
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

The Value of Volunteering

A discussion paper on volunteering in the community and welfare sector

House of Representatives

Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth

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Canberra

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Foreword

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, more than 5 million Australians aged 18 years and over did voluntary work in 2006. These volunteers contributed a total of 713 million hours of unpaid work to the Australian economy. There are indications however, that the rates and patterns of volunteering are changing and that many organisations are finding it difficult to attract and retain volunteers.

In recognition of these challenges, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth decided to gauge the opinions of volunteers and organisations relying on volunteers in the community and welfare sector. Accordingly, on 7 May 2008 the Committee held a roundtable meeting in Sydney to hear from representative individuals and organisations.

The Committee greatly appreciated the efforts and enthusiasm of those who participated and their willingness to discuss issues with Members. On behalf of us all, I offer my thanks and hope that this discussion paper reflects the range of issues raised.

Annette Ellis MP
Chair



Membership of the Committee

Chair	Ms Annette Ellis MP	
Deputy Chair	Hon Judi Moylan MP	
Members	Hon Tony Abbot MP	Ms Kirsten Livermore MP
	Ms Jodie Campbell MP	Ms Louise Markus MP
	Ms Julie Collins MP	Mr Brett Raguse MP
	Hon Sussan Ley MP	Mr Chris Trevor MP

Committee Secretariat

Secretary	Mr James Catchpole
Inquiry Secretary	Dr Alison Clegg
Research Officer	Ms Teneille Steptoe
Administrative Officers	Ms Gaye Milner
	Ms Tarran Snape



List of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
CALD	culturally and linguistically diverse
CCI	corporate community investment
CSR	corporate social responsibility
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
VMP	Volunteer Management Program
VRCs	volunteer resource centres
VUOs	volunteer using organisations
VWI	voluntary work initiative

Background

- 1.1 The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth for the 42nd Parliament was established on 12 March 2008. The Committee is chaired by the Member for Canberra, Ms Annette Ellis MP.
- 1.2 On 19 March 2008, Members resolved that the Committee would conduct a one day roundtable forum (the forum) to investigate the state of the voluntary sector in Australia and to identify the significant challenges facing it. It was agreed that the outcomes of the forum would be presented in a Committee discussion paper.

Scope of the Roundtable Forum

- 1.3 Given the Committee's portfolio responsibilities, it was decided to focus on volunteering in the community and welfare sectors.¹
- 1.4 Despite the focus on community and welfare volunteering, the Committee acknowledges the valuable contribution of volunteers and volunteer using organisations (VUOs) across all sectors. Similarly, many of the issues raised at the forum are likely to be applicable to the voluntary sector more broadly.

1 Community and welfare defined as 'the provision of human and social services to the general community and specific target population groups (e.g. ethno-specific groups, young people, families etc)'.

Conduct of the Roundtable Forum

Format of the Roundtable Forum

- 1.5 The Committee was keen to encourage discussion among participants in order to explore the challenges facing community and welfare volunteers and VUOs. In her introductory statement the Chair explained the rationale for the format of the forum:
- ...the committee has selected a format for today's forum that allows committee members and all participants to interact directly with one another, providing greater opportunity for debate and solutions-focused discussion.²
- 1.6 To allow all participants to engage fully in discussion, the number of participants was limited. Nonetheless, participants were selected to provide wide ranging representation from the community and welfare volunteering sector.
- 1.7 The forum took place on 7 May 2008 in Sydney. To encourage public attendance, the Committee advertised the forum in *The Australian* on 30 March 2008. Information relating to the forum, including details of the program and venue, were posted on the Committee's webpage.³

Program and Participants

- 1.8 The Committee invited a number of individuals and organisational representatives to participate in the forum. The list of participants is at Appendix A.
- 1.9 The 12 participants represented:
- the national peak body for volunteers and volunteering (Volunteering Australia);
 - the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) – the Australian Government Department with primary portfolio responsibility for the voluntary sector;
 - larger and smaller community and welfare VUOs;

2 Ms Annette Ellis, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 1-2.

3 Parliament of Australia Website, viewed on 28 August 2008 at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fchy/reports.htm>.

- VUOs with an urban focus and VUOs with a regional/remote focus;
 - VUOs serving the general community and those with specific target populations (e.g. youth, culturally diverse communities);
 - individuals with volunteering experience;
 - a business/corporate representative with an active employee volunteering program; and
 - a social policy researcher with expertise in volunteering research.
- 1.10 While each participant was invited to appear in a particular capacity, they were encouraged to draw on the full extent of their experience in discussions.
- 1.11 The program for the forum is at Appendix A. The forum comprised two introductory sessions; an overview of the Australian community and welfare volunteering sector in Australia provided by Volunteering Australia and an overview of assistance for volunteers and the voluntary sector available through FaHCSIA programs. These sessions were intended to provide the context for subsequent discussion.
- 1.12 The remainder of the day's proceedings discussed the following themes:
- emerging trends in volunteering in Australia;
 - challenges for individual volunteers;
 - operational challenges for VUOs; and
 - administrative and legislative challenges for VUOs.
- 1.13 The procedure for discussing the themes followed a similar pattern in each session. At the beginning of the session, each participant could speak to the theme for up to three minutes. Members of the Committee were then given the opportunity to ask questions before the debate was opened to general discussion relevant to the topic.
- 1.14 At the end of the forum, the Chair invited each participant to make final comments on any matters relevant to the issues raised during the forum. The Chair also invited participants to provide additional written comments to the Committee (Appendix B).

Transcript of Roundtable Forum Proceedings

- 1.15 The proceedings of the roundtable forum were recorded by Hansard. A full transcript of the proceedings can be obtained from the Committee's webpage.⁴

Structure of the Discussion Paper

- 1.16 Chapter 2 presents contextual information on the voluntary sector in Australia, and examines the changes in the demographics of volunteers, patterns of volunteering, reasons for choosing to volunteer and other emerging trends.
- 1.17 Chapter 3 reviews the challenges and issues raised during the forum discussions and considers the various options presented for addressing these challenges, for improving support for volunteers and VUOs and for strengthening the voluntary sector.

4 Parliament of Australia Website, viewed on 28 August 2008
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fchy/index.htm>.

Volunteering in Australia and Emerging Trends

Defining and Recognising Volunteering

- 2.1 The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines a volunteer as:
... someone who willingly gave unpaid help in the form of time, service or skills, to or through an organisation.
- 2.2 Using this definition, data from the 2006 ABS Voluntary Work Survey, an intensive survey of individuals involving interviews and explanations of the type of activities that constitute volunteering, indicated that more than 30% of people in Australia are volunteers.¹
- 2.3 During discussion a number of forum participants reported that many individuals failed to recognise their own activities as constituting volunteering.² Corroborating this observation, Professor Mark Lyons, a leading researcher on volunteering in Australia, noted that in the absence of the intensive interview process used by the ABS for its Voluntary Work Survey, only 19% of Australians had identified themselves as volunteers in response to a question included in the 2006 ABS census.³

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 3.

2 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 36-37 & p. 71.

3 Professor Mark Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 37.

- 2.4 Ms Lisa Tribuzio of the Victorian Arabic Social Services also noted the importance of cultural differences when recognising volunteering activities, stating:

The word 'volunteering' is often not a word or a concept used in a lot of Arabic-speaking-background cultures.⁴

- 2.5 Participants also raised the distinction between formal and informal volunteering, emphasising the importance of recognising and valuing the contribution to Australian society of both types of volunteering.⁵

- 2.6 In defining formal volunteering, Mr Cary Pedicini noted that the national peak body for volunteers and volunteering organisations, Volunteering Australia, recognises the following essential principles:

Firstly, the efforts must be of benefit to both the community and the individual volunteer. They must be of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion, for no financial payment and, finally, in designated volunteer positions only.⁶

- 2.7 In contrast to formal volunteering, which usually takes place in 'structured settings' and 'with clear lines of accountability and responsibility', Mr Pedicini explained, that informal volunteering:

...takes place in local communities in response to specific social needs. The volunteers work in largely unfunded, less structured settings and this group may include neighbourhood groups and self-help groups: recreational, sporting, social and the like. Examples of informal volunteering include emotional support, transport errands, domestic work, child care, teaching and coaching.⁷

- 2.8 Participants noted there is a tendency to focus on formal volunteering only. Consequently, it was suggested that information on the contribution of informal volunteering to Australia was not adequately captured through available statistics.⁸

- 2.9 For example, in relation to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, Ms Tribuzio commented that if informal

4 Ms Lisa Tribuzio, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 12.

5 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 3-5, p. 12, p. 18, p. 24, p. 36, p. 70 & p. 72.

6 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 3-4.

7 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 4.

8 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 3. See also Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 5, p. 12, p. 18, p. 24 & p. 72

volunteering activities were included in surveys of volunteering, then the CALD participation rate was found to be approximately 72%.⁹

- 2.10 While it was noted that the recognition of the value and contribution of volunteers to society through national awards and/or certificates of appreciation were popular initiatives, the success of these is dependent on people recognising that their own participation in certain activities, or that of others, qualifies them as 'volunteers'.
- 2.11 In view of the issues raised regarding the definition of volunteering and its recognition, Professor Mark Lyons suggested that regular publicity was important to reinforce the broad concept of volunteering and to move perceptions away from traditional stereotypes.¹⁰
- 2.12 Also in relation to acknowledging the real value of volunteering to society, Mr Les MacDonald noted the importance of the 'subtle' messages that Government in particular sends. By way of example, Mr MacDonald observed:

... the huge distortion that occurs in our national honours system. The highest levels of that system seem to be dominated by business people, sports people and senior public servants, all of whom get paid quite well, as I understand it, for what they do. The lower levels of the honours system are dominated by the people who do things for their community for nothing, and do many of the things that those other people would never stoop to doing.¹¹

Committee Comment

- 2.13 **The Committee acknowledges the value of both formal and informal volunteering to Australian society, including the contribution to building social capital, sustaining communities and promoting social inclusion.**
- 2.14 **Appropriate acknowledgement of volunteering and its value to society is more likely to be achieved if there is better recognition of the scope of activities which constitute volunteering, including those activities which may take place beyond the boundaries of traditional mainstream VUOs.**

9 Ms Lisa Tribuzio, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 12.

10 Professor Mark Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 37.

11 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 70.

