An inclusive society is one which values and respects difference. An inclusive society means people with disability can access the activities and services that they would like. This will require a much better understanding of 'disability' and its diversity (both visible and invisible). It will require a shift in the language used across society and in the culture of organisations and institutions.

Being able to participate in volunteering is part of an inclusive society. Everyone has the right to volunteer and to give their time to support others.

*"Inclusion, as the word implies, is a society in which all people regardless of race, colour, creed or physical and mental abilities can if they want, have access to all services, can enter all buildings, can operate without hindrance of physical barriers, are accepted by their fellow citizens as valued individuals who bring with them a unique set of skills that when utilized can benefit society as a whole, and who are encouraged to participate in or contribute to any activity they chose, to whatever level they are capable."* Kevin Bawden AM.

*"This is a society which accepts people are different, and including them in the community, and are respected without judgement. For example, a choir having members who are from a different country, male and female, young and old, have physical, intellectual and emotional disabilities, taking part in a church service."* Caroline Cochrane, PAG member.

#### What are the barriers that prevent inclusion?

The barriers to inclusion of people with disability are many.

*"The barriers to inclusion include the attitude of others i.e., assumptions, stereotypes and misconceptions of people with disability. It includes limited or no accessibility, for example a lack of parking, ramps, toilets and technology in place. It includes processes that don't take into consideration of what support may be required by a person with disability, to complete processes."* Co-design workshops, Volunteerability.

Barriers are often created by biased attitudes and viewpoints.

*"Attitudes of people who for whatever reason find it difficult to speak to a person who has a disability. We have all experienced the mother of a small child telling him or her to not point at that woman/man and rushing them away under the guise of not causing embarrassment – but to whom? My experience of wanting to purchase an item in a large departmental store in Adelaide only to have the shop assistant ask a perfect stranger standing behind me if that was what I really wanted. Some people couple a disability with an inability to know what we want or need, and a voice to ask."* Kevin Bawden AM.

## Submission to the Disability Royal Commission

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Further, physical barriers to inclusion are still pervasive. This includes flaws in basic infrastructure such as slopes on pathways, the design of roadways and curbs, the lack of parking spaces, the width of doorways, the positioning of mirrors in bathrooms – all creating barriers for people with disability to live everyday life.

### How does volunteering support the inclusion of people with disability?

Volunteering provides a way for people with disability to contribute to helping others and to building their own skills and capabilities.

*“When they are volunteering, people are seen as having something to offer, not just consumers, but rather contributors. It means that a person is valued as is, not seen by what they 'lack'.” Rhonda Wilson, PAG.*

Volunteering can also allow greater flexibility than many paid jobs and can help in pathways to employment.

*“It allows the person to assist the organisation to achieve its mission, by utilising their skills and experience when they are able to volunteer. Some people have health problems which prevent them from working on a regular basis, but they would like to help-out when they can. Voluntary work caters for the state of health of the person with a disability. It is difficult to carry out a job when you are not at your best.” Caroline Cochrane, PAG*

*“Volunteering, like employment, necessitates an agreement between the organisation and the volunteer. This provides a structure that needs to be adhered to and this in turn builds self-discipline for the person with a disability. At the same time, this structure provides an environment that mirrors that of employment and provides a yardstick by which that person can measure her/his capabilities to handle a paid position. The requirements of a volunteer may not be as demanding as that of an employee. A volunteer can elect to work less hours and less days per week, can choose a part or parts of a job that suits their abilities. Volunteering provides an opportunity for individuals to satisfy their needs for contact with others on an equal basis, to develop friendships outside their normal circles and to realise a basic need to be productive and contributing. Most importantly it introduces a variety of people to each-other and each can learn to appreciate the other despite disabilities or other characteristics and by so doing continue the process of breaking down the barriers that exist in society. Kevin Bawden AM*

The volunteering sector endeavours to support the full inclusion of people with disability. Various initiatives support this commitment, for example:

- The ‘Victoria ALIVE Project’<sup>8</sup> aimed to improve disability inclusion in the volunteering community sector, through supporting organisations to be welcoming, inclusive and

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.victoriaalive.org.au/>

## Submission to the Disability Royal Commission

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accessible for people with disability. The activities included: developing tools and resources, holding community forums, promoting positive change through media, and creating an evidence base around disability volunteer inclusion. The Victoria ALIVE (Ability-Links-Inclusive-Volunteering-Everyday) project was delivered in partnership with Volunteering Victoria and Neighbourhood Houses Victoria.

