



Frequently asked questions for potential volunteers in aged care

What is volunteering in aged care?

Volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.¹ It does not include direct family responsibilities.

Volunteering includes:

- formal volunteering, where volunteering take place in organisations.
- informal volunteering, where volunteering takes place outside an organisational setting.²

In aged care, volunteering is formal because it takes place in organisations (including planning, recruiting and actual volunteer activities).

Volunteering becomes 'aged care volunteering' when an organisation or Volunteer Manager designs an activity to benefit an older person in receipt of Australian government-subsidised aged care services.

Volunteer support has a positive effect on older peoples' mental and physical wellbeing.

¹ Volunteering Australia, '*Definition of Volunteering*', accessed at <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/definition-of-volunteering/#/>

² Volunteering Australia, '*Volunteering Australia's Definition of Volunteering: Frequently Asked Questions*', 2015, accessed at <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/FAQs-Launch-of-Definition-280715-final.pdf>.



What would I get out of volunteering?

The benefits to volunteers will be different for each person. However, volunteers often benefit by:



Feeling a sense of purpose, fulfilment and personal growth – giving time to others helps you feel good.



Meeting and connecting with people - creating stronger connections in your community.



Developing new social and personal skills and having a chance to use your existing skills and experiences to help others.



Staying mentally and physically active and healthy.



“Giving back” to people and organisations that have contributed to your community or society.

Where would I be volunteering?

You could be volunteering in any setting with recipients of government-subsidised aged care services. These could include:

- in a residential aged care home
- in an older person’s own home (if they are receiving in-home or community care)
- in public (for example accompanying an older person to a coffee shop, park etc)
- between locations (for example delivery of meals, transport to appointments and community centres)

How much time would I need to commit?

The time commitment asked of volunteers depends on each role and volunteering program.

Some programs ask for as little as an hour a fortnight, while others may need more. Volunteer Managers will work with you to ensure volunteering opportunities match your schedule.

You may need to commit more time early on during sign up, onboarding and induction for things like screening checks and training.



Also remember, while there may be some one-off opportunities, many volunteering roles in aged care tend to be at regular recurring periods. These may need a longer-term commitment.

A consistent rather than spontaneous presence is more effective in aged care volunteering because of the:

- need for continuity in support given to older people
- onboarding requirements to be completed up front.

What would I be doing?

Volunteers can do a lot of roles! Some examples include:

- providing companionship – having a chat or sharing a simple leisure activity together
- assisting with activities such as arts and craft, games, gentle exercise, outings, bingo and story sharing
- gardening
- help with meal preparation
- working with older people on projects like life story writing
- transport support.

Volunteers do not do the work of paid staff. That means volunteers will not do clinical roles. Instead, volunteers complement paid staff by working together to elevate the support received by older people.

Volunteers are encouraged to bring their own strengths to volunteering roles. That means that each person's background, professional skills, life experiences and interests are all valued.

For instance, some volunteers play musical instruments, teach crafts or give history talks. Others are more comfortable organising activities in the background or having a coffee and a chat. Some volunteers are on the boards of aged care organisations. Speak to your aged care provider to see if a suitable role is available that matches your skills and interests.

How are volunteers supported?

Each volunteering program must have someone responsible for volunteer management. This is often a Volunteer Manager, Volunteer Coordinator or Lifestyle Coordinator. They are critical to ensuring your volunteering experience is enjoyable, meaningful and safe. They will be able to explain what supports they can offer volunteers. These could include:

- help filling out sign-up forms
- help organising worker screening checks such as a National Police Check
- induction and training
- supervision and continued support
- re-imburements for out-of-pocket costs such as screening checks and travel costs (if applicable)



- provision of translated materials
- supporting you through distressing or challenging situations that may arise
- peer support, buddy systems, or volunteer-peer groups (for example, in-person or online groups and meetings)

Each organisation and program will have their own procedures to support you.

What type of training do volunteers undergo?

Training that volunteers undergo depends on the role, organisation, and program. For instance, a volunteer who is helping to prepare or deliver meals will need different training than a volunteer who is helping with transport or crafts.

There are some main topics that you will likely get training on no matter what your role is:

- aged care basics
- person-centred care
- work, health and safety
- reporting requirements
- what to do in emergencies or if something goes wrong
- what to do if you or someone else has a concern or complaint
- the [Code of Conduct for Aged Care](#) (or a similar organisational code of conduct setting out expected behaviours)
- self-care and mental health
- respecting privacy, confidentiality and ensuring dignity of care
- topics relevant to your role, such as dementia care, safe food handling, mobility support, conversational tips etc.

You might be coming into a volunteering role with years of professional or personal aged care experience. On the other hand, you might never have been in an aged care setting or interacted with older people.

In each case, it is important to let your Volunteer Manager know so they can ensure you get the appropriate level of training.

Your Volunteer Manager will also give you a volunteer role description which will set out the roles you are asked to do. This includes the boundaries of your role; your manager will discuss this with you and answer any questions you have.



