



Australian Government

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing



Engaging volunteers in aged care

A guidance handbook for aged care providers

November 2025

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



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

This booklet is designed to support aged care providers in understanding the key considerations when engaging volunteers. It outlines how to create meaningful roles, ensure compliance with regulatory requirements, and foster respectful, inclusive environments.

Volunteers are a vital part of Australia's aged care system. They help older people:

- ✓ stay connected,
- ✓ 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.

If you are currently volunteering or interested in getting involved, visit the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing's volunteering page. This webpage provides general information, current opportunities, and guidance on how to get started.

<https://www.health.gov.au/topics/aged-care/volunteers>

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), Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) and those receiving Support at Home (SAH) services.



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

Regulation

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 providers should always have regard to obligations existing under aged care laws in Australia.

The [Statement of Rights](#) and Statement of Principles are central to Aged Care. These frameworks are designed to ensure older Australians receive respectful, safe, and high-quality care and support that is person-centred and aligned with their individual needs and preferences.

They are a reference point for the standard of conduct, duties and obligations for when registered providers and care workers (including volunteers) deliver funded aged care services and support.

Learn more about Australian aged care laws at www.health.gov.au/topics/aged-care/about-aged-care/aged-care-laws-in-australia.

Read the fact sheet on the rights-based approach to aged care under the new Act, available in [plain language](#) and [Easy Read](#).



The Aged Care Quality Standards

The Aged Care Quality Standards (Quality Standards) are a set of requirements registered providers must comply with under law if they are registered in Categories 4, 5 and 6. They are designed to improve outcomes for older people receiving funded aged care services and set clear expectations for providers in delivering quality aged care.

The diagram below outlines the **7 Quality Standards**

The Quality Standards:

- place older people at the centre of aged care
- support people living with dementia
- are more inclusive of people from diverse backgrounds
- have stronger requirements for clinical care, food and nutrition and governance
- have more protections for older people.

The guidance materials developed by the Commission aim to support providers' and workers (including volunteers) understanding of their obligations and requirements to deliver safe, and quality care and support.

Although providers registered in categories 1, 2 and 3 are not subject to audits against the strengthened Quality Standards, it is still expected they will deliver the same standard for quality of care and support

Providers registered in all categories must comply with other provider obligations under law including:

- Statement of Rights and Statement of Principles
- Code of Conduct for Aged Care (the Code)
- Worker screening
- Complaints, feedback and whistleblowers protections
- Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS).

More information about the Aged Care Quality Standards is on the department's website and the Commission's website.





Code of Conduct for Aged Care

The Code of Conduct for Aged Care (the Code) describes how aged care providers, responsible persons and workers (including volunteers) must behave and treat people receiving aged care.

Volunteers must always act in a respectful, kind and consistent manner in accordance with the eight elements of expected behaviour outlined in the Code:

- 1. Uphold autonomy and decision-making rights**
 - act with respect for people's rights to freedom of expression, self-determination and decision-making in accordance with applicable laws and conventions
- 2. Treat older people with dignity and respect**
 - act in a way that treats people with dignity and respect and values their diversity
- 3. Respect older people's privacy**
 - act with respect for the privacy of people
- 4. Deliver safe and competent care**
 - provide care, supports and services safely and competently, with care and skill
- 5. Act with honesty and transparency**
 - act with integrity, honesty and transparency
- 6. Raise and respond to concerns promptly**
 - promptly take steps to raise and act on concerns about matters that may impact the quality and safety of care, support and services
- 7. Ensure services are free from harm and misconduct**
 - provide care, supports and services free from:
 - all forms of violence, discrimination, exploitation, neglect and abuse
 - sexual misconduct.
- 8. Prevent and respond to harm and misconduct**
 - take all reasonable steps to prevent and respond to:
 - all forms of violence, discrimination, exploitation, neglect and abuse
 - sexual misconduct.

The Commission monitors and enforces compliance with the Code. Where a provider, responsible person or aged care worker (including a volunteer) fails to comply with the Code, they may be subject to enforcement action by the Commissioner.

More information and resources on the Code are available on the [Commission's website](#).