- The 'Inclusive Volunteering Program'<sup>9</sup> run by Volunteering ACT is designed to help people with barriers to volunteering find meaningful volunteering opportunities. Participants include people living with disability. Volunteering ACT work with organisations to create inclusive volunteering environments for participants of the program.
- The 'Inclusive Volunteering Pathways to Employment Program'<sup>10</sup> is offered by The Centre for Volunteering (NSW), Volunteering ACT and Volunteering Tasmania. It aims to reduce and remove barriers to volunteering and employment for people living with disability and those on a mental health recovery journey. The Program supports participants to engage in volunteering as a pathway to employment and works with organisations to help them become more inclusive.
- 'Volunteerability' is a new program recently launched in South Australia, run by Volunteering SA&NT in partnership with Orana Disability Services. The program supports people with disability find meaningful volunteering opportunities, with the support of trained volunteer buddies. Every stakeholder has access to free training, support, and resources.

In addition to these specific initiatives, all the State and Territory peak volunteering bodies provide guidance, support, and resources<sup>11</sup> to volunteer involving organisations to enable more people with disability to access volunteering.

*When people with disability have been made to feel welcome and included at volunteer involving organisations when there has been a welcoming environment, they have had their volunteer support/adjustment needs listened to and acted upon, and ongoing support in their volunteer role all made them feel like a valued contributor to the volunteer team. Co-Design workshops, Volunteerability.*

### What value does volunteering bring to the lives of people with disability?

*People with disability volunteer for many of the same reasons as anyone else and likewise gain the varied benefits of volunteering: a sense of belonging and purpose, meet new people and gain new skills, share passions and interests and give something back. One participant shared the story of how volunteering 'saved my life'. Co-design workshops, Volunteerability.*

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.volunteeringact.org.au/services/inclusive-volunteering-program/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.volunteering.com.au/inclusive-volunteering-program/>

<sup>11</sup> See for example, <https://www.volunteeringact.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Building-Inclusive-Bridges.pdf> and <https://www.volunteeringact.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Lets-Talk-About-Inclusion-Promoting-inclusion-in-your-volunteer-involving-organisation.pdf>

## Submission to the Disability Royal Commission

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Research evidence consistently demonstrates that volunteering has a wide range of positive benefits for those who volunteer, including significant mental and physical health benefits<sup>12</sup> and offering pathways to paid employment<sup>13</sup>. Everyone should be able to access these benefits of volunteering.

Research<sup>14</sup> specifically with people with disability has demonstrated that volunteering among people with disabilities can reduce feelings of alienation and loneliness and allow an individual with disability to shift from being a recipient of welfare services into an empowered provider of services to others.

*Personally, when I have made a difference in an organisation which I have assisted, I have felt good about it, It has given me confidence and I have gained new knowledge and skills along the way. It is also great working in a team. Caroline Cochrane, PAG*

*The benefits of volunteering are many: capacity building; confidence; ability to contribute to the lives of others; ability to leave a legacy; ability to contribute to a better world for fellow mankind; a sense of purpose; a sense of connection and/or belonging; ability to be known as a volunteer, not just defined by an illness, or a disability, or a limitation; ability to be known as an expert within a field / a field of speciality; ability to work with others, to develop friendships/colleague relationships; ability to gain experience within a potential employment field prior to commencement within that area of study or work; broadens awareness of world, extends the person beyond their own circumstances, or their own home life; increases the scope of influence on that person's life; may be a useful support in transitioning from being in a place of 'survive' to a place of 'thrive'; fulfilment. Rhonda Wilson, PAG.*

### How can volunteering be more inclusive of people with disability?

There is no doubt that volunteering could be and should be more inclusive of people with disability.