- 2.15 **To accomplish this, the Committee supports expanding the definition of volunteering to include informal volunteering and supports the inclusion of informal volunteering in surveys of volunteering activity, including those conducted by the ABS.**
- 2.16 **The Committee also considers that this broader definition of volunteering could be usefully applied in publicity campaigns to promote greater involvement in volunteering.**
- 2.17 **In addition, the Committee believes that all levels of government could demonstrate increased recognition of volunteers by improved acknowledgement through formal systems, including national honours and other award schemes.**

Volunteering in Australia

- 2.18 To date, the ABS has conducted three Voluntary Work Surveys (1995, 2000 and 2006). The major aims of the Surveys were to collect data on:
- participation in voluntary work;
 - the characteristics of people that volunteer;
 - the type of organisations they volunteer for; and
 - the volunteer activities they undertake.
- 2.19 Much of the information presented below on volunteers and volunteering in Australia has been obtained from the statistics reported by the ABS in these Voluntary Work Surveys.
- 2.20 In addition, this data is supplemented by information obtained from the verbal evidence presented by participants during the forum discussion relating to their own observations and experiences.

The Voluntary Sector in Australia

- 2.21 According to the ABS, in 2006 there were more than 5 million volunteers over the age of 18 years in Australia, representing 34% of the adult population and contributing 713 million volunteer hours.¹²
- 2.22 The economic value of volunteering in Australia has been estimated to be approximately \$42 billion per annum, with the time donated by

12 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 3.

- volunteers to welfare services alone, being responsible for \$27.4 billion per annum.¹³
- 2.23 In his introductory overview of the voluntary sector, Mr Pedicini described the diversity of the voluntary sector, noting that there are over 700,000 not-for-profit organisations in Australia, the majority of which involve volunteers in some capacity.¹⁴
- 2.24 These not-for-profit VUOs vary in size (large, medium, small) and structure (government or non-government, incorporated or not incorporated, a combination of paid staff and volunteers or volunteer only). VUOs also vary in location (urban, regional, rural/remote), services provided (e.g. sports and recreation, community and welfare, emergency services etc) and client group served (e.g. elderly, youth, families, communities).¹⁵
- 2.25 The ABS 2006 Survey reports that the majority of volunteering occurs in private not-for-profit organisations (84%), with approximately 14% occurring in government sector organisations.¹⁶
- 2.26 The four most common types of organisation for which people volunteer, accounting for 74% of volunteering involvements¹⁷, are:
- sports/physical recreation (volunteering rate 11.2%);
 - education/training (volunteering rate 9.1%)
 - community/welfare (volunteering rate 7.3%); and
 - religious (volunteering rate 6.7%).¹⁸
- 2.27 In terms of volunteering hours, almost 46% were for two types of organisations, with sports/physical recreation accounting for over 26% of volunteer hours and community/welfare for 19% of volunteer hours.¹⁹

13 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 3.

14 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 3.

15 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 3.

16 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 56.

17 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 87. Volunteering involvements in ABS explanatory notes described as 'For each volunteer, work for a particular organisation'.

18 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 18. Volunteer rate is described as 'Number of volunteers as a percentage of all persons aged 18 years and over'.

19 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 9 & p. 40.

Characteristic of Volunteers

- 2.28 According to the ABS 2006 Survey, women were found to have volunteered more commonly than men (36% versus 32%).²⁰ For the population as a whole, the volunteering rate was highest at 43% in the 35-44 year age group, followed by the 45-50 year age group with 39%.²¹
- 2.29 People in employment (whether full time or part time) were reported to have had a higher rate of volunteering (37%) than those who were unemployed (26%) or not in the labour force (30%). People with higher levels of educational achievement and with higher incomes were also reported to have had higher volunteer rates.²²
- 2.30 People born in Australia were found to be more likely to volunteer than people born elsewhere (36% versus 29%), with volunteering the rate falling to 26% for people born in non-English speaking countries.²³

Patterns of Volunteering

- 2.31 In 2006, the median number of volunteer hours contributed per annum was 56 hours or 1.1 hours per week. Generally, the median number of volunteer hours contributed was greater for older adults.²⁴
- 2.32 Approximately 40% of volunteering involvements were found to have been undertaken on a weekly basis. Of these around 16% were characterised as 'regular, high time commitment involvements' accounting for approximately 62% of total annual volunteer hours. Infrequent, low hour volunteer commitments were also reported to be relatively common, with 36% of volunteer involvements being for less than 20 hours per annum.²⁵
- 2.33 To obtain an indication of on-going commitment of individuals to volunteering, the ABS assessed when individuals had started volunteering. In 2006, 56% of volunteers reported that they had undertaken their first volunteering involvement over 10 years previously. Approximately 45% of volunteers were found to have

20 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 3.

21 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 17.

22 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 20.

23 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 4 & p. 20.

24 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 17.

25 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 9 & p. 55.

been working with one of their current types of VUOs for more than five years.²⁶

- 2.34 The capacity to attract new volunteers was indicated by the finding that in 2006 around 30% of volunteers had been volunteering for five years or less. Not surprisingly, there was a greater concentration of 'new volunteers' in the younger age groups.²⁷

Volunteering Activities

- 2.35 In the ABS 2006 Survey, volunteers reported performing a range of different volunteering activities. The most frequent volunteering involvements were fundraising (47%), preparing and serving food (31%), teaching and providing information (28%) and management/committee work (23%).²⁸

Reasons for Volunteering

- 2.36 In 2006, the most popular reason for volunteering, identified by approximately 57% of volunteers, was 'helping others or helping the community'. However, volunteers also commonly identified other benefits, including benefits to themselves such as 'personal satisfaction' (44%), social contact (22%) and 'learning new skills and gaining work experience' (11%) as reasons for volunteering.²⁹

Emerging Trends in Volunteering

- 2.37 Changes in the demographics of volunteers and patterns of volunteering over time enable an assessment of emerging trends in volunteering. This assessment requires comparison of data from the 1995, 2000 and 2006 ABS Voluntary Work Surveys.³⁰ A précis of the ABS Surveys' statistics focusing on changing patterns of volunteering over time has recently been published by the Australian Government

26 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 10.

27 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 10.

28 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 7 & p. 42.

29 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, pp. 10-11.

30 The ABS notes that changes in survey design between surveys may affect some comparisons of data over time.

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).³¹

- 2.38 However, changes in data collection methodology between surveys in applying the concept of 'voluntary work' and in the classification of the types of organisations for which volunteers undertook their work have affected the direct comparability of data.³²
- 2.39 To address this to some extent, where possible the ABS reprocessed data to account for methodological and definitional changes between surveys. However, there are still limitations to conclusions that can be made regarding the extent of changes to some aspects of volunteering over time. More detailed information regarding the impact of methodological changes on data comparisons between Surveys can be found in the Appendix of the ABS 2006 Survey.³³
- 2.40 In this context, while acknowledging that the data in the ABS Surveys is the best currently available, Professor Lyons urged caution with interpretation of the data in relation to emerging trends.³⁴

Changes in the Voluntary Sector

- 2.41 A comparison of the ABS 1995, 2000 and 2006 Surveys reveals that there has been an increase in the number of people volunteering, from 24% of the population in 1995, to 32% in 2000 and 35% in 2006.³⁵ As observed by Professor Lyons, the volunteer rate appears to have risen during the 1990s and then plateaued in the next decade.³⁶
- 2.42 Data on the organisations by sector (i.e. private not-for-profit versus government) for which people volunteer was not collected in 1995 or 2000, so comparison with the 2006 data is not possible.
- 2.43 In relation to the most common types of organisation for which people volunteer, comparison of the data between Surveys suggests that the top four have consistently remained:
- sports/physical recreation;
 - education/training;

31 Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2008), *Volunteering in Australia: Changing patterns in voluntary work 1995-2006*.

32 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 78.

33 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 78.

34 Professor Mark Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 18.

35 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 5.

36 Professor Mark Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 18.

- community/welfare; and
 - religious.³⁷
- 2.44 However, it should be noted that organisational classification was one element of the Voluntary Work Survey that was modified between the 2000 and 2006 surveys which limits the reliability of direct data comparison. Nevertheless, the data does indicate an apparent decline in the volunteer rate for community and welfare organisations, falling from 9.4% in 2000 to 7.6% in 2006.³⁸
- 2.45 Professor Lyons suggested that this apparent decline in the community and welfare volunteering rate is exacerbated by a simultaneous decrease in the median number of volunteer hours contributed per volunteer.³⁹

Changes in Characteristics of Volunteers

- 2.46 With regard to the characteristics of individual volunteers, several forum participants observed that the stereotypical image of the volunteer, described by one participant as ‘... the housewife from the north shore of Sydney who has time ...’ was no longer applicable.⁴⁰
- 2.47 Comparison of the ABS Survey data indicates that while the trend for increasing numbers of volunteers is apparent in both males and females, and across all age groups, the greatest increase in the rate of volunteering occurred in the 18-24 year age group, rising from 17% in 1995 to 32% in 2006.⁴¹
- 2.48 However, the data also reveals this age group is more likely to participate in sports/recreation, education/training or religious volunteering activities rather than community and welfare volunteering.⁴²
- 2.49 A comparison of the data between the three ABS Voluntary Work Surveys indicates that people in employment (full-time or part-time) have consistently demonstrated higher volunteering rates than

37 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 78.

