



Australian Government
Department of Health and Aged Care



Engaging volunteers in aged care

Guidance handbook for aged care providers

November 2023

Contact the team at agedcarevolunteer@Health.gov.au for questions or feedback.



Contents

Is this booklet for you?.....	3
Legislative environment.....	4
Aged care	4
Other legal protections	4
Looking forward.....	6
Checklists.....	7
Getting your organisation volunteer-ready	7
Designing volunteer roles.....	8
Recruiting volunteers	9
Onboarding volunteers.....	10
Frequently Asked Questions.....	11
Are there age restrictions?	11
Does my organisation need to cover volunteers' out-of-pocket costs?	11
What kind of insurance does my organisation need for volunteers?	11
Can volunteers take residents out of a residential aged care home?	12
Can someone volunteer if they are on a visa?	13
Are NDIS Worker Screening Checks needed?	13



Is this booklet for you?

☐

I work for an organisation that provides aged care services and/or support; and

☐

I want to learn more about engaging volunteers in my organisation

If you are a volunteer in aged care or are interested in volunteering, please visit the Department of Health and Aged Care (the department) website at www.health.gov.au/topics/aged-care/volunteers. This page includes general information and opportunities.

The aim of this booklet is to guide aged care providers through the main early considerations involved in engaging volunteers in their service.

Volunteers are an essential part of the aged care system. They can support older people from diverse backgrounds, life experiences and cultures to:

- ✓ live meaningful lives
- ✓ reduce social isolation, loneliness and connect with community
- ✓ remain living at home
- ✓ feel accepted and safe in their environment
- ✓ improve their physical and mental wellbeing.

A note on terminology:

For the purposes of this document, references to 'older people' means older people living in Australia accessing Australian government-funded aged care services. This can include older people in residential aged care, short-term care (including respite care, short term restorative care, and transition care) and those receiving in-home support.

Definitions

If you are looking for the definition of a word or phrase used in this document, the links provided for each topic likely have the detail you are looking for.

Alternatively, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission has created an extensive glossary of common terms used in the aged care sector. Access the glossary at www.agedcarequality.gov.au/about-us/corporate-documents/aged-care-quality-and-safety-commission-glossary



Legislative environment

When planning for volunteer engagement, aged care providers should keep their obligations within the legislative environments (both aged care and volunteer engagement generally) in mind.

Aged care

Aged care providers should always have regard to obligations existing under aged care laws in Australia. Learn more about Australian aged care laws at www.health.gov.au/topics/aged-care/about-aged-care/aged-care-laws-in-australia.

The Aged Care Quality Standards (Quality Standards) focus on outcomes for older people and reflect the level of care and services the community can expect from organisations that provide government-subsidised aged care services. This includes care and services provided by volunteers.

Learn more about the Quality Standards on the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission's website at www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/standards.

Other legislative instruments that aged care providers should be aware of and compliant with as relevant include the [*Competition and Consumer Act 2010*](#) and the [*Privacy Act 1988*](#), including the [*Australian Privacy Principles*](#).

Providers should note that volunteers will have duties to protect the privacy and confidentiality of older people they provide support to.

Other legal protections

Several Australian discrimination laws are relevant to volunteer engagement. These include:

- [*Age Discrimination Act 2004*](#)
- [*Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986*](#)
- [*Disability Discrimination Act 1992*](#)
- [*Racial Discrimination Act 1975*](#)
- [*Sex Discrimination Act 1984*](#)

Each state and territory may have their own laws that you may need to comply with as well.



Learn more on the Australian Human Rights Commission website at <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/employers/quick-guide-australian-discrimination-laws>.

Not-For-Profit (NFP) Law has created a set of resources for anyone managing volunteers, including a self-help tool. Their National Volunteering Guide covers the differences between volunteers and employees, insurance, volunteer safety, unlawful workplace behaviour, minimum protections and privacy.

Learn more and access NFP Law's National Volunteering Guide at www.nfplaw.org.au/free-resources/managing-people/managing-volunteers.

Work Health Safety (WHS) Requirements

Everyone has a right to be safe at work, including volunteers.