People with disability face many barriers to volunteering. Research has demonstrated that many organisations do not offer volunteering positions to people with disability and those individuals who do manage to secure volunteer roles can face many challenges, owing to prejudice or lack of awareness and support. Research<sup>15</sup> commissioned by Volunteering Tasmania highlighted three key themes to understanding how people with a disability can volunteer: Physical accessibility; Attitudes

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<sup>12</sup> For example, see literature review and recent research by Kim et al (2020). Volunteering and subsequent health and well-being in older adults: an outcome-wide longitudinal approach. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

<sup>13</sup> See for example,

[https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/employment\\_research\\_report.pdf](https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/employment_research_report.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> For a recent summary of literature, see Yanay-Ventura, G. (2019). "Nothing About Us Without Us" in Volunteerism Too: Volunteering Among People with Disabilities. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 30(1), 147-163.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/other4.pdf>

## Submission to the Disability Royal Commission

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and management; and Support requirements. The authors argued that for volunteering to be successful for a volunteer with a disability all three need to be considered.

One way to reduced barriers is to invest further in Inclusive Volunteering Programs.

*Having a program such as Inclusive Volunteering Program, which helps to reduce and remove barriers to volunteering in the States where this Program or similar program operates. The Program includes a coordinator attending the interview with the applicant for a position. It would be ideal if this person was able to help the person with a disability feel at ease during the initial contact with their new organisation, the same as it is done in a paid position with someone from a Disability Employment Service. Caroline Cochrane, PAG.*

Limited options and resources for transport are also major challenges for many people with disability. This is especially so in rural and regional Australia, and people in these areas often rely on volunteer-run community transport programs. If a volunteer involving organisation is open and inclusive of people of all abilities, that doesn't matter if the person with disability cannot get to the door. People with disability can also face compounding barriers and discrimination based on intersections with other attributes. For example, LGBTIQ+ people with disability are at higher risk of abuse and harassment.

Much still needs to be done to reduce barriers to volunteering and to ensure volunteer involving organisations are inclusive of people with disability. This includes<sup>16</sup>:

- Staff and volunteer education and training on disability awareness
- Support and education for people with disability to recognise the contribution that can be made through volunteering.
- Having a culture of being open to people of all abilities.
- Enabling trial volunteering opportunities.
- Adjusting volunteer roles when needed and perhaps utilising pictures, simple instruction lists, video, audio or demonstrations to set out tasks.
- Ensuring initial process are accessible e.g., provide various formats for application forms including easy read (plus support if required to complete forms and other documents).
- Not being afraid to ask the person with disability what support they require to carry out a role.
- Providing opportunities for feedback and checking in regularly on how they are going with the role and offer extra training/support if needed.
- Communicating with respect and directing questions and conversation to the person with disability, not a support worker.
- Volunteer roles not being tokenistic i.e., not just given a 'time-filler' of a role / task, but instead a purposeful task that contributes to the success of the business or organisation.

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<sup>16</sup> These ideas have been compiled from our engagement activities.



## Submission to the Disability Royal Commission

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- Increased opportunities to volunteer from home where available with remote access capabilities. This would mean voluntary work can be completed with a person's own IT set up, and perhaps in a person's best working time.
- Allowing space for some creative influence from a person with lived experience of disability.

## Conclusion

Volunteering offers opportunities for social, economic, and cultural inclusion. Everyone has the right to these opportunities.

In our recent submission<sup>17</sup> to the development of the new National Disability Strategy, we highlighted that the new strategy should include volunteering and provide strategic direction for the further inclusion of people with disability in volunteering. The new Strategy should reflect that 'full inclusion' relates to volunteering as well as other aspects of life such as paid employment and the wide diversity of activities that make life fulfilling.

Finally, the disability sector and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) are reliant on the volunteer workforce to deliver key programs and services. Volunteers provide supports and services that are integral components of the NDIS. We plan to make a further submission to the Royal Commission on issues around the volunteer workforce in disability services.

