

# State of Volunteering South Australia 2023

## SUMMARY & KEY FINDINGS









*Volunteering SA&NT acknowledges the Kaurna People as the traditional owners of the land on which we live and work. We recognise the importance of their connection to place and community on these lands and pay our respects to Elders, past and present.*

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# Executive Summary

*Despite the enduring challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost-of-living crisis, a staggering number of volunteers in South Australia continue to freely give their time to activities that benefit and enrich their communities.*

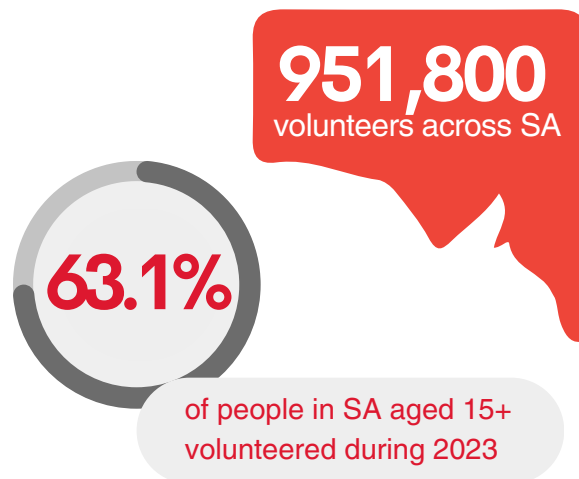
In 2023, 951,800 South Australians dedicated their time to volunteering, generating a substantial value of \$36.1 billion for the state. Volunteers contributed 223 million hours and individuals volunteered for an average of 4.5 hours per week. This includes people who volunteered formally with organisations (30%) and those who contributed informally in their communities (42.8%).

A considerable amount of volunteering activities in SA are undertaken by younger people, with 69.4% of people aged 35-44 engaging in some form of volunteerism, followed closely by 67.4% of people aged 25-34, and 67% of those aged under 25.

While the sheer breadth of volunteer contributions in SA is immense, this comes at a significant cost to volunteers. To highlight this, the report reveals an hourly cost of \$14.92 to volunteer, with volunteers absorbing 83.3% of the total expenses of volunteering, compared to 16.7% for volunteer-involving organisations. Additionally, 9.5% of paid volunteer managers and 23% of unpaid volunteer managers bear the brunt of costs related to volunteering activities.

Despite this significant financial impost, 76.4% of volunteers reported their intention to maintain or increase their volunteering efforts over the next three years, while 28% of non-volunteers reported their intention to start volunteering over the same period. Similarly, 56.5% of volunteer managers believed they would be doing the same or more hours with their organisation in three years' time.

Volunteering generates substantial social and economic benefits for SA. The \$36.1 billion benefit represents a return of \$5.20 for every dollar invested in volunteering. Volunteering's social return is estimated to be \$29.3 billion.



The report further estimates the replacement labour cost of volunteering at \$9 billion, nearly double the cost of the entire SA public sector. Volunteering is identified as a key contributor to community well-being, resulting in a notable 14.7% increase in workplace productivity.

The report draws on insights from two extensive surveys within the volunteering sector. The first, a Public Survey, involved a random sample of 986 SA residents, while the second, a Volunteer Manager survey, included 341 SA volunteer managers from across metropolitan, regional, and remote locations. Additionally, four focus groups were undertaken with volunteers, volunteer managers and peak bodies within the aged care sector, providing valuable information on their unique challenges and opportunities.

The inaugural State of Volunteering Report provides a comprehensive, rich, and practical snapshot of the volunteering landscape in SA, offering insights into the volunteering sector, volunteering behaviour and the economic and social value of volunteering.



## Introduction

Commissioned by Volunteering SA&NT, this comprehensive report offers a timely overview of the State of Volunteering in SA in 2023. As such, it serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, community leaders, volunteer managers, and engaged citizens alike.

The objectives of this report are manifold: to quantify the economic and social value of volunteering, to provide insights into the characteristics and challenges of volunteers and volunteer managers, and to advance evidence-based data that can inform stakeholder decisions. In doing so, this report complements and extends previous work in this field, including previous State of Volunteering Reports and research undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

One of the standout features of this report is the scale of the research that underpins it. Its analysis is motivated by one of the largest-ever population-representative surveys conducted exclusively on volunteering within SA, comprising a sample of 986 individuals. This is supported by a survey of volunteer managers in SA, involving 341 respondents.<sup>1</sup>

This extensive dataset enables a deep understanding of volunteering from both the volunteer and managerial perspectives, making the findings of this report particularly relatable and reliable. It tells the story of volunteering in the State, capturing the unique characteristics that make SA's volunteering landscape one-of-a-kind.