If your organisation is covered by the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*, you must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of all volunteers. This means that you must provide volunteers with the same protections as an organisation's paid workers.

This Safe Work Australia page helps volunteers and organisations understand work health and safety laws: www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/managing-health-and-safety/volunteers

Further information on WHS laws is available on the Safe Work Australia website: www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/



Looking forward

Where to find information about aged care volunteering:

The ‘frequently asked questions for potential volunteers in aged care’ document addresses common questions arising at the recruitment stage that you can adapt to your program.

The volunteer training and resources kit takes you through free, publicly available training and resources.

**Plan for
volunteers**



Recruit



**Onboard and
train**



**Manage and
improve**



**Celebrate and
strengthen**

This document will take you through the key steps to getting your organisation volunteer-ready, including planning for regulatory compliance, designing volunteer roles and planning for recruitment and onboarding.

The manager handbook takes you through key information and helpful tips for recruitment, onboarding, training, managing volunteers, improving the volunteer experience, celebrating volunteers and strengthening your volunteer base.



Checklists

Getting your organisation volunteer-ready

- ☐ The organisation has a dedicated Volunteer Manager or coordinator.
- ☐ The organisation has insurance that covers volunteers.
- ☐ The organisation understands its responsibilities under the [Aged Care Act 1997](#). These may include incident management, reporting, and training obligations, and obligations under the [Quality Standards](#) and the [Code of Conduct for Aged Care](#). Note that pursuant to the [Records Principles 2014](#), approved aged care providers must record certain information including volunteer records.
- ☐ The organisation understands its responsibilities under Work Health Safety (WHS) requirements (where applicable).
- ☐ The organisation has allocated funding to support volunteer activities.
- ☐ The organisation has considered a policy for re-imbursing volunteers' out-of-pocket costs.
- ☐ The organisation has an [onboarding plan](#) for volunteers, including procedures in place for training and worker screening checks that are required.
- ☐ The organisation has effective policies and procedures in place to cover work health and safety, workplace bullying and harassment, equal opportunity and anti-discrimination, complaints and grievances and the volunteer is given access to these.

Volunteer Managers are essential to a good volunteering experience. Managers should be suitably trained, resourced, skilled and supported to undertake their responsibilities, including volunteer recruitment, onboarding, training, and retention activities.

Approved aged care providers must ensure that their volunteers understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to incident management systems. This includes identifying, recording, managing and resolving incidents, as well as preventing them from occurring. Learn more at www.agedcarequality.gov.au/resources/volunteers-aged-care.



Designing volunteer roles

- ☐ Roles are designed with the needs and preferences of older people receiving volunteer support in mind.
- ☐ Roles are designed to provide benefit to both volunteers and older people receiving volunteer support.
- ☐ Volunteer roles do not replace paid worker roles.
- ☐ Where possible, volunteering roles meet the needs of the volunteer and are flexible (for example, weekend, ad-hoc and outside of core hours volunteering).
- ☐ Where relevant, volunteering roles can complement or build on other volunteering programs in the area.
- ☐ Where possible, roles match the skills and interests of volunteers.

Did you know? There may be existing volunteering programs in your area that you can use to support older people. Learn more at www.health.gov.au/topics/aged-care/volunteers.

The World Health Organisation has created a guide to planning and implementing interventions for intergenerational contact which may be useful to begin designing programs to fit your service. Access it at www.who.int/publications-detail-redirect/9789240070264.

Provide person-centred and culturally appropriate care by planning your volunteering programs to cater for the diverse needs of your community. Celebrate what makes people from diverse backgrounds and life experiences unique and connect to them to culture and community.

The Bolton Clarke Research Institute a website for aged care providers with resources for inclusive health and ageing in the community. It is a good place to start planning for diversity in your service. Explore the website at www.inclusivehealthandageing.com.au/.

The Older Person's Advocacy Network runs Planning for Diversity workshops to help aged care providers make services more inclusive of older people from diverse and marginalised groups. Learn more and register at opan.org.au/education/education-for-professionals/diversity-education.