38 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 78.

39 Professor Mark Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 10-11 & p. 18.

40 Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 10.

41 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 74; Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 4; Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 10.

42 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 47.

unemployed people or people not in the labour force.⁴³ As data on levels of educational attainment and income was not collected as part of the 1995 or 2000 Surveys, further comparisons are not possible.

- 2.50 While the volunteer rate was lower for people born outside of Australia in each of the three surveys, there is evidence of an increase in the volunteer rate in this population, from 17% in 1995, to 25% in 2000 and 29% in 2006.⁴⁴ For people born in non-English speaking countries, the volunteering rate increased from 9% in 1995 to 26% in 2006.⁴⁵
- 2.51 There are likely to be a range of factors that contribute to the lower participation of CALD volunteers in formal volunteering. As noted earlier in this paper, one fundamental difference relates to the understanding of the concept of volunteering, with a much greater emphasis on informal volunteering among CALD populations.
- 2.52 Despite the data indicating increased CALD participation in volunteering, during discussion participants emphasised the continuing need to encourage greater cultural diversity across the voluntary sector, particularly greater participation of CALD people in 'mainstream' formal volunteering.
- 2.53 Mrs Dewani Bakkum, herself a long term volunteer with a migrant resource centre, identified the vital role of this involvement in 'promoting integration and social inclusion of diverse communities'.⁴⁶ Based on her own experiences working in a migrant resource centre, Mrs Bakkum noted:

We have found that many of our clients are only comfortable learning from and talking to people who share similar cultural, ethnic or religious backgrounds.⁴⁷

Changes in the Patterns of Volunteering

- 2.54 ABS Survey data reveals that the increased numbers of individuals volunteering is associated with an overall increase in the total number

43 ABS (1995), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 9; ABS (2000), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 4; ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 4.

44 ABS (2000), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 13; ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 4.

45 ABS (1995), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 9; ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 4.

46 Mrs Dewani Bakkum, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 24.

47 Mrs Dewani Bakkum, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 14.

of volunteer hours contributed, rising from 512 million hours in 1995 to 730 million hours in 2006.⁴⁸

- 2.55 However, the data for this same period also reveals a decline in the median number of volunteer hours contributed annually per individual, falling from 74 hours or 1.4 hours per week in 1995 to 56 hours or 1.1 hours per week in 2006.⁴⁹
- 2.56 As reported earlier in this paper, Professor Lyons observed that the decrease in median volunteer hours had impacted significantly on the community and welfare sector.⁵⁰ In 1995, the ABS reported that 24% of the total number of annual volunteer hours was contributed to the community and welfare sector.⁵¹ By 2006, this had declined to 19% of the total number of volunteer hours.⁵²
- 2.57 Another significant change in the pattern of volunteering is the decline observed in relation to regular high time commitment involvements. In 2000, regular weekly volunteering involvements accounted for 73% of all annual volunteer hours contributed, compared to only 62% in 2006.⁵³ Furthermore, a comparison of volunteers contributing less than 20 hours per annum reveals that in 2000 this represented 28% of volunteers, rising to 36% of volunteers by 2006.⁵⁴
- 2.58 In 1995, 54% of volunteers reported having their first volunteer involvement more than 10 years previously, compared to 48% in 2000 and 56% in 2006. In 1995, approximately 40% of volunteers had been working for one of their current types of organisations for at least six years, compared to approximately 45% in 2006.⁵⁵ The ability to recruit new volunteers as indicated by the number of volunteers that reported their first volunteer involvement less than five years

48 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 6 & p. 74.

49 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 6.

50 Professor Mark Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 10-11 & p. 18.

51 ABS (1995), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 10.

52 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 9.

53 ABS (2000), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 7; ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 9 & p. 55.

54 ABS (2000), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 7; ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 9 & p. 55.

55 ABS (2000), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 18; ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 10.

previously moved from approximately 33% in 1995 to 36% in 2000 and 30% in 2006.⁵⁶

- 2.59 These data in relation to on-going commitment and recruitment, reflect the significant increase in the volunteer rate and the ability to attract new volunteers observed between 1995 and 2000, and the apparent on-going commitment from this cohort. However, between 2000 and 2006, the ability to recruit new volunteers appears to have declined.
- 2.60 Taken together, data on changing patterns of volunteering indicate a trend for a larger number of generally younger volunteers, to contribute a smaller number of volunteer hours per individual and a decline in regular high time commitments. It is not yet possible to assess the level of on-going commitment of these younger volunteers, as many are more recent recruits to volunteering. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that organisations are experiencing increasing difficulty with sustaining on-going engagement.
- 2.61 For example, Mr Bates observed that in some cases volunteers were primarily using the experience gained through volunteering 'as a pathway to a career' staying only for a short period of time before moving on.⁵⁷
- 2.62 In addition to the smaller number of hours contributed by individual volunteers and the reported reduction in longer-term commitment, several participants also noted that increasingly, volunteers had restricted availability requiring volunteer organisations to be more innovative and flexible in their operations.⁵⁸ For example, volunteers who are in full time employment frequently had restricted availability during the working week, requiring volunteering opportunities after work hours or on the weekends only.⁵⁹

Changes in Volunteering Activities

- 2.63 In 1995, the most frequent volunteering activities reported were fundraising (47%), management/committee work (41%),

56 ABS (1995), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 18; ABS (2000), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 18; ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 11 & p. 30.

57 Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 19.

58 Professor Mark Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 11; Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 11.

59 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 11; Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 19.

preparing/serving food (29%) and teaching/instruction (27%).⁶⁰ Notably, the most significant change in volunteering activity over a ten year period is the decline in management/committee work from 41% in 1995 to 23% in 2006.⁶¹

Changes in Reasons for Volunteering

- 2.64 Comparison of data relating to the reasons that people volunteer show 'helping others and the community' has been the most frequently reported motivation over the last decade (42% in 1995, 47% in 2000 and 57% in 2006). However, the other benefits of volunteering, including benefits to the volunteers themselves, have also become increasingly more important over time (e.g. personal satisfaction, social contact and learning new skills and gaining work experience).⁶²
- 2.65 The changing motivation for people to volunteer was linked by a number of participants to the changing demographics of volunteers. It was suggested that with younger volunteers in particular, the reasons for volunteering were moving away from volunteering due to a sense of responsibility or family tradition, toward volunteering more out of self interest and for personal development.⁶³
- 2.66 As explained by Mr MacDonald:
- The older generation seem, from our experience, to volunteer out of a sense of responsibility. They grew up in a culture of responsibility and they felt a responsibility to contribute. The younger generations seem to us to have grown up in a culture of rights where – I think somebody said earlier – they often volunteer to meet a need of their own. There is nothing wrong with that, but it is a reality.⁶⁴

60 ABS (1995), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 13.

61 ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 7 & 42.

62 ABS (1995), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 19; ABS (2000), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 20; ABS (2006), *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 34.

63 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 10-12, p 17 & pp. 28-29.

64 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 11.

Other Emerging Trends

Government Involvement and Funding for the Community Sector

- 2.67 All three levels of governments in Australia have extensive involvement with volunteering. In addition to the provision of funding and program support, government involvement also extends to funding of research, initiating public policy and in some cases using volunteers themselves.
- 2.68 However, government support for volunteering was described as being inconsistent and fragmented. Mr Pedicini noted that many community-based organisations found that they had to report to more than one government agency and across different levels of government which resulted in confusion and increased administration. As stated by Mr Pedicini:
- Different levels of government maintain and develop their own portion of the volunteer pie, often with little reference to what is occurring in other departments or at other levels of government. The sector up until now has lacked a whole-of-government reference point on volunteering.⁶⁵
- 2.69 Participants also noted that those community based organisations that rely entirely or heavily on government funding are most vulnerable to changes in government priorities and associated policies that affect funding.⁶⁶
- 2.70 The challenges for the community sector in managing transitions associated with changing priorities of governments and associated reforms to public policy are considered in more detail in chapter 3.

The Growth of Corporate Volunteering

- 2.71 Another emerging trend identified by participants is the growing importance of corporate involvement with volunteering.⁶⁷ This appears to be associated with the developing concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) or corporate community investment (CCI) as a mechanism to 'increase employee morale, engagement and

65 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 6.

66 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 6, pp. 38-39 & pp. 59-63.

67 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 5-6, p. 11, p. 13, p. 19, pp. 38-39 & p. 49.

teamwork'.⁶⁸ As noted in a 2007 report produced by the Prime Minister's Business Community Partnership:

There is an overwhelming view, with varying levels of sophistication, that a business case exists for not only acting responsibly with an eye to community expectations, but that significant investment in the social wellbeing of communities is aligned with, and increasingly integral to, corporate economic success.⁶⁹

2.72 Volunteering Australia's National Survey of Volunteering Issues 2008, reported that 38% of the VUOs surveyed had utilised corporate or employee volunteers during the previous 12 months.⁷⁰

2.73 Volunteering Australia's Survey reported that the majority of VUOs that had utilised corporate volunteers had found the contribution to be either 'extremely valuable' (57%) or 'somewhat valuable' (39%).⁷¹

2.74 However, also in relation to the growth of corporate volunteering, Mr Pedicini cautioned:

The massive growth in corporate volunteering over the past decade has not come without its challenges. Many well-intentioned initiatives have floundered due to an inability to match the needs and requirements of the sector with those of the corporate partner and vice versa.⁷²

2.75 The impact of the growth of corporate volunteering on the voluntary sector is considered in more detail in chapter 3.

