



Making the change

Recommendations for
Communities 2032 Action Plan 2022 – 2025
Queensland State Budget 2023 – 2024



volunteering
queensland



VOLUNTEER

About Volunteering Queensland

We are the lead voice for volunteering in Queensland supporting this essential industry to thrive. As the state peak body we are solely dedicated to advancing and promoting volunteering. To achieve our vision we work across four strategic focus areas:

- **Enable** volunteer contribution to be maximised
- **Inspire** more Queenslanders to volunteer
- **Increase** the impact of the volunteering sector
- **Ensure** our sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency

Recommendations

1. **Funding for volunteer involving organisations** to safeguard state government priorities
2. Design and implementation of a **state volunteering strategy**
3. Improved **resilience** through volunteering
4. Support for volunteering **governance** and **risk management**

These recommendations are drawn from our ongoing research and consultation with the sector. In addition, two themes consistently emerge in discussions around volunteering:

- Engaging **youth** and fostering a culture of volunteering for the future
- Preparing for the **Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games**, and seizing the opportunity to strengthen volunteering pre- and post-Games

Each year, Australia comes together during National Volunteer Week to celebrate those who give their time for the common good. This year's theme is **The Change Makers**. So often, positive change in Queensland's communities is only achieved through the selfless dedication of its volunteers. However, the future for volunteers – and their capacity to carry the burden of change – is uncertain.

Significant challenges and opportunities lie before us. Societal institutions face declining trust and participation, new technology disrupts our work and leisure, climate change tests our resilience. Only by coupling strategic planning with targeted support, and intention with action, can Queensland ensure its volunteers have the opportunity to connect, participate, contribute and thrive.

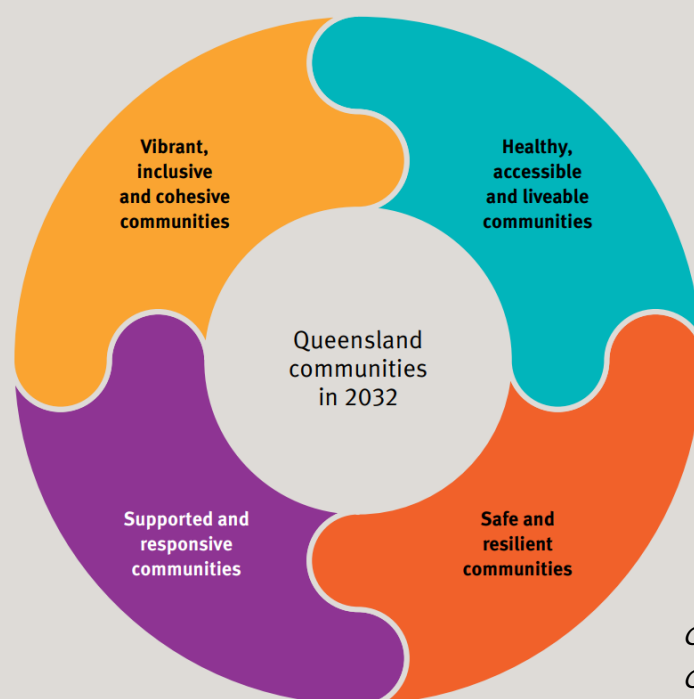
We welcome *Communities 2032* and the change towards connection, strength and resilience it describes. Now is the time to make the change and to partner with our state's key change makers: volunteers.

Communities 2032 and the role of volunteers

State governments exert much influence over the wellbeing of their citizens. From health and housing to arts and education, the state's responsibilities include many aspects of community life. A community-minded government creates opportunities for stronger civic outcomes by leveraging the knowledge, passion and skills of its residents. The reciprocal relationship between the individual, community and state relies on the active, willing participation of all parties. Although it is not always recognised, the participation of individuals within this system typically takes the form of volunteering: *time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain*.

The Queensland Government actively develops strategies to create the conditions necessary for healthy, thriving communities. In December 2022, the state government launched *Communities 2032*. This is a whole-of-government strategy that seeks to strengthen the fabric of Queensland's communities and support all Queenslanders to live their best lives.

Volunteering Queensland commends the Queensland Government for the *Communities 2032* strategy and the inclusion of volunteering among its priorities. As the strategy notes, *"volunteers and organisations that involve and support volunteering are a crucial part of connected communities"*, and *"many services would be unable to operate without this vital contribution"*.