You can also find a training video and fact sheet for volunteers and Volunteer Managers about the Code on the [Commission's website](#).



Worker screening

The *Aged Care Act 2024* requires registered providers to:

- comply with the worker screening requirements
- ensure aged care workers (including volunteers) and responsible persons of the provider comply with the worker screening requirements

All aged care volunteers must have:

- a police certificate that is not older than 3 years and does not record certain convictions or offences; or
- a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). NDIS check for aged care workers or responsible persons that are working (or have worked) in the NDIS sector.

To learn more about worker screening requirements, including the offences that will stop people from working as an aged care worker (or volunteer), download our fact sheets for [aged care providers](#) and [aged care workers](#), [guidance for CHSP providers](#) or visit the department's website for [updates on screening requirements](#).

Complaints and feedback

The [Statement of Rights](#) also means older people are encouraged to share their feedback. This includes being able to make a complaint if they feel their provider has not upheld their rights. This means volunteers need to understand and follow the aged care complaints process.

It is important older people are supported and empowered to provide feedback and make complaints by:

- providing them with information about how to make a complaint
- linking them to advocates or languages services (such as interpreters) who can support them to make a complaint
- supporting them to make a complaint to the Commission, who manages complaints.

To learn more about how to support an older person understand their rights within complaints handling and to access free training for volunteers and Volunteer Managers go to the [Commission's website](#).



Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS)

The Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS) aims to reduce abuse and neglect of older people receiving government funded aged care services.

Under the SIRS, providers must manage and take reasonable action to prevent incidents with a focus on the safety, health, wellbeing and quality of life for older people. Aged care providers must also notify the Commission when reportable incidents happen in their service.

Volunteers do not have to report within SIRS. However, it is important they are aware of what a serious incident is, and if one occurs, they need to let their Volunteer Manager, or another staff member, know as soon as possible. If a volunteer has any concerns they need to talk to their Volunteer Manager.

To find out more about SIRS and to access free training for volunteers and Volunteer Managers go to the [Commission's website](#).

Protection for whistleblowers

A whistleblower is someone who raises concerns about wrongdoing they have seen or experienced in a workplace or organisation.

The Aged Care Act 2024 protects whistleblowers, people can report information without fear of punishment or unfair treatment.

Volunteers can report a person or organisation who has not followed aged care law, without fear they will be punished or treated unfairly.

A volunteer can make a report in-person, over the phone or in writing, and it can be anonymous. The report can be made to:

- the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner or staff member of the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
- the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
- an aged care provider or worker
- a responsible person of an aged care provider, such as a CEO or Board Member
- a police officer.

If a volunteer receives a protected disclosure, they must take steps to ensure the above protections are afforded to the discloser. See [Section 547 of the Act](#) on the definition of a disclosure that qualifies for protection.

For more information, visit the [department's website](#).



Other legal information

Several Australian discrimination laws are relevant to volunteer engagement including:

- [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 laws you may need to comply with.

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.

Privacy

Other legislative instruments 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 volunteers will have duties to protect the privacy and confidentiality of older people they provide support to.