Increasing Administrative and Legal Complexity

2.76 During discussion, a number of issues were raised in relation to the impact on volunteers and VUOs of the increasingly complex administrative and legal operating environment. Examples of administrative and legislative requirement that affect volunteers and VUOs include conducting police records checks and working with children checks on volunteers, obtaining appropriate insurance for

68 The Allen Consulting Group (2007), *Global Trends on skill-based volunteering*, p.1.

69 The Prime Minister's Business Community Partnership, (2007), *Corporate Community Investment in Australia*, p. 19.

70 Volunteering Australia, *National Survey of Volunteer Issues 2008*, p. 4.

71 Volunteering Australia, *National Survey of Volunteer Issues 2008*, pp. 4-5.

72 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 6.

volunteers, ensuring compliance with occupational health and safety legislation and financial accountability reporting requirements.⁷³

- 2.77 While acknowledging the importance of many of these administrative and legislative requirements, many participants also expressed concern regarding the associated costs – both direct (e.g. cost of volunteer insurance) and indirect (e.g. time and resources) required to ensure compliance.
- 2.78 The impact on the voluntary sector of complying with complex administrative and legislative requirements is also considered in more detail in chapter 3.

73 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 5, pp. 20-21, pp. 42-43 & p. 69.

Impacts of Emerging Trends and Challenges for the Voluntary Sector

The Changing Environment of Volunteering

- 3.1 This chapter examines the impact of emerging trends in volunteering on the voluntary sector. Based on suggestions put forward during the interactive discussion with forum participants the chapter also considers strategies and changes in policy that might be implemented to assist the sector to adapt more readily to these trends.
- 3.2 Although the voluntary sector is diverse, what emerged from discussion is a recognition that the sector as a whole needs to develop its capacity to adapt. However, diversity of the sector also means that particular issues may have more impact on some parts of the sector than on others.

Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers

- 3.3 During discussions participants indicated that many community and welfare volunteer organisations were experiencing increasing difficulty in attracting new volunteers and retaining volunteers.¹
- 3.4 As reported in the previous chapter, there has been an increase in the number of people in Australia who volunteer. Notably, this increase

¹ Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 11, p. 15, & p. 19.

has been associated with the increased participation of younger people in volunteering.

Engaging with Younger People

- 3.5 The importance of encouraging participation in community and welfare volunteering by younger age people was broadly recognised by forum participants, particularly as it relates to longer term succession planning. However, data indicates that community and welfare VUOs are less likely to attract younger people than other organisation types in the voluntary sector such as sports and recreation.²
- 3.6 Another identified consequence of the difficulties experienced by some community and welfare VUOs in recruiting new and younger volunteers, was the reported 'burnout' among existing volunteers.³
- 3.7 However, even within the community and welfare volunteering sector, participants reported varying experiences in recruiting younger volunteers. For example, Ms Larman reported increasing involvement of younger volunteers was a trend being experienced by SHINE for Kids.⁴ In contrast, Mr MacDonald indicated that Meals on Wheels continued to rely heavily on older volunteers and that the organisation appeared to have a limited capacity to attract younger volunteers.⁵
- 3.8 Drawing upon her experiences of SHINE for Kids, Ms Larman emphasised the importance of being able to adapt and refocus so the values of the organisation continue to remain relevant and align with the values of younger volunteers.⁶
- 3.9 From the perspective of a VUO operating in rural and remote areas of Australia, Mr Sullivan of Frontier Services also reported experiencing difficulties in attracting younger volunteers.⁷ Mr Sullivan noted declining populations in some rural and remote communities, with many younger people moving to the cities for work. In addition, he explained that transient populations and a shortage of people to

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, *Voluntary Work Australia*, 4441.0, p. 47.

3 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 19-20.

4 Ms Gloria Larman, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 12.

5 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 11.

6 Ms Gloria Larman, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 22 & p. 47.

7 Mr David Sullivan, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 15.

undertake paid work in some regional and remote centres also contributed to the difficulty in recruiting volunteers.

- 3.10 During forum discussion some participants suggested that community and welfare VUOs in particular, could improve their strategies for engaging with potential younger volunteers. Specifically, consideration could be given to age appropriate marketing and greater use of communications media and technologies such as mobile phones, and the internet, including social networking sites.⁸
- 3.11 In addition, it was suggested that VUOs could do more to engage with and educate younger people about the merits and rewards of volunteering through schools and other educational institutions.⁹
- 3.12 Participants also explained that the changing reasons why people volunteer, including the increasing expectations for personal and professional development opportunities particularly for younger volunteers, have changed the nature of engagement between volunteers and VUOs.
- 3.13 Interestingly, a number of participants also explained that an individual's motivation for volunteering often changes over time from self interest at the point of initial engagement to more altruistic motives as they continue to engage.¹⁰ On this point, Mr MacDonald noted:
- Younger people by and large are not interested in volunteering in community services, but once they have done it they enjoy it. The key is getting them into it in the first place. Once you get over that a lot of them will stay, simply because they enjoy what they do. But they do not think they will stay before they have done it.¹¹
- 3.14 There was some discussion regarding more innovative means by which initial involvement of younger people in community volunteering could be encouraged.
- 3.15 However, there was a cautious response from participants about the potential merit of a scheme to provide a partial offset of higher

8 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 15-16, p. 22, p. 25.

9 Mr Harry Whelan, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 15-16; Mr David Sullivan, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 69.

10 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 29, pp. 30-31.

11 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 30.

education fees such as the Higher Education Contribution Scheme - Higher Education Loan Program (HECS-HELP) to encourage greater participation of young people in volunteering.

- 3.16 While there was some support for the concept¹², there was also concern that such a scheme could be seen as providing inappropriate financial incentive in the form of payment by proxy.¹³ As Mr Sullivan observed:

Something like a HECS forgiveness scheme could be great as an entry point to attract people into that volunteering arena who may not otherwise come in. But we need to be really careful that we do not start to build in financial incentives and lose sight of what volunteering essentially is about, which is serving the community. ... Yes, let us look at creative ways of encouraging people into the sector and ensuring they can stay there, but let us not get so fixed on creating legislative frameworks and financial incentives that we lose sight of what volunteering is about.¹⁴

- 3.17 An alternative incentive scheme used in some Scandinavian countries was outlined by Mr MacDonald as follows:

...there is always competition for places in higher education. In Australia selection is based largely on the UAI [University Admission Index] but in Scandinavian countries they have made participation in volunteering a factor. So if two children competing for a place at university or TAFE have pretty much the same UAI score, the one who has done volunteering gets the place.¹⁵

- 3.18 Mr MacDonald suggested that this would be an innovative, no cost option for government, that could in long-term (10-20 years) change the way that younger people viewed volunteering.¹⁶

Committee Comment

- 3.19 **The Committee encourages VUOs, particularly those in the community and welfare sector, to seek greater engagement with younger potential volunteers.**

12 Mr Harry Whelan, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 17.

13 Mr David Sullivan, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 27.

14 Mr David Sullivan, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 27.

15 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 30.

16 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 30.

- 3.20 **This may be achieved if VUOs seek to be more proactive by emphasising age appropriate marketing and increasingly using the full range of media and communications technologies available. This engagement may be further supported through actively promoting the merits and rewards of volunteering for younger people through schools and other educational institutions.**
- 3.21 **The Committee notes the cautious response from participants in relation to incentive schemes (e.g. partial forgiveness of higher education loan schemes) to encourage greater participation of tertiary students in volunteering. Therefore, the Committee concludes that any further consideration requires a thorough examination of the potential benefits and risks associated with incentive schemes.**

Engaging with CALD Communities

- 3.22 During discussion, forum participants acknowledged the importance and potential benefits of increasing the involvement of volunteers from CALD backgrounds. In addition to the benefits that CALD volunteers make to their own communities, it was emphasised that the important contribution made by CALD volunteers to the broader Australian community should also be recognised and supported.¹⁷
- 3.23 However, the lack of English language proficiency was raised as a significant barrier to accessing 'mainstream' formal volunteering opportunities by volunteers from CALD backgrounds.¹⁸
- 3.24 It was suggested that a mistrust of authority and a mistrust of some administrative requirements associated with formal volunteering, such as police checks, were potential barriers for CALD involvement with formal volunteering.¹⁹ Ms Tribuzio also noted:

There is often a reluctance to access mainstream services due to a lack of confidence in accessing these services, particularly for those from Arabic-speaking-background communities post September 11, whereby negative stereotypes have been heightened and there is a perceived sense of racism and prejudice.²⁰

17 Mrs Dewanin Bakkum, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 25-26.

18 Ms Lisa Tribuzio, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 26

19 Ms Lisa Tribuzio, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 26.

20 Ms Lisa Tribuzio, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 26.

- 3.25 To increase the participation of CALD volunteers in formal volunteering, participants suggested that mainstream VUOs need to adopt a more proactive approach. In relation to this, the importance of developing informal processes and networks to engage ethnically diverse volunteers was emphasised.²¹
- 3.26 Practical strategies suggested by participants included greater involvement of people from CALD backgrounds in the management of mainstream volunteering organisations and the formation of partnerships between mainstream VUOs and ethno-specific organisations.²² As stated by Ms Tribuzio:
- ... a capacity-building approach to volunteering, moving away from the traditional charity approach to one of community development, social inclusion and capacity building whereby we have the employment of CALD managers within formal volunteering organisations that outreach specifically to community groups so there is a bridging program ...²³
- 3.27 In addition, it was suggested that mainstream VUOs could improve engagement with CALD volunteers by having appropriate organisational structures and operational procedures that acknowledge gender, religion, cultural practices and language needs.²⁴ The importance of cultural awareness training for all staff and volunteers, particularly those who are increasingly dealing with CALD clients, was also recommended.²⁵

Committee Comment

- 3.28 **The Committee believes that mainstream VUOs should seek greater engagement with potential volunteers from CALD communities.**
- 3.29 **Strategies to support greater engagement may involve dissemination of information through CALD media, including ethnic community radio and newspapers, on the opportunities for involvement with mainstream volunteering. The potential value of**

21 Mrs Dewani Bakkum, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 24.

22 Ms Lisa Tribuzio, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 12.

23 Ms Lisa Tribuzio, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 12.

24 Ms Lisa Tribuzio, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 12 & p. 30, Mrs Dewani Bakkum, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 14.