*Queensland Government
Communities 2032 destinations*

However, the success of *Communities 2032* heavily relies on the capacity of volunteer involving organisations – and, in many cases, increased capacity. While actions that explicitly support volunteering are only present within the *Supportive and responsive communities* destination, it is apparent that **volunteers are a key stakeholder across each *Communities 2032* destination.**

“[...] we know that **now is the time** to create the systems, structures and enablers for the communities that we all want to live in now and into the future.”

Communities 2032

For example, over a dozen actions in the strategy are specifically identified as being community-led. These require community members to give time by applying their knowledge, sharing their experiences, performing labour, or a combination of these. Unpaid, non-compulsory participation in an activity for the common good is volunteering. Within the context of state government departments, agencies or community groups, it is ‘formal volunteering’. That is, volunteering through an organisational structure.

“Communities 2032 will prioritise collaboration and partnerships with the sector and stakeholders to ensure Queensland has a strong, **sustainable service network and workforce to meet our current and future service needs.**”

Communities 2032

Communities 2032 seeks to build communities across the state. However, through the plan’s actions, the strategy reveals implicit assumptions about the capacity of volunteer involving organisations and the availability of volunteers engaged through these groups. Collaboration with volunteers and the organisations that host them is always welcome, but Volunteering Queensland must pay heed to the dire warnings coming from the sector. Volunteers and volunteer involving organisations must be supported **before** the state’s reliance on their services is further entrenched.

A volunteering recession

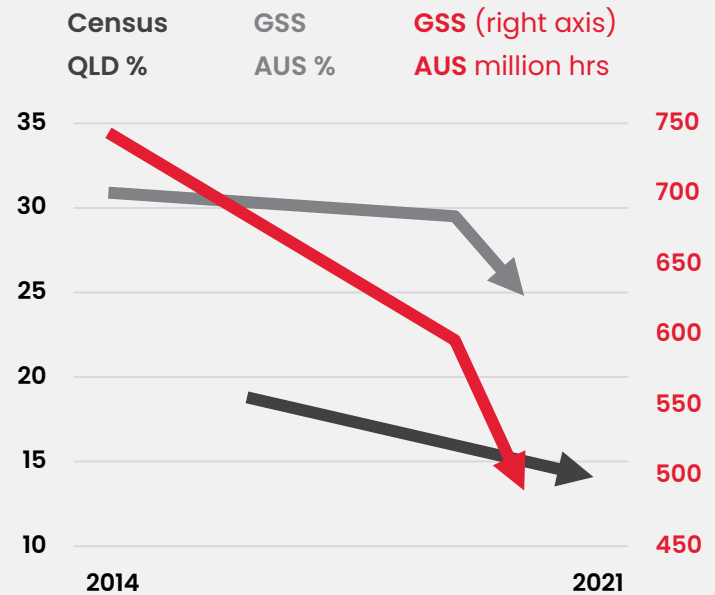
Formal volunteering (volunteering through an organisational structure) is in long-term decline in Australia. Like-for-like measures display a clear trend: while the need for volunteers is increasing, their participation within groups has decreased.

The chart on the right depicts the proportion of Australians aged 15+ who reported volunteering through an organisation through the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It also plots the estimated total hours given through volunteer involving organisations.

According to *Volunteering in Australia 2022: The Organisation Perspective*, **60% of volunteer involving organisations need more or significantly more volunteers** in five years' time. Only 8% felt that their needs would decrease.

Formal volunteering 2014 – 2021

Australian Bureau of Statistics
Census and General Social Survey



Increasing demand, decreasing supply: the pressures on Queensland's volunteers

Just as economic trends must be taken into account for government initiatives, trends in volunteering must be considered for activities that rely on their participation. Queenslanders currently face many adverse pressures that limit their civic engagement. *Communities 2032* directly acknowledges and responds to these pressures, including social isolation, access to housing and cost of living. While volunteering has proven benefits that assist in navigating these challenges, volunteers are not immune to them. Each worsens the barriers experienced by volunteers: namely that they cannot afford the time or the money to participate.