More information about involving diverse volunteers is provided in the guidance handbook for volunteer managers at www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/managing-volunteers-in-aged-care-guidance-handbook-for-volunteer-managers



Recruiting volunteers

- ☐ The organisation knows the kinds of volunteers they want to recruit and the roles they are recruiting for.
- ☐ The organisation has a recruitment strategy in place that has considered the local area including diversity and demographics.
- ☐ The organisation has a clear point of contact for expressions of interest and a Volunteer Manager responsible for responding.
- ☐ The organisation has clear processes in place for following up volunteering expressions of interest, including strategies to streamline the process and avoid unnecessary delays.

To help organisations and managers, the department has collated publicly available resources which you can access at www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/managing-volunteers-in-aged-care-guidance-handbook-for-volunteer-managers.

You can use our 'Frequently asked questions for potential volunteers in aged care' factsheet as a starting point to address questions during recruitment within your own volunteer program.

Access the frequently asked questions at www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/frequently-asked-questions-for-potential-volunteers-in-aged-care.



Onboarding volunteers

- ☐ Volunteers will understand the process for completing the relevant workers screening check/s and will be kept informed on the progress of checks.
- ☐ Volunteers will understand their reporting requirements.
- ☐ Volunteers will understand their expected behaviours, including those set out in their agreed role description. The role description clearly explains the volunteer's rights and responsibilities.
- ☐ Volunteers who are engaged by an approved aged care provider will understand that they must comply with the Code of Conduct for Aged Care.
- ☐ Volunteers understand they must respect personal boundaries and must abide by privacy duties.
- ☐ Volunteers will know who their first point of contact is for questions, reporting concerns or any other matters.
- ☐ Volunteers will have received the training they need to complete their roles in a safe and culturally competent way.
- ☐ Where relevant, volunteers undertake any vaccination requirements.

The department has developed Worker Screening Guidelines, which applies to volunteers. Access it, as well as more information on screening requirements for the aged care workforce at www.health.gov.au/topics/aged-care-workforce/screening-requirements.

The department does not mandate any specific training. It is expected that each organisation assesses and carries out training best suited to the organisation and volunteering role.

To help organisations and managers, the department has collated publicly available training and information resources which you can access at www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/volunteers-in-aged-care-training-and-resource-kit-for-volunteers-and-volunteer-managers.

More information about writing role descriptions, recruiting, retaining and managing volunteers once onboarded can be found at www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/managing-volunteers-in-aged-care-guidance-handbook-for-volunteer-managers.



Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently asked questions for aged care volunteers are available at www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/frequently-asked-questions-for-potential-volunteers-in-aged-care.

Are there age restrictions?

Organisations often have a minimum volunteer age of 18 and a few have upper age limits (this depends on the organisation's insurance policy). Organisations should design volunteer roles with age considerations in mind and have appropriate volunteer insurance to accommodate the age of their volunteers.

For more information about volunteering and young people see Not-for-Profit Law's 'Guide to engaging and working with youth volunteers' which you can access at content.nfplaw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Engaging-and-working-with-youth-volunteers-guide.pdf

During the recruitment process, your organisation may also want to acknowledge any perceptions of aged restrictions. For example, you could consider clarifying that volunteers of all ages above 18 are welcomed and combine this with testimonies from volunteers of several age ranges to ensure that no potential assumes they will not be welcomed and valued because of their age.

Does my organisation need to cover volunteers' out-of-pocket costs?

Aged care providers do not have to cover volunteers' out-of-pocket costs. Providers may wish to reimburse volunteers for items such as meals, travel and vaccinations for example as a matter of best practice.

Costs associated with worker screening checks for volunteers are often waived or reduced, although costs vary between jurisdictions. Providers are encouraged to check with the relevant authority in their state or territory.

What kind of insurance does my organisation need for volunteers?

The [*Work Health and Safety Act 2011*](#) requires organisations to organise personal accident and public liability insurance on behalf of their volunteers.



Volunteer insurance (also known as Volunteers Personal Accident Insurance or Volunteer Accident Insurance) can include public liability insurance, protecting an organisation from public liability claims caused by a volunteer.

It also covers personal accidents experienced by volunteers working onsite at a facility.