25 Mrs Catherine Grear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 13; Mrs Dewani Bakkum, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 14.

involvement in terms of broader social inclusion, personal and professional development could also be emphasised.

- 3.30 **Mainstream VUOs may seek to develop stronger linkages with the CALD communities and bridge the gap between informal and formal volunteering through the establishment of partnerships with ethno-specific community based organisations.**
- 3.31 **The Committee acknowledges the importance of ensuring that mainstream VUOs are open and accessible to CALD volunteers. This may require the development of organisational structures and operating procedures that have the capacity to accommodate cultural differences.**
- 3.32 **This may be further supported by seeking greater involvement of organisational managers from CALD backgrounds and by providing cultural awareness training for all organisational employees and volunteers.**
- 3.33 **However, given the resources required, the Committee recognises that larger VUOs are more likely to have the capacity to incorporate culturally inclusive organisational structures and procedures.**

Responding to Changing Volunteer Demographics and Patterns of Volunteering

- 3.34 Having the capacity to adapt to changing volunteer demographics, motivations and expectations emerged as significant challenges for VUOs.
- 3.35 Associated to some extent with the changing demographics of volunteers and to community attitudes to volunteering, it was observed that many volunteers are now better informed and as a result were demanding more skilled or influential volunteering roles. As illustrated by Mr Bates:
- ... [the volunteers] do not want to just stuff envelopes but actually [want] to control what goes in the envelope ...²⁶
- 3.36 A number of participants also reported increasing difficulties experienced by VUOs in finding volunteers prepared to be involved

26 Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 10.

in organisational administration and governance roles such as treasurer and secretary.²⁷

- 3.37 There are likely to be several factors that contribute to the difficulties experienced in attracting volunteers that are willing to accept administrative roles or governance positions, including the ability to recruiting volunteers with the requisite skills and capacity.²⁸
- 3.38 One participant also reported that many volunteers expressed reluctance to accept governance or administrative roles because that they did not volunteer to do 'paperwork'.²⁹ In addition, concern was expressed regarding the possible legal implications and liabilities for volunteers that accept governance positions.³⁰
- 3.39 Several participants suggested that VUOs need to develop more flexible models of volunteering in order to adapt to changing patterns of volunteering, particularly the reduction in the median number of volunteer hours per individual, their restricted availability and the increase in episodic volunteering.
- 3.40 Mr Bates of Wesley Mission noted:
- ... the popularity of more flexible models of volunteering activity, such as virtual projects, events, seasonal, expert consultants, on call and emergency responses. So we [VUOs] have to change: the trend is away from the ongoing week-to-week volunteer style.³¹
- 3.41 However, it was noted that the ability to adapt was likely to be most challenging for those larger organisations with more bureaucratic and established operating practices.³²
- 3.42 VUOs will also benefit from promoting the potential benefits of volunteering by explicitly linking participation to opportunities for personal development and practical outcomes such as skills

27 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 20 & pp. 37-38; Professor Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 29; Mrs Catherine Grear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 43.

28 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 11, pp. 37-38 & p. 47.

29 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 20.

30 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 47.

31 Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 10.

32 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 56; Ms Lisa Tribuzio, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 57; Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 63.

development and the opportunity to undertake training or gain qualifications.³³

Committee Comment

3.43 **The Committee believes that in order to adapt to changing patterns of volunteering, VUOs will increasingly need to consider more flexible and innovative models of volunteering.**

3.44 **While the Committee acknowledges that the capacity to be flexible and innovative will be more challenging for some parts of the voluntary sector than for others, it believes that the sector as a whole would benefit from increased promotion of the opportunities for personal and professional development that can be gained as a result of volunteering.**

Understanding Changes in Volunteering

3.45 The need to understand the motivations of different groups that volunteer, and their changing expectations emerged during discussion as prominent issues.

3.46 As observed by Mr MacDonald:

... there is not really an understanding, in any detailed sense, of motivations. We have anecdotal information from lots of different discussions that we have had but we really do not have any sound research information that tells us what are the motivations of the different groups of people that volunteer and how you then plug into those motivations to start developing group involvement.³⁴

3.47 In addition, it was suggested that the sector would also benefit from better understanding the disincentives to volunteering. While not discussed at length, several participants noted the significant out of pocket costs for individuals associated with their participation in volunteering, such as transport costs, costs of uniforms, training, telephone calls, postage and so on.³⁵ Referring to recent research, Mr Bates noted that involvement in volunteering was costing individuals on average \$300-\$600 per annum.³⁶

33 Ms Lisa Tribuzio, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 12, p. 26 & p. 38; Mr Harry Whelan, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 17.

34 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 44.

35 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 13, p. 19, p. 25, p. 26, p. 37.

36 Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 37.

- 3.48 Volunteering Australia's 2008 Survey of Volunteering Issues indicated that around 40% of volunteers do not receive any reimbursement for these out of pocket expenses, while 40% receive partial reimbursement and only 13% received full reimbursement. The same Survey also indicated that 28% of volunteers reported that the out of pocket expenses had a negative impact on their volunteering.³⁷ It is unclear what impact increasing fuel costs, (the single biggest out of pocket expense incurred by volunteers) and rising costs of living will have on volunteering.
- 3.49 However, in July 2008 the Australian Government commenced its three year, \$64 million Volunteer Grants Program (VGP). The VGP is intended to make it easier for volunteers in community not-for-profit organisations to claim financial support, and includes an element of funding to allow reimbursement of fuel cost for volunteers.³⁸ This may reduce the reported negative impact associated with the increasing out of pocket costs currently borne by volunteers.
- 3.50 It was suggested that increased and ongoing research, monitoring and evaluation would assist the voluntary sector to better understand the factors that impact on volunteering and to respond more effectively to these factors. In a written addendum to verbal evidence presented at the forum, Professor Lyons suggested that Government:
- ...establish and fund a research unit that specialised in volunteering research, or more appropriately in research into volunteering, philanthropy and non-profit organisations. Such an entity could work with volunteer-using organisations, government policy makers, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the social science research community in Australia and internationally to identify research priorities and undertake high quality data collection and research analysis.³⁹
- 3.51 In considering possible research models, Professor Lyons suggested the following options with an annual budget allocation:
- Stand alone research institutes e.g. Australian Institute for Family Studies and the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare; or

37 Volunteering Australia (2008), *National Survey of Volunteering Issues*, p. 31.

38 Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) Website viewed on 28 August 2008 at http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/sfscvseg_2007.htm.

39 Professor Mark Lyons, *Supplementary Information*, Appendix B.

- An organisation that coordinates the research efforts of various universities e.g. the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI).

3.52 An alternative model proposed was for:

... government to establish and endow a charitable trust for the purpose of conducting and broadcasting research on volunteering and voluntary associations. The Institute would operate from returns from the endowment, which could come from the large surpluses currently being generated. This would require no more than a one-off commitment of around \$50 million in capital. The terms of the trust and the appointment of trustees would ensure that the original purpose of the trust was adhered to overtime. The endowment could be administered as part of the Future Fund.⁴⁰

Committee Comment

- 3.53 **The Committee recognises the importance of a strong evidence base to enable the voluntary sector and governments to respond appropriately to changes in the demographics and patterns of volunteering.**
- 3.54 **While acknowledging the value of data collected by the ABS in its regular Voluntary Work Surveys, and occasional research activities on volunteering commissioned by various government departments and agencies⁴¹, the Committee supports the need for more research on volunteering.**
- 3.55 **More specifically, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs may consider further research to better understand who, why and how people do voluntary work in the community and welfare sector.**

40 Professor Mark Lyons, *Supplementary Information*, Appendix B.

41 See for example: FaHCSIA Website, *Social Policy Research Paper No 28, Exploring the Economic and Social Value of Present Patterns of Volunteering*, viewed on 28 August 2008 at http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/research/prps-prps_28.htm; National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (2004), *Passions, People and Appreciation: Making Volunteering Work for Young People*.

Linking Volunteers with Volunteering Opportunities

- 3.56 Following initial engagement with potential volunteers, a significant issue affecting the recruitment of volunteers that emerged during discussion, is the need for effective mechanisms to link potential volunteers to suitable volunteering opportunities.⁴²
- 3.57 The existence of a national database of volunteering opportunities 'GoVolunteers', administered by the national peak body - Volunteering Australia, was noted by Mr Pedicini who described it as a database where:
- Organisations put up the opportunities and volunteers can then self-select and refer themselves to those.⁴³
- 3.58 Mr Pedicini proceeded to explain however, that active matching of volunteers to opportunities that involve determination of the precise requirements of the VUO and the motivations, interests and skills of potential volunteers, was often a more effective matching mechanism than self-selection.
- 3.59 It was also noted that many of the state based and local volunteer resource centres (VRCs) have developed their own databases that enable them to proactively match individual volunteers with the required skills and capabilities with suitable volunteering opportunities.⁴⁴ One consequence of this had been the duplication of effort and a lack of consistency.
- 3.60 While it was noted that many of these systems potentially work well at a local level, Mr Pedicini explained:
- I keep hearing from the centres that the single greatest value that could be added to the sector is a consistent database system – not a national database containing all opportunities and everybody, but at least a consistent system that every organisation could use.⁴⁵

Committee Comment

- 3.61 **The Committee acknowledges the view presented relating to the value of developing a standardised database, to be used at a local**

42 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 25.