In addition to reducing the supply, adverse societal trends also increase the demand for volunteers. Formal volunteers are essential to many of the frontline services that catch those who are falling into hard times, often before they encounter government institutions. Informal volunteers – operating outside of organisational structures – provide innumerable benefits to the wellbeing of neighbours, friends and peers in the community. A drop in volunteering activity has a knock-on effect that is not always recognised as a decline in volunteering but is always felt as a decline in our collective wellbeing.

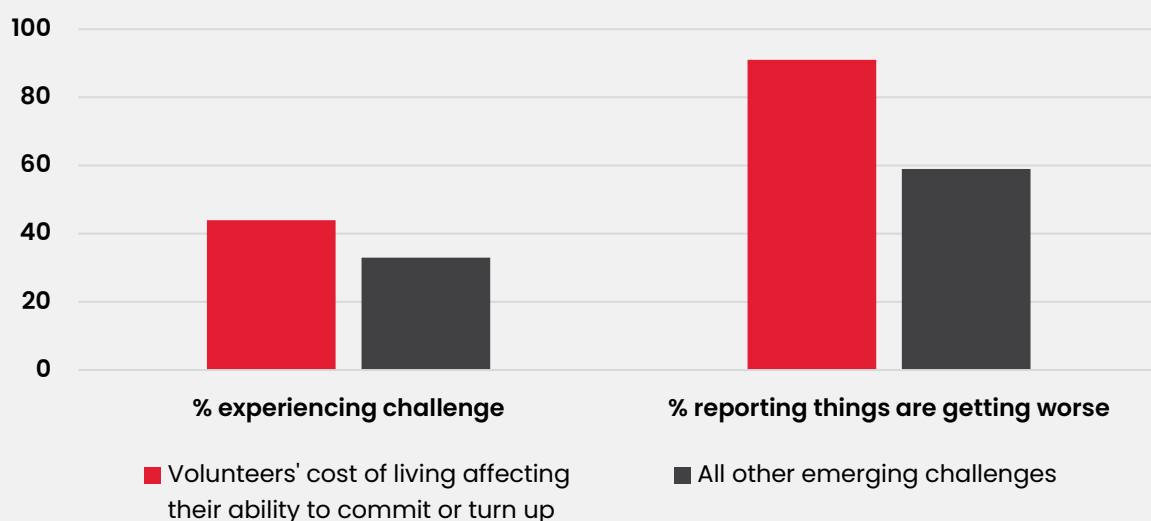
When a Queenslanders stops assisting others through volunteering and starts requiring assistance, our communities haven't only lost a volunteer. They have also created the demand for another, above the replacement cost of the first.

A key pressure facing volunteers today is the rising cost of living. Volunteering Queensland conducted a sector survey in late 2022 to identify challenges and opportunities encountered by volunteer involving organisations. Responding organisations were asked about a series of emerging challenges that they may be experiencing, including harm to volunteers' mental health and demands on volunteer involving organisations becoming more complex.

One of the most significant challenges reported was *volunteers' cost of living affecting their ability to commit or turn up*. This was experienced by 44% of responding volunteer involving organisations, second only to *difficulty finding people for boards or leadership roles within the organisation* at 47%.

Cost of living as an emerging challenge

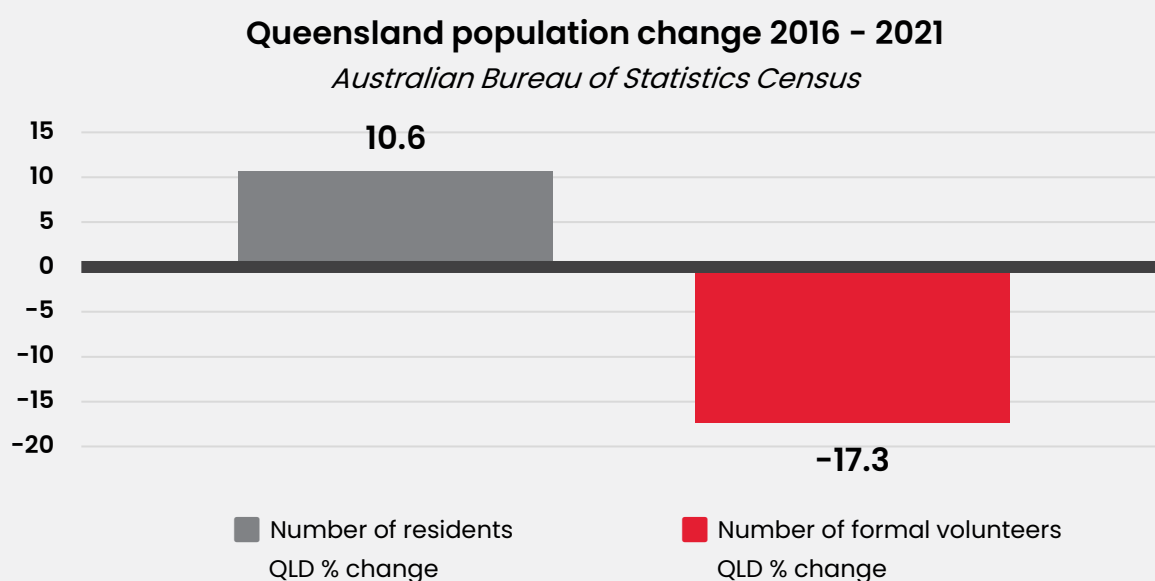
Volunteering Queensland sector survey late 2022