Anchoring the report is a robust cost-benefit analysis that quantifies the economic and social value that volunteering delivers to SA. The principal finding reveals that the benefits of volunteering significantly outweigh the social costs, resulting in a substantial return that enriches the whole community. For every dollar invested in volunteering, there is an economic return of \$5.20, demonstrating remarkable efficiency in outcome.

Ultimately, this report is designed to be more than a compendium of statistics and observations; it aims to be a catalyst for informed decision-making and action. By drawing quantifiable evidence from authentic experiences, we hope to continue to inform the strategic direction of South Australia's volunteering sector.

<sup>1</sup> - These surveys were concurrently undertaken in every state and territory in Australia, resulting in a national dataset of 6,830 individuals and 3,948 volunteer managers.



## Key Findings

## Volunteering in SA

**951,800**  
volunteers across SA

**63.1%**

of people in SA over the age of 15 volunteered in 2023



## Top 5 motivations to volunteer



- 1 To help others
- 2 For enjoyment
- 3 To use skills and experience
- 4 For social and community connection
- 5 To be active

South Australians spent over

**223 million hours**

volunteering in 2023

With an average of **19.5 hours** per month

## Top 3 recruitment channels



1 Word of mouth



2 Social media



3 Online search

**26.7%**



of volunteering was done online or at home

**30.0%**



of volunteers engaged in formal volunteering

**42.8%**



of volunteers engaged in informal volunteering

**28.6%**

of SA residents intend to volunteer more in 3 years' time

## Social preference for volunteering

By themselves – 31.3%

With others – 33.3%

Both – 35.3%

## Barriers to volunteering

(for non-volunteers)

1. No time
2. Not sure how/never been asked
3. Not interested in volunteering
4. Lack of confidence
5. Health reasons

## Barriers to volunteering more

(for existing volunteers)

1. No time
2. Costs
3. Burnout (over-volunteering)
4. Health reasons
5. Not interested in volunteering more

## Demographic constraints on volunteering with others

(as reported by volunteers)

1. Living with disability
2. Age (for persons over 75 years)
3. Caring duties



## Key Findings

# Volunteer Management in SA

### Top retention strategies:



**1** Volunteer training and development



**2** Personal relationship building



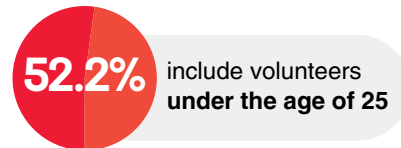
**3** Role flexibility and accessibility support

### Top recruitment channels:



### Key inclusion metrics

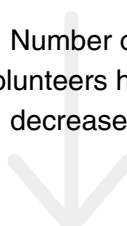
(% of volunteer managers that include these demographics in their programs)



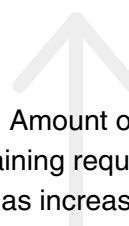
### Biggest changes of the last 3 years

(as perceived by volunteer managers)

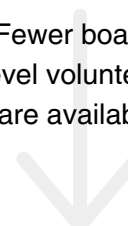
Number of volunteers have decreased



Amount of training required has increased



Fewer board-level volunteers are available



**32.3% of volunteer managers believe their number of volunteers will increase in the next 3 years**



of the volunteer managers surveyed

**61.6%** were paid staff



**42.2%** were unpaid/volunteers

(with 3.8% receiving partial payment)

**9.5%** of volunteer managers surveyed cover the costs of some/all of their volunteer program

### Top 5 issues in volunteering

(as perceived by volunteer managers)

1. Volunteer health and safety
2. Volunteer retention
3. Volunteer recruitment
4. Volunteer management
5. Organisational culture, inclusion and diversity

### Barriers to volunteering

(as perceived by volunteer managers)

1. No time
2. Health reasons
3. Loss of interest
4. Burnout
5. Government requirements/restrictions

### Top 3 sources of help utilised by volunteer managers

- 1 Their organisation**
- 2 Their volunteers**
- 3 Fellow volunteer managers**





## Key Findings

### Value of Volunteering

**\$ 36.1 billion** - total social and economic benefits of volunteering in SA

**\$ 5.20** - return for every **\$1** invested in volunteering

**\$ 29.3 billion** - net (or social) return on investment

**\$ 9.0 billion** - cost of replacing volunteering labour

**\$ 6.4 billion** - estimated extent to which employee participation in volunteering improved workplace productivity

**\$ 17.8 billion** - value of well-being benefit felt by individual volunteers

**2.4%**

total contribution of volunteering expenditure to Gross State Product (SA)