Personal accidents cover will ensure that if a volunteer is injured in their role, they will receive protection. This may include cover for medical costs and weekly payments until they have recovered, depending on the coverage. This is particularly important for volunteers who may be unable to continue in their regular paid work during that period.

Volunteer insurance is also necessary as volunteers will not be covered by standard business insurance policies since they are not paid employees. [Learn more about volunteers' insurance at www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/insurance/](https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/insurance/).

This advice is in line with Standard 6.2 of the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement. You can access these at www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/national-standards-and-supporting-material/#/

Not-for-profit Law provides guidance on managing insurance and risk. Learn more at www.nfplaw.org.au/free-resources/insurance-and-risk and at content.nfplaw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Part-2-NVG-Volunteer-employee-or-independent-contractor.pdf

Organisations should also reduce risk to its staff, including volunteers, through proper health, safety, training and management practices and documenting procedures. Learn more at www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/managing-health-and-safety/volunteers

Can volunteers take residents out of a residential aged care home?

Organisations providing government-subsidised aged care services are responsible for meeting all relevant obligations and requirements when delivering care and services to older people.

They are also responsible for ensuring the workforce meet their responsibilities and are supported to understand these responsibilities. As the aged care [workforce](#) includes volunteers, any activity undertaken by volunteers comes under the duty of care of the provider.

Conversations and documentation of an older person's consent should be considered where this is appropriate as part of those activities. The level of care and support required for each older person, any associated risks, and risk mitigation strategies should be identified, considered, addressed, and documented.

Providers are expected to have processes in place to enable an older person's access to safe and quality care, and in-line with the older person's preferences and wishes. This means



respecting dignity of risk, which includes the expectation that providers should support an older person to make decisions about their own care.

Learn more about supported decision making and access additional resources at open.org.au/videos/my-right-to-make-decisions-2023.

Information on the Quality Standards, including guidance, can be found at www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/standards.

Organisations should also ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the physical and mental health and safety of all its workers, including volunteers. Learn more at www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/managing-health-and-safety/volunteers

Can someone volunteer if they are on a visa?

There may be conditions attached to particular visas which affect a person's ability to volunteer. It is recommended that a Visa Entitlement Verification Online (VEVO) check is undertaken.

To undertake this check and understand any conditions attached to the visa, visit immigration and citizenship webpage and follow the prompts for VEVO:

immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/already-have-a-visa/check-visa-details-and-conditions/overview

Are NDIS Worker Screening Checks needed?

NDIS Worker Screening Checks are required for workers and volunteers who undertake a **risk assessed role** where the provider is a registered NDIS provider. If a volunteer undertakes activities which do not sit within the below definition of a risk assessed role, only a National Police Check is required.

Under NDIS legislation, a risk assessed role:

- is a key personnel role of a person or an entity as defined in s 11A of the [*National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013*](#) (for example, a CEO or a Board Member)
- involves the direct delivery of [specified supports or services](#) to a person with disability
- is likely to require 'more than incidental contact' with people with disability, which includes:
 - physically touching a person with disability; or
 - building a rapport with a person with disability as an integral and ordinary part of the performance of normal duties; or



- having contact with multiple people with disability as part of the direct delivery of a specialist disability support or service, or in a specialist disability accommodation setting.

Based on that definition, volunteers who visit NDIS participants in an aged care facility may need a NDIS Worker Screening clearance (specifically if they have 'more than incidental contact' with a person with disability).

If a volunteer already has a valid NDIS Worker Screening clearance, they will not need an additional police check completed prior to volunteering in an aged care setting.

If you have further questions about what is considered a risk assessed role, please contact the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission on [1800 035 544](tel:1800035544).

You can also find more information about the NDIS Workers Screening Check, including the definition of a risk-assessed role and links to state and territory Worker Screening Units at the NDIS Commission website at www.ndiscommission.gov.au/workers/worker-screening/applying-worker-screening-check.

There may be delays getting a NDIS Worker Screening Check. Providers, Volunteer Managers and volunteers are encouraged to start all NDIS Worker Screening Check and police check applications or renewals 12 weeks in advance.