Since the survey was conducted, inflationary pressures have worsened. Just as rising cost of living creates emerging needs *within* communities, it also has an immediate and tangible impact on the capacity of volunteer teams to provide *for* communities. This pincer effect, affecting both supply and demand, cannot be offset by individual volunteers and under-resourced volunteer involving organisations. This is not unique to cost of living; the same effect applies to all societal issues that reduce people's capacity to act. External intervention is required to avoid spiraling decline in formal volunteering, retaining capacity to both mitigate crises and pursue opportunities.

Formal volunteering and government efficiencies

Volunteer involvement is not exclusive to charities, churches and community centres. Many state government agencies also rely on volunteers to help deliver services. The *State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2021* estimated that 500,000 Queenslanders volunteered through governments in 2020. From 2016 to 2021, the Census reported a decline in the number of Queenslanders volunteering through organisations, despite robust population growth in the state. Relative to population growth, the **number of people formally volunteering fell short by more than 25%**. This has a negative impact on the efficiency of government services.



There is a demonstrated correlation between government investment in volunteering and savings in the delivery of public services. While robust data is not available for Queensland, we can look to similar environments for evidence that strengthens both the volunteer and public sectors.

In a 2019 study of 522 US municipal governments over ten years, each increase in the volunteer-to-employee ratio in a government agency **provided an average efficiency of \$8,500 USD (\$13,500 AUD adjusted)** to their budgets. The author notes that these benefits could help increase service delivery for equivalent funding, maintain services when funding is constricted, ease the impact of emergencies, or provide resources for government departments during periods of transition.

However, these gains are not associated with tokenistic, shallow engagement of volunteers. It is only after a year of commitment – commitment to both fund programs and embrace volunteerism – that the investment yields a return. This benefit applied regardless of the type of activity the volunteers participated in.

“It is a problem. It’s not only ageing, it is declining, the base, there are just fewer and fewer people.”

Public servant quoted in Temporary Staff, Contractors, and Volunteers: The Hidden Workforce in Victorian Local Government

The need for government bodies to commit to best practice volunteer management has also been documented closer to home. The latest-known Australian study, *Temporary Staff, Contractors, and Volunteers: The Hidden Workforce in Victorian Local Government* found in 2011 that volunteers were at the periphery of

government thinking, often excluded from strategic plans and effective human resource management. Also, the Human Resource Managers tasked with engaging volunteers reported significant issues caused by declining participation in formal volunteering. There was a lack of knowledge around the scale of volunteer involvement and how workforce strategies apply to volunteers. These issues reflect systematic absence of investment and consideration towards volunteers – those who selflessly give their time for the common good. In the current volunteering environment, participation within formal structures requires ongoing commitment, investment and alignment with strategic priorities. It cannot be taken for granted.

There are parallels between the Victorian local government experience and the engagement of volunteers in Queensland’s public services. Despite the *State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2021* estimating that 500,000 Queenslanders volunteered through governments in 2020, many aspects of the state government’s strategic planning neglect the essential role of volunteers. The *Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022 – 2032* contains no reference to volunteers, nor does Queensland Health’s workforce strategy *Advancing health service delivery through workforce*.