**31,100**

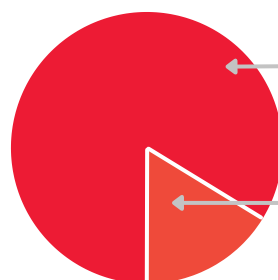
jobs created in all sectors by expenditure on volunteering

**4.4%**

increase in individual well-being attributable to volunteering

**\$3.1 billion**

direct cost of volunteering and its associated activities in SA



**\$2.6 billion** costs to individuals, 83.3% of financial burden

**\$0.5 billion** costs to organisations, 16.7% of financial burden

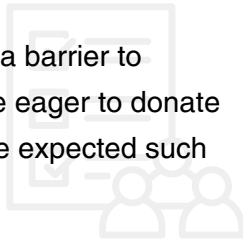
## Key Findings

# Volunteering in Aged Care

Insights from focus groups with volunteers, volunteer managers and peak bodies.

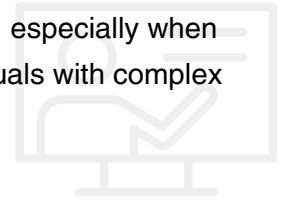
### Recruitment

- Recruitment of volunteers to the aged care sector is increasingly complex, involving multiple steps such as interviews, reference checks, and police checks.
- This complexity may act as a barrier to potential volunteers who are eager to donate their time but might not have expected such thorough requirements.



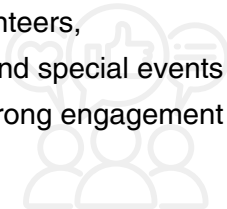
### Induction and Training

- Volunteer inductions and training not only equip volunteers with necessary skills but also ensures a consistent quality of care.
- Training is considered essential to ensure safety standards are met, especially when dealing with older individuals with complex issues.



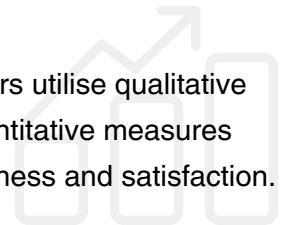
### Engagement and Retention

- It's crucial to find innovative ways to engage and retain volunteers, especially considering the array of challenges they face.
- Regular meetings with volunteers, personalised interactions, and special events are central elements of a strong engagement strategy.



### Volunteer Contributions

- While mechanisms exist for evaluating the contributions of volunteers, there is difficulty quantifying both the tangible and intangible effects of their work.
- Many volunteer managers utilise qualitative feedback alongside quantitative measures such as volunteer happiness and satisfaction.



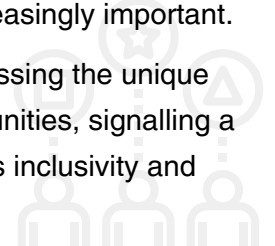
### Digital Technology

- It's important to leverage technology and digital platforms for recruitment and enhancing the volunteer experience.
- This includes the use of social media for storytelling, digital tools for simplifying the application process, and online platforms to facilitate training and engagement.



### Diversity

- In the face of an ageing population, the need to diversify the volunteer workforce within the aged care sector is increasingly important.
- Diversity is key to addressing the unique needs of various communities, signalling a significant move towards inclusivity and cultural competence.



***“Respondents shared the deep sense of satisfaction volunteers feel from positively affecting the lives of older people”.***



# Conclusion



The data is compelling: a proven annual return of 520% on every dollar invested would set off a financial frenzy if it were tied to a commercial investment. This suggests that the scale and impact of volunteering have been historically undervalued and under-recognised in public discourse.

Notably, nearly two-thirds of SA residents volunteer in some form. Yet it is also evident that volunteering in SA has room for further growth.

From an economic standpoint, this report challenges the traditional view that the value of volunteering is merely the minimum-wage replacement cost of its labour. Rather, volunteering has a much broader economic impact, affecting almost every activity in the state.

The measures in this report indicate volunteering is SA's largest industry by labour force. Consequently, there is a strong case for better resource allocation and knowledge sharing within the volunteering sector to leverage its full potential.

Ultimately, the cost-benefit analysis reveals that the external benefits of volunteering far outweigh the social costs, making the activity economically efficient. Moreover, it indicates that increased investment in volunteering could produce exponential returns.

While the study has limitations that warrant further research, it offers a foundational framework that decision-makers in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors can use for ongoing improvements in how volunteering is promoted and managed.









Full report available on our website  
[vsant.org.au/state-of-volunteering](https://vsant.org.au/state-of-volunteering)



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