What skills do I need?

Some roles need specific skillsets. For example, volunteer transport drivers will need a different skillset than volunteers who help with gardening.

However, usually you don't need any specific vocational skills! For many volunteer roles, the most important things a volunteer can provide are:

- care, compassion, and respect for older people
- kindness and understanding
- a welcoming and positive approach
- an ability to be open and make space for older people.

Often, just being present to have a chat and listen to an older person is all that is needed to brighten up their day.

Is there an age restriction?

Each organisation and program will decide the age requirements for volunteers, so check with your local aged care provider.

No matter what age a volunteer is, volunteering can be a great opportunity to help others in your community. You can also learn new skills, practise old skills and connect with people in your community.

Organisations should embrace volunteers of all ages and celebrate the unique skills and backgrounds they can bring to their volunteering role.

Can I volunteer if I work or study full time?

Absolutely. However, there may be a minimum number of hours required. There may also be limitations in flexibility to visit the aged care home during out of hours and on weekends. Each organisation will be able to advise you about whether they have a volunteer in a role that fits in with your schedule.

I'm on a visa – can I still volunteer?

There may be conditions attached to visas which affect a person's ability to volunteer. It is recommended that potential volunteers undertake a Visa Entitlement Verification Online (VEVO) check if interested in volunteering while on a visa.

To do 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



What pre-volunteering screening will I need to undergo?

Background screening is a key component of the volunteer application process. Every aged care organisation must undertake this process before you can be accepted as a volunteer.

These screening checks are important to protect the safety of older people receiving aged care.

- Typically, volunteers need to receive a National Police Certificate (NPC) or National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Worker Screening Check.
 - An [NDIS Worker Screening Check](#) will only be required if a volunteer is in a risk assessed role where the provider is a registered NDIS provider.
 - If you already hold a valid NDIS Worker Screening clearance you will not need an additional police check completed before volunteering in an aged care setting.
- The Department of Health and Aged Care has issued [Worker Screening Guidelines](#), which provides more detailed information and includes volunteers.

The Volunteer Manager at each organisation will be able to tell you what screening checks you must undertake.

While costs vary across Australian jurisdictions, volunteers often receive reduced or waived screening costs arranged by the aged care provider.

Do I need to be vaccinated?

Typically, volunteers need to give evidence of their recent flu and/or COVID-19 vaccination history.

Each aged care provider will be able to tell you the specific requirements for the role and jurisdiction.

I am not used to being around older people – should I still apply

It's okay to feel unsure or question if volunteering in aged care is right for you. It may be a new experience for you creating intergenerational connections.

However, connections that bring together older and younger people have a lasting impact. These connections strengthen everyone's wellbeing and helps to dispel any misconceptions or stereotypes that may exist between generations.

The volunteer training that you will receive will give you the insights and skills to understand older people. Your Volunteer Manger will support you to ask questions or discuss any feelings you may have.



Am I covered by insurance when I am volunteering?

Australian work health and safety legislation requires organisations to arrange personal accident and public liability insurance for their volunteer. It is not the duty of the volunteer.

Talk to your Volunteer Manager about any specific questions you have about the organisation's insurance policy.

Can I get reimbursements for out-of-pocket expenses?

There is no requirement for organisations to reimburse volunteers for out-of-pocket expenses. However, some will do so for costs such as meals, travel, fuel vouchers, vaccinations etc.

Talk to your Volunteer Manager to understand what the policies and procedures the organisation may have in place for reimbursements.

What about my safety at work?

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

If the organisation you volunteer for is covered by the [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#), it must ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety of all of its workers. This includes volunteers. This means that you, as a volunteer, must be provided 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 from the Safe Work Australia website: www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/

How do I get involved?

For aged care volunteering opportunities in your state or territory, see:

- [Volunteering in NSW](#)
- [Volunteering in Victoria](#)
- [Volunteering in SA & NT](#)
- [Volunteering in Queensland](#)
- [Volunteering in WA](#)
- [Volunteering in Tasmania](#)
- [Volunteering in ACT.](#)

Other ways you can find opportunities to volunteer include:



- Using [GoVolunteer](#) or [Seek Volunteer](#) to find aged care volunteer opportunities in your area.
- Contacting your local council who may also know about opportunities close to you.
- Contacting [the aged care provider in your local area](#). You can explore the providers listed in My Aged Care. Alternatively, if you know one in your area already you can check their website or contact them.
- The [Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme](#) arranges volunteer visits to older people to foster friendship and companionship.
- [Meals on Wheels](#) volunteers deliver nutritious meals while providing social connection and a wellbeing check.
- Other key sector groups including [Dementia Australia](#), [LGBTIQ+ Health Australia](#), and palliative care state and territory organisations may have volunteer programs.

I have more questions - what do I do now?

If we have not covered your questions please get in touch with us at agedcarevolunteer@health.gov.au and we will be happy to help.