“Public managers should plan to allocate funds for an investment in volunteering programs, especially for recruitment and training.”

The Costs and Benefits of Volunteering Programs in the Public Sector

However, *Communities 2032* could be the start of a new approach. This strategy highlights the importance of volunteers to Queensland and to state government priorities. Replicating this focus across government departments and within agencies is essential. Internal commitments to volunteering don't just improve the budget bottom line, they also position the government to form more effective partnerships with the volunteer sector.



The delivery of *Communities 2032* and the success of the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games both rely on active, constant collaboration between communities, government agencies, volunteer involving organisations and individual volunteers. A government that does not strategically plan its own volunteer engagement or recognise their contributions will face significant barriers trying to achieve these outcomes externally.

Recommendation 1

Funding for volunteer involving organisations to safeguard state government priorities

Volunteering Queensland recommends a multi-faceted approach that includes:

\$200,000 p.a. over three years for targeted grants to drive new activity

The state government has demonstrated one approach through its *Communities Innovation Fund* grants. We recommend that similar opportunities are created specifically within volunteering to:

- Create **inclusive volunteering opportunities** across different cultures
Supporting Communities 2032 actions 1, 2, 12, 13, 44, 47
- Create **volunteering roles for youth, seniors and people with disability**, tailored to their needs and motivations
Supporting Communities 2032 actions 4, 7, 8, 9, 21, 38

Supporting new volunteer recruitment measures increases the capacity and diversity of volunteer involving organisations, while also directly benefitting priority groups through increased participation in communities. These grants are targeted at short-term measures that build capacity for long-term outcomes.

\$5 million for sector-wide support through a Volunteer Futures Fund (investing \$1 million p.a.)

Grants alone will not address core issues that limit volunteers' ability to grow our communities. ACOSS's 2021 report *Valuing Australia's Community Sector* notes that grants have disproportionate negative impacts on small groups, including competition with professional grant writers, complex reporting requirements, and time spent applying when already time-poor.

Although recent events have been disruptive and unpredictable, many of the challenges facing volunteering in Queensland are notably consistent. Long-term challenges require long-term solutions, however governments will not always have the means to provide support.

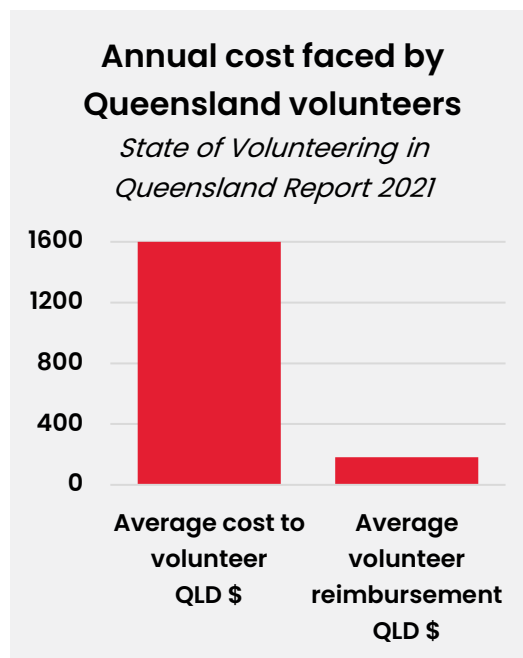
Top challenges reported by volunteer involving organisations

1. Recent events in Australia have **put financial strain** on our organisation
2. Volunteers seem to have **less time** to commit than in previous years
3. Our volunteering program has yet to recover from the **impact of COVID-19**

*Volunteering in Australia 2022
The Organisation Perspective*

We recommend the establishment of a Volunteer Futures Fund to safeguard future support for volunteering and avoid the worst impacts of long-term decline. Potential outcomes of the fund could include:

- Establishment or continuation of **volunteer sector grants**
- Offsets for expenses incurred by volunteer involving organisations, such as **insurance** or **costs incurred during disasters and pandemics**
- Funding to implement the **Queensland volunteering strategy** and its objectives
(recommended funding of \$150,000 p.a. for five years)
- **Volunteer reimbursement** programs, enabling greater participation among lower socio-economic areas and at-risk communities
- **Improving management skills** in the sector through increased enrolment in *Certificate IV in Coordination of Volunteer Programs*
- Strengthening Queensland’s volunteer sector ahead of the **Brisbane 2032 Games**, making the sector more robust and identifying emerging leaders within volunteering communities
- Support for safe and impactful volunteering among **informal volunteers**
- Higher engagement and normalisation of **volunteering among youth** by expanding the *Active Volunteering* schools program. This Queensland program has seen over 15,000 school seniors attain a Certificate I, II or III through volunteering in their communities



