

The Centre for Volunteering – 2024-25 Federal Budget Analysis

Introduction

On May 14, 2024, the Federal Treasurer, The Hon. Dr Jim Chalmers MP, delivered the Budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year. The full budget documents can be found [here](#), and the overview document provided by the Treasury can be found [here](#).

Our analysis will focus on those measures most relevant to the volunteering sector and the community service sector in New South Wales.

This analysis has been prepared from all budget documents but focuses on Budget Paper Number 2 (Budget Measures), particularly those sections relevant to the Social Services Portfolio. It was prepared with reference to the Budget Analysis paper produced by Volunteering Australia, which can be found [here](#), and we are grateful for the work they have done analysing the wider budget.

The overall budget is largely focused on cost-of-living relief and broader social wellbeing policies. We are, however, pleased to see that dedicated funding to volunteering is continued in the Budget as part of the Volunteering and Community Connectedness program administered by The Department of Social Services (DSS). This program covers several volunteering-related programs administered at the Federal level, including the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) program and Volunteer Grants. The budget allocates \$100,079,000 for the 2023-24 fiscal year, with \$77,188,000 allocated for the 2024-25 fiscal year. Further forward estimates can be seen below.

While the Government's cost-of-living relief packages will be a welcome aid for many Australians who are struggling in the current economic climate, we are disappointed to see that volunteering is not widely considered in the Budget, as volunteers are an essential part of many services that provide cost-of-living relief around Australia. In particular, we note that there is still not a whole-of-government approach funding volunteering that recognises how widespread it is across government portfolios.

Our advocacy

We provided advice to Treasury through a Pre-Budget Submission, outlining the economic benefits of volunteering and the rising costs that volunteers face. We made strong recommendation that VMA funding is continued and are pleased to see that this recommendation was actioned. We also made specific recommendations to Treasury that volunteering-related expenses need to be funded as part of cost-of-living relief and that funding is provided for ongoing, independent research into volunteering to assist with policy making and understanding the needs of the sector.

While not directly submitted to Treasury, we have also provided feedback to the wider Federal Government through our submissions to the *Not-For-Profit Sector Blueprint* and *Stronger, more diverse and independent community sector* issues papers provided by DSS. Both of these submissions noted the need for increased funding for volunteering, the need for a whole-of-government approach to the work that volunteers do, and the need to reduce the unnecessary administrative red-tape that volunteers face through reporting and registration.

Several of our members provided feedback on draft versions of these submissions to ensure that we accurately captured the views of the wider volunteering sector. We are very grateful for those who took the time to help improve our advocacy to the Government.

Key Measures

Direct volunteer measures

These measures are directly related to volunteering and volunteer-involving programs.

- Continued funding for the “Volunteering and Community Connectedness” stream within the Department of Social Services. Allocated funding (including forward estimates) is:
 - \$100,079,000 (estimated actual) for the 2023-24 year
 - \$77,188,000 allocated for the 2024-25 year (an increase from approximately \$59.5 million in the previous budget)
 - \$65,517,000 for 2025-26
 - \$66,517,000 for 2026-27
 - \$66,281,000 for 2027-28
 - This funding will allow us, and the other volunteering peak bodies, to continue our work that is funded under the VMA program. We welcome the continued funding and forward estimates in the Federal Budget.
- Adjustments to Carer’s Payments supported by \$18.6 million over 5 years. From 20 March 2025, the 25 hours per week limitations on qualifying for a payment will change:
 - Travel time, study time, and volunteering activities will be excluded from this limit.
 - Single temporary cessation of care days will be allowed (as opposed to the current 7 day minimum).
 - We know from our State of Volunteering Report that 41.6% of volunteers in NSW have caring duties at home.¹ We welcome the exclusion of volunteering activities from the limit to qualify for a Carer’s Payment as a mechanism to make it easier for volunteers who are also carers to continue with their volunteering.

Indirect volunteer measures

These measures are not specifically targeted at volunteers, but impact sectors and industries that heavily involve volunteers.

- Funding is provided to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to deliver an enhanced annual General Social Survey as part of an overall \$57.9 million aimed at modernising Australian data collection. This survey has historically included some research on volunteering.

¹ Muller et. al., 2023. *2023 NSW State of Volunteering Report*. The Centre for Volunteering: Sydney, p. 6, <https://www.volunteering.com.au/2023-state-of-volunteering-report/>.

- Many of the Government's cost-of-living relief measures are intended to support industries that are reliant on or heavily involve volunteers, including: \$138 million towards emergency and food relief and financial support services
- \$1 million (in 2025-26) toward extending the Community Reference and Settlement Pilot until 30 June 2026 to continue the settlement services provided by volunteers.
- \$468.7 million invested in the NDIS, targeting a range of programs within the services, some of which involve volunteers.
- \$2.4 million over two years toward the development of a community sector partnership framework in collaboration with DSS and the Community Services Advisory Group as part of the *Stronger, more diverse and independent community sector* program.
- \$132.7 million over three years provided to the Australian Sports Commission and Department of Health and Aged Care to increase participation in sport. Sport is the fourth-largest volunteering activity in NSW, thus it is expected that this funding will impact volunteers.²
- \$925.2 million over five years to permanently establish the Leaving Violence Program, aimed at eliminating intimate partner violence and family violence. Many of the programs under this aegis rely on volunteers.

While it is good to see that volunteer-involving organisations will receive some knock-on benefits from these measures, we continue to recommend that a whole-of-government approach to funding volunteers is considered to better meet the needs of the sector.

Ongoing plans

We will continue to advocate for our members' needs and the needs of volunteers in New South Wales and Australia.

DSS has recently released the summary paper for the *Stronger, more diverse and independent community sector* submissions, which includes our own submission. We will continue to participate in the feedback process and liaise with the Federal Government to ensure that the needs of volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are taken into account when considering the funding needs of the community sector.

We will continue to look for opportunities to provide feedback to all levels of Government about volunteering in NSW and Australia and look forward to your continued feedback and support as we do this.

² Ibid., p. 8.