Work Health Safety (WHS) Requirements

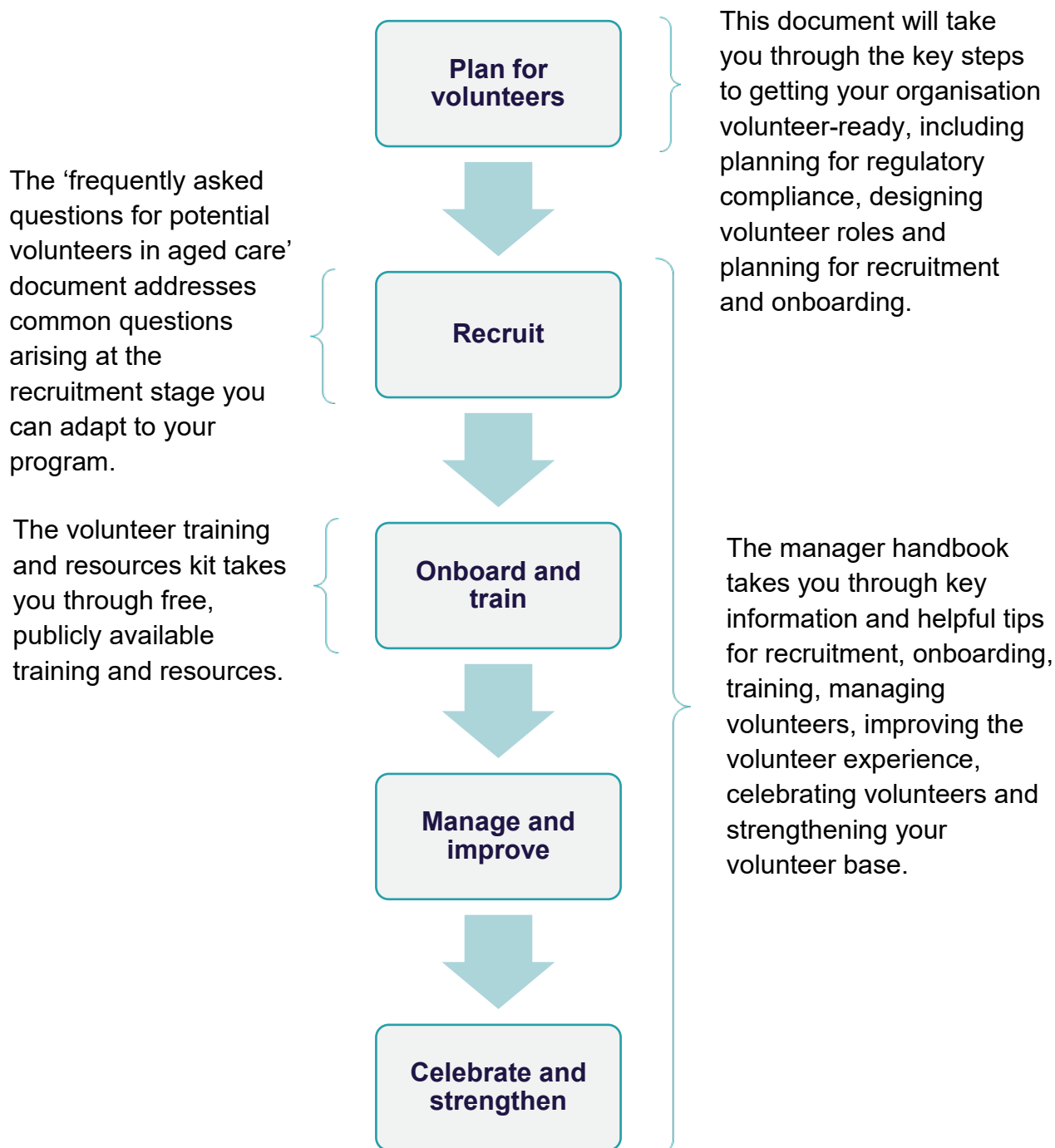
Everyone has a right to be safe at work, including volunteers. If your organisation is covered by the [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#), you must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of all volunteers. This means you must provide volunteers with the same protections as 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



Looking forward

Where to find information about aged care volunteering:





Checklists

Getting your organisation volunteer-ready

- ☐ The organisation has a dedicated Volunteer Manager or coordinator.
- ☐ The organisation has insurance covering volunteers.
- ☐ The organisation understands its responsibilities under the *Aged Care Act 2024*. These may include incident management, reporting, and training obligations, and obligations under the Quality Standards and the Code of Conduct for Aged Care. Note pursuant to the Records Principles 2014, registered 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
- ☐ 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.

Registered aged care providers must ensure 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 complement the paid workforce and do not replicate or 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 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 and 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 and 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 you can access them 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 a registered aged care provider will understand 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, applicable 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.

To help organisations and managers, the department has collated optional and suggested publicly available training and information resources 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' 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 volunteers of all ages above 18 are welcomed and combine this with testimonies from volunteers of several age ranges to ensure 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 covers personal accidents experienced by volunteers working onsite at a facility.

Personal accidents cover will ensure 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 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/](#).

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 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 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, including the expectation 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 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 visas impacting on a person's ability to volunteer. It is recommended 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, including:
 - 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 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.