Recommendation 2

Design and implementation of a state volunteering strategy

\$400,000 over 18 months for the development of a state volunteering strategy

\$150,000 p.a. for five years for implementation from Volunteer Futures Fund

Supporting Communities 2032 action 48

The Queensland Government has taken the first step towards a state volunteering strategy by including it as an action in *Communities 2032*. Volunteering Queensland commends the state government for its commitment to this much-needed endeavour. We encourage the state government to act quickly to maximise the value of a state volunteering strategy.

There are many time-sensitive conditions that incentivise taking early action:

- The **National Strategy for Volunteering** was delivered in February 2023
- Volunteers for the **Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games** will be engaged in 2028 or earlier, requiring much preparation in the years before
- Following COVID-19 lockdowns and devastating floods, now is an opportune time to create alignment as **volunteer involving organisations rebuild and renew** their engagement of volunteers

Delays to the strategy limit the benefits of aligning with the above developments.

Successful design and implementation of a state volunteering strategy also creates the capacity, alignment and efficiencies among volunteer involving organisations necessary to deliver for governments, communities and Queenslanders. Leveraging these benefits has a compounding effect with future actions, strengthening their outcomes in turn.

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Develop and implement a Queensland volunteering strategy, in partnership with volunteering leaders and volunteering involving organisations, to:

- ensure the right settings are in place for healthy volunteering in Queensland and to maximise the benefits of the anticipated uplift in volunteerism that will arise in response to the 2032 Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games
- promote the benefits of volunteering to improve health, wellbeing and social connection across Queensland communities
- promote opportunities for youth volunteering
- establish a framework for measuring volunteering participation and impacts
- enhance the role that volunteering plays in addressing the causes and impacts of social isolation and loneliness.

Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy

Potential outcomes of a state volunteering strategy include:

- Creating a **unified vision** for volunteering in Queensland that all volunteers and volunteer involving organisations can work towards
- Establishing a network of **local, place-based volunteering supports** across the state
- Enabling more **flexible** and impactful volunteering
- Better **recognition** for volunteering
- Improved **mental and physical health** for Queenslanders
- Increased **engagement** across and within communities
- Preparing Queensland for **successful delivery of the Brisbane 2032 Games**
- Improved **inclusion and diversity** across the volunteer sector
- Improving **equity across regions** of Queensland, including rural and remote
- **Future-proofing volunteering** through effective engagement of **youth** volunteers and the use of **new technology**

Volunteering Queensland is well-positioned to partner with the Queensland Government in the design and implementation of a state volunteering strategy. Being the state peak body for volunteering, we have a singular focus on improving volunteering for the benefit of Queensland. Volunteering Queensland has played a key role in related strategic work, such as the Queensland Volunteering Action Partnership, the *National Strategy for Volunteering* and the *Neighbourhood and Community Centre Strategic Repositioning Committee*.

Recommendation 3

Improved resilience through volunteering (communities)

\$300,000 p.a. over three years to strengthen resilience through volunteering

Supporting Communities 2032 actions 43, 44, 45, 46

A key priority for the Queensland Government is developing safe and resilient communities. Local volunteering is what enables communities to be strong, connected and resilient – especially at times of disaster or during pandemics.

Volunteering Queensland is an internationally-recognised leader in this space and manages two programs that help define Queensland’s response to adverse events: Care Army and Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather (EV CREW). We recommend that these programs are supported to be sustainable and to integrate with a wider network of resilience initiatives, especially future state government actions that enhance resilience.