43 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 39.

44 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 39.

45 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 40.

level by organisations within the sector, to facilitate the matching of appropriately skilled volunteers with volunteering opportunities.

- 3.62 **The Committee considers that it may be beneficial for the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to examine the level of support and need for a standardised database, and the requirements of such a system.**

Training of Volunteers

- 3.63 Ms Benson wished to dispel the myth that the use of volunteers was cost neutral for organisations:

Today we have talked about one of the many misconceptions – that is, that volunteering saves money because it is free. Obviously, while a person volunteering is giving their time freely, the recruitment, support, management and retention of volunteers cannot be free.⁴⁶

- 3.64 As noted by Mr Pedicini:

Organisations spend time and energy recruiting, training and managing volunteers. Gone are the days when it could be assumed that recruiting a volunteer would result in a long-term commitment with perhaps very little support required from the organisation. Organisations now find that they have to invest significant time and effort not only in the recruitment but in the retention, training and ongoing support of volunteers.⁴⁷

- 3.65 Given the significant organisational resources (time and cost) required to train and manage volunteers, this emerged as a significant challenge for VUOs.

- 3.66 As a result of the changing patterns of volunteering, particularly the reported reduction in long-term commitment to single organisations, Mr Bates suggested that organisations need to be better organised in terms of training. Specifically, Mr Bates suggested that volunteers need to be trained more quickly and efficiently, so that they can do a small project or part of a project before moving on.⁴⁸

46 Ms Paula Benson, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 44.

47 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 5.

48 Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 19.

- 3.67 In addition, due to the costs associated with the training of volunteers, Mr Bates also noted that for some roles, prospective volunteers were required to already have obtained certain training or accreditation before they could apply. Mr Bates suggested that increasingly volunteers would be required to meet or to contribute to the costs of their own training.⁴⁹
- 3.68 To reduce inconsistency in volunteer training and duplication of effort in developing training programs, Mr Pedicini noted that Volunteering Australia had developed Certificates I, II and III of Active Volunteering which cover those elements that are common to all aspects of volunteering.⁵⁰ Mr Pedicini also noted the potential advantages for volunteers and volunteering organisations of accessing training which is accredited and transferable across organisations.⁵¹

Committee Comment

- 3.69 **The Committee acknowledges the advantages of VUOs reviewing the effectiveness and efficiency of volunteer training programs. Where appropriate, VUOs may consider using existing training courses delivered through registered training organisations rather than expending resources on developing their own training programs.**
- 3.70 **The Committee also encourages VUOs to consider the potential benefits to the individual volunteer and to the voluntary sector of using accredited training which is standardised and transferable. VUOs are also encouraged to give due recognition of prior learning where appropriate.**

Managing Volunteers

- 3.71 In addition to the training of volunteers, participants reported that appropriately training volunteer managers also presented significant organisational challenges. It was noted that VUOs sometimes underestimated the resources required to supervise and manage volunteers.⁵²

49 Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 19-20.

50 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 41.

51 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 43.

52 Mrs Catherine Grear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 21 & p 43.

3.72 It was pointed out that managing a volunteer is often very different to managing a paid employee. As explained by Mrs Grear:

Volunteers in fact need better management than paid workers in a number of respects, such as recognising volunteers and ensuring they are happy undertaking the role they are in.⁵³

3.73 In fact it was raised that volunteers may not be used in some cases in the community and welfare sector because professional staff are too stretched and unable to find the time to manage volunteers.⁵⁴

3.74 There is also a general lack of recognition of the importance of managing volunteers, and of volunteer managers, even in organisations where there are many more volunteers than paid employees.⁵⁵ As one participant observed:

It is not unusual to find managers coordinating a volunteer program in organisations that have many more volunteers than paid employees but where, however, the value and importance of the role of the manager is not acknowledged through the provision of adequate resources for the training of those managers.⁵⁶

3.75 In relation to this, Mr Pedicini indicated that Volunteering Australia had also developed training for volunteer coordinators and managers - Certificate IV Volunteer Program Coordination.⁵⁷ Ms Benson also noted a range of training programs for volunteer managers that are offered either at low or no cost through Our Community⁵⁸ which has established the Australian Institute of Community Practice and Governance. The Institute was established to support capacity building through the provision of (among other things) professional training for staff, board members and volunteers working in the not-for-profit community sector.⁵⁹

3.76 It was also suggested by participants that electives on working with volunteers and in the not-for-profit sector should be included as a

53 Mr Catherine Grear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 43.

54 Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 19; Mr Catherine Grear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 21.

55 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 43; Professor Mark Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 46.

56 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 43.

57 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 43.

58 Our Community is an Australian social entrepreneurship body set up in 2001 to build capacity in Australia's 700,000 community groups.

59 Ms Paula Benson, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 44 & p. 50.

component in all undergraduate courses on business, tourism, accounting and law.⁶⁰

Committee Comment

- 3.77 **The Committee recognises the important role of volunteer coordinators and managers. The Committee encourages VUOs to give due consideration to the resources required to support the role, and the various training options available for volunteer managers and coordinators.**
- 3.78 **In addition, where not already included, the Committee encourages tertiary education institutions to consider the introduction of electives on working in the not-for-profit sector as a component of a range of undergraduate courses, including courses on business, tourism, accounting and law.**

Government Involvement and Funding for the Community Sector

- 3.79 The challenges associated with changing government policies, and the effects on organisations in the community sector were raised during discussion. As the majority of community based organisations have significant volunteer involvement, these policy changes may also have consequences for volunteering and volunteers.
- 3.80 Participants discussed the challenges facing many community based organisations that are associated with the uncertainty of ongoing funding.⁶¹ One issue that participants considered had impacted significantly on the community based organisations was the transition in government support from funding of organisations to funding for services, programs and individual projects.⁶²
- 3.81 Participants explained that the transition to program/project based funding, and the associated reduction in security of funding had resulted in a lack of longer term sustainability of some organisations and programs. One participant related his own experience of having

60 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 43.

61 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 6, pp. 63-65.

62 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 6 & p. 59.

to 'retrench' volunteers when funding for a particular program was not renewed.⁶³

- 3.82 Some participants also noted that program/project based funding often does not include a component to cover the cost of program administration and infrastructure, leaving some organisations struggling to find sufficient resources to deliver the service and programs.⁶⁴
- 3.83 Furthermore, it was noted that while the insecurity of government funding had led many organisations in the community sector to recognise the need to be more proactive in seeking alternative funding, this in itself was becoming more difficult. As one participant observed:
- 'We can't rely on government for that funding, so we've got to diversify our funding sources.' That is not necessarily a bad thing; in fact, in some instances it is a good thing. But what it means is that the market out there for donatable funds is getting crowded and so it is getting so hard to raise money.⁶⁵
- 3.84 The larger community based organisations with trained staff dedicated to applying for funding were generally seen by most participants to have an advantage when competing for government funding.⁶⁶ As one participant noted, applying for government funding 'is a profession now'.⁶⁷
- 3.85 In an attempt to redress this inequity, one participant emphasised the importance for smaller community based organisations of partnerships when seeking government funding.⁶⁸ Providing an alternative viewpoint, Mr Lewis suggested that the closer connection of smaller organisations with the community might be viewed as an advantage when seeking government funding.⁶⁹
- 3.86 In relation to changing government priorities that may impact on the voluntary sector, participants suggested that the community based

63 Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 63.

64 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 6; Professor Mark Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 59-60; Mrs Dewani Bakkum, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 60.

65 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 63.

66 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 56-57.

67 Ms Paula Benson, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 57.

68 Ms Lisa Tribuzio, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 49 & pp. 57-58.

69 Mr Evan Lewis, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 60.

organisations would benefit if policy review processes were more inclusive and transparent.⁷⁰ As Mr MacDonald explained:

The difficulty in most of these organisations is that the first they know about it [i.e. changes to government policy] is when the funding is refused – they have all the structures and people and things in place and they have nowhere to go. That is the issue, rather than the fact that the government will from time to time change its mind about what is important and what is not important. It is really about the process, the way that happens, from there on.⁷¹

- 3.87 Although the need for governments to review and change priorities over time was acknowledged by participants, it was suggested the community sector, and therefore volunteers, would benefit if governments gave consideration to transitional strategies as part of change management to assist VUOs to adapt.⁷²

Committee Comment

- 3.88 **The Committee recognises that government policies will change over time. These changes will be reflected in changes to funding priorities that will affect community based organisations, and consequently the volunteers that they engage.**
- 3.89 **In considering the impact of policy changes on the community based organisations, the Committee strongly encourages all levels of government to also consider the possible consequences for volunteering and volunteers.**
- 3.90 **Where possible, governments may consider options for phased implementation of new policies or other transitional arrangements as part of managing change and to assist community based organisations to adapt.**

Funding for Volunteer Peak Organisations and Resource Centres

- 3.91 There was discussion at the forum about the funding of second tier organisations in the voluntary sector, such as volunteer peak bodies

70 Professor Mark Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 59.

71 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 65.

