

MEDIA RELEASE

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Volunteering Australia calls for tougher legislative instruments to enshrine the rights of volunteers

Volunteering Australia is alarmed to learn of the allegations of sexual misconduct and bullying against former volunteers in the ACT Greens during the federal and local election campaigns last year.

Volunteering Australia is concerned at the lack of consistency and clarity around volunteer rights more broadly across the country. These allegations reinforce the need for robust mechanisms to be established to enshrine and protect the rights of volunteers in the workplace.

Volunteering makes an estimated annual economic and social contribution of \$290 billion, with 31 per cent of the population involved in volunteering activities. With volunteering playing such a critical role in Australia's national identity, it is essential that as a society we protect, support and treat volunteers with dignity and respect.

While volunteers have some rights under the law, they are not covered by awards or workplace agreements in the same way as paid employees. Employers must consider best practice guidelines such as Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement when involving volunteers in their organisation. Volunteers should not be exploited or be used to replace paid employees.

Volunteers have the same rights as paid staff, not to be sexually harassed or to harass, and organisations have a duty of care to guarantee all staff (paid or unpaid) are working in a safe and equitable environment.

Volunteering Australia CEO Adrienne Picone said, "The lack of clarity around volunteer rights, and consistency across State and Territory legislation, creates doubt on what rights a volunteer has."

Following these allegations of misconduct, Volunteering Australia recommends producing clear and consistent guidelines on what volunteer rights are, to protect volunteers, Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs), and managers of volunteers. This would also include tougher legislative instruments to enshrine the rights of volunteers.

Volunteering Australia, as the national peak body for volunteering in the country, is committed to working with the relevant agencies to advance these measures, and ensure the safety of those in the volunteering sector across Australia.

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