



# Barriers to Volunteering People with Disability

In 2023, all volunteering peak bodies commissioned a report to identify barriers to volunteering and how to improve access and inclusion for First Nations people, people with disability, and newly arrived migrants. We have created a snapshot series to share the key findings, so volunteer-involving organisations feel equipped to engage volunteers from each group.

Please note, the language used in these snapshots follows the Australian Government's style manual. However, language is always evolving and varies by region. Always check with local peak bodies and relevant agencies in your area for the most appropriate language.

## Who are people with disability?

The umbrella term "people with disability" includes individuals with mobility, vision, hearing, intellectual, psychosocial, and neurodiverse conditions. This is a highly diverse group with varying needs and capabilities. Where possible specific characteristics of disability will be identified to provide further information about types of barriers to volunteering experienced by people with disability.

Many people with disability are active members of the volunteering sector.



Nearly **1 in 5** people in Australia live with a disability



Around **41%** of people with disability volunteer informally in their communities



1.5 million volunteers in Australia with a disability – **that's 24% of all volunteers!**

*"It has been amazing being the helper rather than the helpee."*

– Interviewee

## Barriers to volunteering

Negative stereotypes reduce people with disability to mere recipients of volunteering rather than valuable contributors. Core barriers are wide-ranging and connected.







- **Access** to transport, physical access of the built environment, digital access and insufficient visual aids or captioning.
- **Lack of infrastructure** such as adaptive equipment, sign language interpreters, accessible material, or flexible volunteer hours.
- **Negative stereotypes** and assumptions limit opportunities and contribute to social exclusion.
- **Unconscious bias** or discrimination influences recruitment, selection processes, and growth opportunities.
- **Medical expenses**, specialist equipment and limited income impacts ability to cover volunteering costs.

# Barriers to Volunteering People with disability

## Key insight

People with disability often face assumptions that they are only recipients of help rather than active contributors. This mindset needs to change to create a truly inclusive volunteering environment.

## Recommendations:

- **1. Make roles accessible and meaningful**  
Make volunteer roles accessible, both physically and operationally. For example, provide clear signage and step-free access to buildings. Assign meaningful tasks that acknowledge the skills and contributions of people with disability
- **2. Co-design meaningful roles**  
Collaborate with disability-led organisations and people with lived experience of disability to ensure their insights and experiences shape the proposed solutions.
- **3. Remove pointless paperwork**  
Streamline application and onboarding processes by removing unnecessary paperwork and reducing barriers to participation.
- **4. Reimburse costs**  
Provide stipends or reimbursements to cover transport and other out-of-pocket costs for volunteers.
- **5. Provide regular training**  
Provide regular disability-inclusive training for staff and volunteers, ensuring it improves workforce competency and is evaluated for impact.
- **6. Increase authentic representation**  
Use imagery and language across communication channels that authentically reflects and resonates with people living with a wide range of disabilities.

## Learn more

[National Disability Services](#)

[Volunteering Australia: Disability Action Plan](#)

[National Knowledge Base: Engaging Volunteers with Disability](#)

[Volunteerability](#)

## For more support

Visit the [Knowledge Base](#) or your volunteering peak body website for helpful advice, information, and insights on engaging volunteers with disability.



*The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.*

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