72 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 65; Mrs Catherine Gear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 68.

and volunteer resource centres (VRCs) that provide important links between volunteers, VUOs, government and the for-profit sector.⁷³

- 3.92 Mr Pedicini pointed out that it was an apparent anomaly in the tax system that some peak bodies and VRCS qualify for public benevolent institution (PBI) status while others do not. Mr Pedicini explained that the distinction is based on an assessment of whether the organisations core business is direct delivery of services to the community.⁷⁴
- 3.93 The main disadvantage for those organisations that do not qualify for PBI status is the inability to offer fringe benefit tax exemption for employees in a competitive employment market. Mr Pedicini argued that PBI status should be extended to include all volunteer peak bodies and VRCs given their importance to the voluntary sector as a whole in terms of recruitment, referral and training of volunteers.⁷⁵
- 3.94 It was noted by one participant that despite the similarity of services provided by VRCs, there was a lack of uniformity in VRC funding across the country.⁷⁶ Mrs Grear indicated that annual funding for VRCs under FaHCSIA's Volunteer Management Program (VMP) had been allocated on the basis previously used for the Australian Government's Voluntary Work Initiative (VWI). Mrs Grear expressed her concern that there had been no opportunity for other VRCs to seek funding under the VMP as part of a merit based selection process.⁷⁷ Mrs Grear suggested that there was a need for blanket funding for VRCs linked to best practice and capacity building.⁷⁸

Committee Comment

- 3.95 **The Committee acknowledges the value of the advocacy, support and services provided to the voluntary sector by volunteer peak bodies and by VRCs.**
- 3.96 **With regard to qualifying for PBI status, the Committee encourages Volunteering Australia as the national peak body, to make a submission to the Australian Government's Review of Australia's**

73 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 35; Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 68.

74 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 66.

75 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 66.

76 Mrs Catherine Grear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 33.

77 Mrs Catherine Grear, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 64-65.

78 Mrs Catherine Grear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 33.

Future Tax System on behalf of second tier organisations in the voluntary sector.

- 3.97 **The Committee also encourages the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to consider a review of the administration of its Volunteer Management Program for funding of volunteer resource centres.**

The Growth of Corporate Volunteering

- 3.98 An emerging trend, as already noted, is the increased involvement of the for-profit sector in volunteering. As with many other businesses, Ms Benson representing Alcoa Australia emphasised that her company's support for community engagement was seen a part of core business in relation to corporate social responsibility.⁷⁹
- 3.99 Participants identified the potential for 'win-win' outcomes, where businesses could 'honour their community obligations' and VUOs could receive meaningful assistance and build capacity.⁸⁰
- 3.100 Access to people with specialised skills (e.g. financial/accounting expertise, legal services, business/strategic planning etc) was identified as one way in which the corporate sector was most able to contribute to the voluntary sector.⁸¹
- 3.101 Mr Pedicini also noted that one emerging trend in corporate volunteering was the growth of 'virtual volunteering':

... where organisations that have the types of employees whose skill sets would suit that type of volunteering do it online in their work time for organisations that they may have no face-to-face contact with. These would be services like administration, strategic planning, financial advice et cetera.⁸²

79 Ms Paula Benson, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 13-14.

80 Mrs Catherine Gear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 48; Ms Gloria Larman, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 48.

81 Ms Catherine Gear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 48; Ms Gloria Larman, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 48.

82 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 39.

- 3.102 However, the challenge of supporting appropriate engagement between the corporate sector and VUOs was acknowledged by a number of participants during discussion.⁸³
- 3.103 For example, while it was noted that a number of corporate organisations liked to engage in community activities through large-scale, high profile annual charity days, this was not always considered to be the most useful or productive form of engagement.⁸⁴ Ms Benson outlined two reasons why Alcoa Australia does not adopt this approach to its community engagement activities:
- Firstly, the community partners that we work with have told us that that is actually not a great way of working with them. It creates an enormous number of problems for them, and therefore from our perspective it falls over at the first hurdle – if it is not meaningful to the community partner, it is not meaningful. Secondly, we are a large resource company and we cannot have physically large groups of employees not at work, because we operate 24 hours a day, every day of the year.⁸⁵
- 3.104 Ms Benson explained Alcoa Australia’s approach to aligning the company’s employee volunteering efforts with the needs of the community through various initiatives. This included a successful partnership with an organisation in Victoria called BacLinks which Ms Benson described as:
- ...a business and community links organisation and community partner, which facilitates volunteering by identifying community needs and building links between businesses and community organisations.⁸⁶
- 3.105 While the potential benefit of corporate engagement with volunteering was generally acknowledged, it was suggested that access was more readily available to the ‘larger side of town’, i.e. those VUOs with the resources to proactively interact and pursue these links. There was concern that smaller and medium

83 Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 46; Ms Gloria Larman, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 48; Ms Catherine Grear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 48; Professor Mark Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 48-49.

84 Ms Paula Benson, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 38.

85 Ms Paula Benson, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 38.

86 Ms Paula Benson, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 26.

organisations would not have the necessary resources and skills required to pursue these linkages.⁸⁷

- 3.106 To assist in establishing these linkages, Mr Sullivan noted the services available through another not-for-profit organisation called Goodcompany which connects businesses with VUOs that have specific needs. Mr Sullivan further indicated:

My understanding is that they [Goodcompany] have fewer organisations approaching them than they have corporates willing to contribute time and resources to assist organisations.⁸⁸

Committee Comment

- 3.107 **The Committee believes that the potential benefit of greater corporate involvement with volunteering has yet to be fully recognised by business, VUOs and by the wider community.**
- 3.108 **Nevertheless, the Committee is also aware of the significant challenges associated with establishing improved linkages between the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors. Specifically there is a need to focus on establishing linkages that have the capacity to better match the needs of the voluntary sector with the resources and skills available within the business sector.**
- 3.109 **To facilitate the development of such linkages, the Committee encourages businesses and VUOs to use referral and matching services, such as those provided by organisations like BacLinks and Goodcompany.**
- 3.110 **The Committee believes that Volunteering Australia, as the peak body for the voluntary sector, might consider promoting the corporate-volunteering referral and matching services that are available in Australia, and including links on its website to direct potential users to these services.**

87 Professor Mark Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 48; Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 50.

88 Mr David Sullivan, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 49.

Administrative and Legislative Challenges for Volunteer Using Organisations

- 3.111 The operational challenges facing many VUOs as a consequence of increasing administrative and legislative requirements were discussed at length during the forum.
- 3.112 Specific issues raised by participants included the costs, workload and lack of national consistency associated with background checking of volunteers (criminal history records and working with children checks). Also raised were the costs and complexities associated with insurance for volunteers and the workload associated with ensuring compliance with administrative and/or legislative requirements such as occupational health and safety (OH&S), financial accountability reporting etc.
- 3.113 Although the importance of background checks to screen potential volunteers was acknowledged by participants as an important component of 'duty of care' and risk management, there was consensus that background checks were an administrative challenge for both individual volunteers and VUOs.⁸⁹
- 3.114 Specifically in relation to criminal history records checks, Mrs Gear noted that it takes approximately four to six weeks for these to be processed.⁹⁰ Mrs Gear explained that the processing time often delayed potential volunteers from commencing their volunteer position, and in some cases resulted in potential volunteers losing interest in volunteering opportunities.⁹¹
- 3.115 The lack of uniformity in cost, processing time and legislative requirements for criminal history records and working with children checks between states or territories was also raised.⁹² Mr Pedicini also raised the lack of portability of background checks between organisations and states or territories as a major concern.⁹³ In summarising the concerns about background checks, Mr Bates stated:

89 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 5; Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 21; Mrs Catherine Gear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 21.

90 Mrs Catherine Gear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 13.

91 Mrs Catherine Gear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 13.

92 Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 53; Mrs Catherine Gear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 54.

93 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 5.

Our concern is that it is inconsistent, it costs too much money, there is a dispute between the state and the federal police [regarding who is responsible for its conduct] and there are also differences between the working with children checks across the states.⁹⁴

- 3.116 Also debated was whether a completed background check should belong to the individual volunteer concerned or to the VUO that initiated the check. This issue becomes significant as volunteers wish to move from organisation to organisation or interstate and either party wishes to avoid the cost of additional checks. Questions of legal liability also arise if background checks become portable. For example, if a volunteer was engaged who should not have been, would liability then rest with the organisation that first initiated the check or with the organisation that currently engaged the volunteer?⁹⁵
- 3.117 Participants also pointed out that background checks are not infallible. Records checks can only include convictions up to the date of issue; they do not include 'spent' convictions; their accuracy may be compromised by a misspelt or incorrect name; and abuse of vulnerable people may have gone undetected etc).
- 3.118 Ms Larman emphasised that background checks need also to be supplemented by rigorous screening of individuals by the VUO through, for example, reference checks and interviews.⁹⁶ Judgements must also be made about the severity and nature of previous criminal records.⁹⁷
- 3.119 Nevertheless, the majority of participants identified the need for a nationally consistent system of background checks for volunteers, despite the limitations of background checks and the potential legal complexities associated with portability. As stated by Mr Sullivan in his concluding statement:
- I, like many others, I am sure, cannot see for the life of me why there cannot be one unified system of transportable criminal history checks that are common across the country.⁹⁸
- 3.120 The impact of other public policies and legislation (e.g. OH&S, equal opportunity, anti-discrimination) on volunteers and VUOs was also

94 Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 54.

95 Mrs Catherine Grear, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 55.

96 Ms Gloria Larman, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 54.

97 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 54-55.