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<sup>17</sup> [https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Submission-to-the-National-Disability-Strategy-FINAL\\_2020.11.30.pdf](https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Submission-to-the-National-Disability-Strategy-FINAL_2020.11.30.pdf)

## Submission to the Disability Royal Commission

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### Questions from the Issues Paper – Promoting Inclusion

Question 1: What does inclusion mean to you?

Question 2 What makes an inclusive society?

- A. What are the characteristics of an inclusive society?
- B. How can the supports people with disability need be provided in a way that is consistent with promoting an inclusive society?
- C. What is the role of governments through legislation, policy making, funding and operation of public systems and services, in achieving an inclusive society?
- D. What is the role of non-government institutions and the private sector in achieving an inclusive society?
- D. How can inclusion in society be measured, monitored and reported on? What data is available that could be used?

Question 3: Do you think Australia is an inclusive society? If not, why not?

Question 4: How can an inclusive society support the independence and choice and control of people with disability?

Question 5: How can an inclusive society support a person with disability's right to live free from:

- A. violence and abuse?
- B. neglect?
- C. exploitation?

Question 6: What practical and sustainable steps can governments take to promote a more inclusive society for people with disability? What needs to change:

- A. in laws, policies and standards?
- B. in implementation, monitoring, and accountability measures?
- C. in service provision?
- D. to ensure people with disability are closely consulted and actively included in all steps to promote a more inclusive society?

Question 7: What practical and sustainable steps can non-government institutions, the private sector and communities take to promote a more inclusive society for people with disabilities? What needs to change:

- A. in attitudes, behaviours, relationships and values?
- B. in organisations, culture and workforces?

## Submission to the Disability Royal Commission

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- C. in service provision?
- D. in implementation, monitoring, and accountability measures?
- E. to ensure people with disability are closely consulted with and actively included in all steps to promote a more inclusive society?

Question 8: What are the barriers and challenges to inclusion for people with disability? Including for:

- A. First Nations people with disability
- B. People with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- C. People with disability who identify as LGBTQI+
- D. Women and girls with disability
- E. Children and young people with disability
- F. People with disability living in rural or remote communities

Question 9: Is there anything else we should know?

## Submission to the Disability Royal Commission

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### Testimonials from IVP, VolunteeringACT

“I was shy. I was focused on finding employment and I couldn’t find a job. Volunteering changed my life. Before volunteering I had limited interaction with others. Now I am able to interact with people, people from Australia and people visiting Australia. I’m learning about science; it is an interesting place to volunteer. I feel like an important person. I translate for Arabic visitors; I am part of a team. I feel like I have found my place. I feel Australian.”

– Program Participant, Canberra, ACT

“My son’s volunteering is going well. He is happy doing his shifts. Volunteering is one of his best therapies and strategies towards job readiness. He has had a few job interviews lately and is currently awaiting 3 offers of employment in hospitality/food preparation. Keeping fingers crossed!”

– Parent of Program Participant, Canberra, ACT

“I am delighted to inform you that I have been offered a job as an Administration Officer. It’s a permanent full-time opportunity. I will be forever grateful to you for assisting me via the Inclusive Volunteering Program. I will always be thankful to the volunteering community as well. Thank you for helping a mother to get back into the workforce after a maternity break. Thank you for being so helpful and supportive in my journey.”

– Program Participant, Canberra, ACT

## Submission to the Disability Royal Commission

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### Authorisation

This submission has been authorised by the Chief Executive Officer of Volunteering Australia.



Mr Mark Pearce  
Chief Executive Officer

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### Endorsements

This position statement has been endorsed by the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies.



### About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering, working to advance volunteering in the Australian community. The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies work to advance and promote volunteering in their respective jurisdictions and are Foundation Members of Volunteering Australia.

Volunteering Australia's vision is strong, connected communities through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, promote and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

## Submission to the Disability Royal Commission

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### State and Territory Volunteering Peak Bodies

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**The Centre for Volunteering (NSW)**  
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