There is a strong relationship between volunteering and resilience, but more can be done to implement tailored solutions within communities. For example, by mapping *Australian Disaster Resilience Index* SA2 data against formal volunteer participation in the 2021 Census, opportunities can be identified:

	<i>Lower resilience index</i>	<i>Higher resilience index</i>
<i>Lower formal volunteering</i>	Opportunities to improve volunteering and resilience, or to better understand local factors Yarrabah Kowanyama – Pormpuraaw Northern Peninsula Carpentaria Riverview	Opportunities to better integrate volunteering with professional resilience structures Clear Island Waters Highland Park Morayfield Runaway Bay Helensvale
<i>Higher formal volunteering</i>	Opportunities to link local volunteering to resilience efforts Far South West Barcaldine – Blackall Monto – Eidsvold Croydon – Etheridge Far Central West	Opportunities to learn about methods to support resilience through volunteering Chapel Hill The Gap Kenmore Ashgrove Brookfield – Kenmore Hills

Volunteering Queensland recommends that the state government integrates volunteering outcomes in all resilience-building efforts, especially leveraging prior work in this space: EV CREW, Care Army and the VOAD model (Volunteer Organisations Active in Disaster).

Improved resilience through volunteering (individuals)

Pro-rata funding for volunteer involving organisations delivering social prescribing

Supporting Communities 2032 actions 28, 29, 30, 32

Research demonstrates that volunteering has a wide range of benefits to individual resilience. These include social connection, established routines, increased physical activity, gains in skills and knowledge, and a sense of purpose, belonging and accomplishment.

“For social prescribing to deliver its promise, especially in terms of population health management and tackling health inequality, the NHS **needs to ensure that the [volunteer] sector receives the funding it needs to meet increased demand, coordinate support and build community**”

Rolling Out Social Prescribing report

These benefits are acknowledged through the state government’s support of social prescribing. These activities are heavily reliant on volunteering, often being hosted by volunteers or involving the client joining the team as a volunteer themselves. Without broad support to increase the capacity of volunteer involving organisations, social prescribing measures will face hard limits on their efficacy. Evidence for this can be seen in the UK, which has attempted widespread social prescribing initiatives. From the UK experience, it is clear that social prescribing cannot reach its potential without first supporting local volunteering efforts.

We recommend that social prescribing measures are underpinned by broad support for volunteer involving organisations, including building capacity before an expansion of social prescribing services, as well as funding the delivery of services during its implementation.

“Our recommendations to **ensure a future for social prescribing**:

1. Any organisations or services that take referrals from social prescribing link workers must receive financial investment for this
2. Long-term (e.g. five years) core funding for the provision of activities and services in response to referrals must enable appropriate payment for providers”

Enabling the potential of social prescribing report

Recommendation 4

Support for volunteering governance and risk management

\$100,000 of funding for enhanced, volunteer-specific training in governance, utilising resources from Volunteering Queensland and the sector

While compliance, administration and strategic management have always been challenges within formal volunteering, governance has recently emerged as one of the most pressing issues in the sector. Volunteering Queensland's annual sector survey identified *"difficulty finding people for boards or leadership roles within the organisation"* as a top emerging challenge. In late 2022, 47% of surveyed volunteer involving organisations said it has negative impacts.

Volunteering in Australia research, also from 2022, found that the top activity performed by volunteers in organisations was board / committee work. There is immense potential to both improve the confidence of the sector and unlock millions of hours of volunteer support by improving their governance outcomes. Volunteering Queensland has responded to these needs by developing and launching the *My Governance Journey* tool and hosting training workshops – but more needs to be done.

We recommend that sector-wide support for better governance is developed, including resources, expanded online tools and training. Volunteering Queensland is well-positioned to deliver this work, actively investigating the needs of volunteer involving organisations and implementing solutions for the sector.





\$200,000 of funding for a feasibility study into state-provided volunteer insurance

Another issue impacting the governance of volunteer involving organisations is insurance. This is an ongoing issue for the sector. Managers of volunteers frequently cite a lack of finances, expertise and time needed to navigate this complex industry and purchase an appropriate product.

In particular, lack of accessible insurance severely limits the number of roles available to youth through volunteer involving organisations. Similar challenges have been encountered in designing roles suitable for seniors and vulnerable groups.

We recommend funding a feasibility study to determine appropriate options for improving volunteer insurance accessibility. There is a mechanism to provide volunteer insurance through the Queensland Government via WorkCover, however in practice its use among organisations is very limited. Current WorkCover volunteer insurance covers a small subset of higher-risk activities. This could be expanded to cover lower-risk activities, potentially lowering premiums while improving safety and confidence in the sector.