98 Mr David Sullivan, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 68-69.

raised. The main challenges identified were the lack of national standards, the administrative burden associated with the development and implementation of appropriate policies at organisational level and the difficulty in obtaining legal guidance and advice.⁹⁹

- 3.121 While a number of participants noted the ‘overwhelming amount of paperwork’ associated with public policy administration, there was general consensus that this burden was particularly challenging for smaller and medium sized VUOs. Frequently these organisations do not have the human resources and infrastructure to adequately support these activities.¹⁰⁰
- 3.122 Professor Lyons referred to recent research which also indicated that the costs associated with complying with government regulation and administration were comparatively more for smaller VUOs. This is due largely to their relatively flat organisational structure and the lack of junior staff to take on the more routine administrative tasks.¹⁰¹
- 3.123 Attempts to provide administrative guidance and support for VUOs have included development of standardised policy frameworks, templates and the provision of accredited training for volunteer managers.¹⁰² However, although these resources are available, as one participant noted, there is a substantial difference between downloading a standardised policy framework and implementing organisational change.¹⁰³
- 3.124 Furthermore, Professor Lyons indicated that due to variations between state and territory requirements, the development of common templates was not a viable option to simplify compliance with governance and legal requirements in Australia.¹⁰⁴
- 3.125 Mr Lewis of FaHCSIA advised that he was aware of several initiatives that are currently under consideration by the Minister which might assist the voluntary sector. These initiatives include the introduction of a ‘new standard chart of accounts’ to assist not-for-profit organisations with financial accountability reporting and the

99 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 56-57.

100 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 20-21; Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 20-21.

101 Professor Mark Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 58.

102 Mr Cary Pedicini, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 51.

103 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 51.

104 Professor Mark Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 69-70.

introduction of a 'new not-for-profit legal entity' to assist with the appropriate development and implementation of regulatory reform.¹⁰⁵

- 3.126 A number of participants also noted the potential benefits of greater cooperation and resource sharing between VUOs to ease their administrative burdens.¹⁰⁶ To encourage this kind of cooperation among volunteering organisations, Professor Lyons suggested the establishment of capacity building grants which could comprise an essential element for organisational administrative networking.¹⁰⁷
- 3.127 Mr MacDonald referred to a recommendation that had been made to state government that VUOs establish a centralised back office to support administrative functions. This would provide better quality and more consistent information that governments need for accountability while allowing VUOs to focus on their core business.¹⁰⁸
- 3.128 It was also suggested that another way in which governments might assist to reduce the administrative burden experienced by VUOs would be through the adoption of a 'risk management rather than a risk elimination' approach.¹⁰⁹ As one participant expressed it:

The need to manage risk management issues without risk managing volunteering out of existence...¹¹⁰

- 3.129 Mr MacDonald suggested that a more sophisticated approach to risk management was required; one that analyses the nature and size of the issue and considers a public policy and/or legislative response that is in proportion to the risk.¹¹¹
- 3.130 Mr Lewis concurred that the fundamental policy issue that needed to be addressed required an assessment of:

...where does the risk lie, who is prepared to accept the risk and what is the degree of risk? It comes back to the mitigation or elimination that we as a country are prepared to live with in doing this work.¹¹²

105 Mr Evan Lewis, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 62.

106 Various Participants, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 45-46, p. 52 & p. 58.

107 Professor Mark Lyons, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 60.

108 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 51.

109 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 20.

110 Mr Alan Bates, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 68.

111 Mr Les MacDonald, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 55-56.

112 Mr Evan Lewis, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 62.

Committee Comment

- 3.131 **The Committee appreciates the significant administrative challenges facing VUOs and the associated direct costs and indirect costs required to comply with legislative requirements.**
- 3.132 **However, the Committee is pleased to be advised of the initiatives currently under consideration, including the ‘standard chart of accounts’ and the ‘not-for-profit legal entity’, that could assist to reduce the administrative burden and legislative complexities encountered by VUOs. It is hoped that further advice in relation to the progress of these considerations will be forthcoming in the near future.**
- 3.133 **To help alleviate one such burden, the Committee believes that the Attorney-General, through the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General, should seek the creation of nationally consistent requirements for criminal history record checks and working with children checks.**
- 3.134 **The Committee also encourages VUOs, particularly smaller organisations, to cooperate and share administrative resources. This process could be assisted by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs considering options for supporting such collaborations.**
- 3.135 **Finally, the Committee encourages government agencies to balance their needs for accountability and risk management when funding community based service providers, particularly those using volunteers, to ensure that the burdens of compliance are commensurate with the level of funding.**

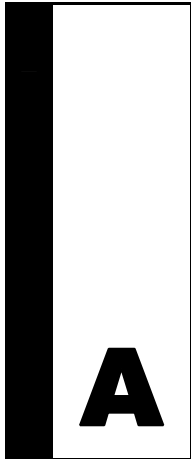
Conclusion

- 3.136 **The Committee recognises the valuable contribution made to society and to the economy by the millions of volunteers across Australia who give freely of their time, energy and enthusiasm. Active participation in volunteering not only brings its own rewards for those that volunteer, but also helps to build stronger communities and a more inclusive society.**
- 3.137 **While involvement in volunteering has long been an Australian ‘tradition’, communities and society continue to evolve and change over time, and new community and government priorities emerge.**

The Committee believes that many of these changes have the potential to offer new opportunities for volunteers and for volunteering. However, the Committee also recognises that these changes pose significant challenges for the voluntary sector which needs to further develop its capacity to adapt and respond appropriately.

- 3.138 To facilitate the development of a dynamic, innovative and sustainable voluntary sector, the Committee recognises that there is a critical role for all levels of government. In particular, the Committee considers that governments should review the level and scope of current investment in the voluntary sector with a view to better supporting the sector's changing needs. Governments are also encouraged to seek ways by which the complexity of administrative and legislative frameworks that regulate the sector can be reduced.
- 3.139 The Committee is encouraged by the potential opportunities for the voluntary sector presented by the growth of corporate volunteering. While not without its challenges, the Committee believes that continued dialogue and engagement between the voluntary sector and the private sector will facilitate enhanced cooperation between the sectors that better meets the expectations and needs of both.
- 3.140 Finally, the Committee acknowledges the range and complexity of the issues raised at the forum and the associated challenges facing the voluntary sector. While a valuable exercise, the Committee realises that the forum only allowed for a comparatively superficial consideration of these issues. However, the Committee anticipates that this discussion paper, based on the deliberations of the forum, will provide a platform for further debate and more detailed exploration.

Annette Ellis MP
Chair



Appendix A – Program and List of Participants

**Wednesday 7 May 2008
Sydney Masonic Centre**

9:00 am	Chair's opening statement
9:10 am	Introductions
9:20 am	Overview of the Australian community and welfare volunteering sector (Mr Cary Pedicini - Volunteering Australia)
9:35 am	Overview of assistance for volunteers and the voluntary sector available through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) (Mr Evan Lewis - FaHCSIA)
9:50 am	Theme 1: Emerging trends in volunteering in Australia
10:45 am	Theme 2: Challenges for individual volunteers
12:00 pm	<i>Break</i>
12:45 pm	Theme 3: Operational challenges for volunteering organisations
2:15 pm	Theme 4: Administrative and legislative challenges for volunteering organisations
3:30 pm	Concluding remarks

Invited Participants

Alcoa of Australia

Ms Paula Benson, General Manager, Corporate Affairs

Participant category: Business/corporate organisation with an active employee volunteering program

Ms Dewani Bakkum

Migrant Resource Centre of Canberra and Queanbeyan

Participant category: Individual volunteer

Department of, Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)

Mr Evan Lewis, Group Manager, Mental Health, Autism and Community Support

Participant category: Department with portfolio responsibilities for the volunteering sector

Frontier Services

Mr David Sullivan, National Development Manager

Participant category: Rural/regional Australia volunteering organisation

Professor Mark Lyons

Adjunct Professor, University of Technology Sydney

Participant category: Social policy researcher/expert

NSW Meals on Wheels

Mr Les MacDonald, Chief Executive Officer

Participant category: Large, state-based volunteering organisation

SHINE for Kids

Ms Gloria Larman

Participant category: Volunteering organisation specialising in youth services.

Victorian Arabic Social Services

Ms Lisa Tribuzio, Youth Services Coordinator

Participant category: Volunteering organisation dealing with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) volunteers and clients.

Volunteering Australia

Mr Cary Pedicini, CEO

Participant category: National peak body representing the voluntary sector

Wagga Wagga Resource Centre

Ms Catherine Grear

Participant category: Non-FaHCSIA funded volunteer resource centre

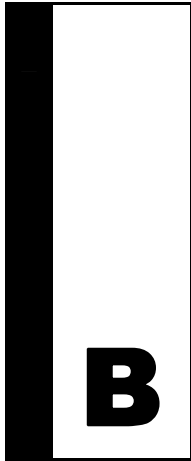
Wesley Mission

Mr Alan Bates, Manager of Volunteer Services

Participant category: Large, urban-based volunteering organisation

Mr Harry Whelan

Participant category: Individual volunteer



Appendix B – Supplementary Information

1. Supplementary information from Professor Mark Lyons on establishing and funding a research unit specialising in volunteering research.

Suggestion for House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth discussion paper on community welfare volunteering.

The absence of reliable data and information on volunteers and their motivation, on changes in patterns of volunteering and on the voluntary or non profit organisations that absorb most of their efforts was raised at several points during the forum. Given that governments emphasise the importance of an evidence base for policy making, this hiatus with respect of understanding the patterns and process behind both the giving of time and money and the non profit sector more generally is surprising.

A solution would be for the government to establish and fund a research unit that specialised in volunteering research, or more appropriately in research into volunteering, philanthropy and non profit organisations. Such an entity could work with volunteer-using organisations, government policy makers, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the social science research community in Australia and internationally to identify research priorities and undertake high quality data collection and research analysis.

Existing models of stand alone research institutes are the Institute for Family Studies, the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare. Another model is the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) which operates by coordinating the efforts of researchers in several universities. Both models are funded by annual budget allocations.

A fourth model would be for the government to establish and endow a charitable trust for the purpose of conducting and broadcasting research on volunteering and voluntary associations. The Institute would operate from returns from the endowment, which could come from the large surpluses currently being generated. This would require no more than a one-off commitment of around \$50 million in capital. The terms of the trust and the appointment of trustees would ensure that the original purpose of the trust was adhered to overtime. The endowment could be administered as part of the Future Fund.