

Ongoing trends in volunteering in Australia

National Strategy for Volunteering Factsheet: Data from 2023

Key Findings

The most recent national data reveals the recovery of volunteering since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic remains slow. The proportion of people volunteering has increased over the last year but is still below pre-COVID levels, and the average number of hours people have volunteered has declined. This has occurred at a time when cost of living has increased significantly and demand for services provided by many volunteers and volunteer involving organisations has increased.

<p>32.6 per cent</p> <p>of people volunteered formally</p>	<p>151 hours</p> <p>were spent volunteering on average in the past year, per volunteer</p>	<p>92.6 per cent</p> <p>of volunteers were satisfied with their volunteering experience</p>
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- 32.6 per cent of people volunteered formally in the 12 months leading up to April 2023, an increase since 2022 but significantly below the pre-COVID average.
 - This is an increase from 26.7 per cent in 2022.
 - The pre-COVID rate was 36.0 per cent.
- In the last 12 months, the proportion of people volunteering has increased but the average number of hours they volunteered has decreased. We estimate that the total number of hours spent volunteering did not increase between 2022 and 2023.
 - Volunteers estimate that they spent 151 hours volunteering on average.
 - This represents a significant decrease from 180 hours in 2022.

- 60.1 per cent of volunteers were 'satisfied' and a further 32.5 per cent were 'very satisfied' with their volunteering experience.
- Those who spent more time volunteering in 2022 were more likely to have continued in 2023.
- Those who started volunteering in 2023 and did not volunteer in 2022 were more likely to have higher levels of education, live in a capital city, and have volunteered in the past.

Introduction

This report summarises the most recent data on volunteering in Australia, collected in April 2023.¹ This was the same survey used in the Volunteering in Australia 2022 research, and therefore provides robust data on changes in volunteering during the first year of the National Strategy for Volunteering. The data was collected through the April 2023 ANUpoll survey, and analysis was undertaken by the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods.

This report presents data on the rate of formal volunteering, hours spent volunteering, and satisfaction with volunteering. It also includes analysis of the dynamics of volunteering, examining how volunteering activity has changed between 2022 and 2023.

¹ Data was collected in *ANU Poll 55 (April 2023): COVID-19, mental health, employment, policy issues, the value of higher education and role of education, science and technology*, available at:

<https://dataverse.ada.edu.au/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.26193/CI4Z2S>

The definition of volunteering

Volunteering is defined as “time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.”²

This report focuses on formal volunteering, which is undertaken through an organisation or group. This report refers to two surveys, undertaken in 2022 and 2023, that collected data on volunteering in the adult Australian population using the following question:³

“Over the last 12 months did you spend any time doing voluntary work through an organisation or group?”

Please include voluntary work for sporting teams, youth groups, schools, or religious organisations. Please exclude work in a family business or paid employment. Please exclude work to qualify for a government benefit or to obtain an educational qualification or due to a community / court order.

Volunteering in 2023

- 32.6 per cent of people volunteered formally in the 12 months leading up to April 2023.
 - This is an increase from 26.7 per cent in 2022.
- Increases in volunteering were the largest among those aged 35 to 54 years. Increases were either small or not statistically significant for younger Australians (particularly those aged 25 to 34 years) or older Australians (aged 75 years and over).

² <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/definition-of-volunteering/#/>

³ Information on the ANUpoll survey including the full questionnaire, as well as the raw data, is available for download at <https://dataverse.ada.edu.au/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.26193/CI4Z2S>

- Volunteers estimate that they spent 151 hours volunteering on average.
 - This represents a significant decrease from 180 hours in 2022. This means that the overall number of hours of volunteering contributed to the community did not change despite the increase in the proportion of people who volunteer.
 - Declines in hours volunteered (for those who volunteered at all) were much greater for males compared to females. For the former, the average number of hours spent volunteering declined from 202 hours in April 2022 to 153 hours in April 2023. For female volunteers, on the other hand, declines were much smaller, decreasing from 162 hours to 150.
- Women were more likely to volunteer than men – 34.1 per cent of women and 30.8 per cent of men volunteered in 2023.
- Adults of all ages volunteer, with people aged 65-74 years being the most likely to volunteer (39.1 per cent) and those aged 25-34 years being the least likely (26.3 per cent).
- People with higher levels of education, living outside a capital city, in high income households, and in part-time employment are more likely to volunteer, while those with lower levels of education, who live in a capital city, in low- and middle-income households, and unemployed or in full-time employment were less likely to volunteer.
- As of April 2023, COVID-19 does not appear to create direct barriers to volunteering. Those who thought it was likely that they would contract COVID-19 in the next six months were more likely to be undertaking volunteer work, and those who had to isolate in the previous 3 months were also more likely to be undertaking volunteer work.

Volunteering dynamics – changes in 2023

People who spent more time volunteering in 2022 were more likely to have continued in 2023.

- Of those in the lowest quintile (volunteered for 16 hours or less in 2022), only 68.0 per cent remained volunteering by April 2023. For the top quintile (294 hours or more in the previous 12 months), this increases to 88.7 per cent. The rest of the volunteering population were in between (78.6 per cent).

Those who started volunteering in 2023 and did not volunteer in 2022:

- Had higher levels of education.
 - Of those who were not volunteering in April 2022, only 7.3 per cent of those who had not completed Year 12 volunteered in the 12 months leading up to the April 2023 survey. This is compared to 16.6 per cent of those with a postgraduate degree, 14.0 per cent of those with an undergraduate degree, 14.2 per cent of those with a Certificate or Diploma, and 12.5 per cent of those that had completed Year 12 but did not have any qualifications.
- Lived in a capital city.
 - Only 10.2 per cent of those who lived in a non-capital city had commenced volunteering by 2023, compared to 14.2 per cent of those who lived in a capital city.
- Had volunteered in the past.
 - By the April 2023 survey, 27.3 per cent of those who said they had volunteered a lot prior to 2022 had commenced volunteering, and 25.3 per cent of those who had volunteered a little had commenced. This is roughly three times the rate of commencement relative to those that had not volunteered at all in the past.

About the data

Data used in this report comes from the ANUpoll series of surveys collected by the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods, which included questions about volunteering in late-2019, April 2020, April 2021, April 2022, and April 2023. The ANUpoll data is representative of the adult Australian population.

The April 2022 survey included an expanded module on volunteering to collect data for the Volunteering in Australia research, including on where and how people volunteer, reasons for volunteering, costs of volunteering, and informal volunteering.

The April 2023 survey included a smaller module, collecting data on rates of volunteering, time spent volunteering, and satisfaction with volunteering, with 4,469 respondents. Across the April 2022 and 2023 surveys, there is data on volunteering in both waves for 2,460 respondents. This makes it possible to track changes in volunteering activity at the individual level over this period. The 'Volunteering dynamics' section focuses on this sub-sample.

Further analysis of this data is available in the full report by Nicholas Biddle and Matthew Gray:

Biddle, B. and M. Gray (2023). 'Ongoing trends in volunteering in Australia', ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods, Australian National University, Canberra.

https://csrcm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2023/10/Ongoing_trends_in_volunteering_in_Australia.pdf

Enquiries about this Factsheet should be directed to:

Jack McDermott

Policy Officer and National Strategy Research Fellow

Volunteering Australia

jack@volunteeringaustralia.org