

# VOLUNTEERING IN RESPONSE TO A PANDEMIC

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEERS



volunteering  
queensland

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# VOLUNTEERING IN RESPONSE TO A PANDEMIC

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEERS

**This Guide provides practical guidance to support volunteers to be better informed about volunteering in response to a pandemic.**

During a pandemic, volunteers will be faced with the need to adapt to a number of changes and to make decisions that may impact their volunteering. This guide provides practical checklists and information on key things to consider including:

- ✓ Volunteering in a pandemic
- ✓ Helping in pandemic response and recovery
- ✓ Continuing or ceasing to volunteer
- ✓ Maintaining good health and wellbeing
- ✓ Staying connected
- ✓ Volunteering post-pandemic

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## Same but different

Volunteering is a cornerstone of our society, contributing significant value to our economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing. Every day, volunteers of all ages and from all walks of life play an invaluable role delivering vital services across a wide range of areas strengthening individual wellbeing, and community cohesion, capability, and economic prosperity. The act of volunteering creates a sense of purpose and belonging, builds skills and connections, improves health outcomes, creates pathways to employment, and forges stronger, resilient, sustainable, inclusive communities.

To maximise both the contribution of their volunteers and the opportunity for their volunteers to participate in a rewarding experience, volunteer involving organisations engage their volunteers within a framework of good practice principles. This framework is based on the [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#).

In a pandemic situation it is very important that good practice for effective volunteer engagement is followed. However, whilst the same, volunteering in a pandemic is also different. Activation of volunteers and the roles they fulfil are one-off or short term and are response or recovery focussed.

Recruitment, matching, deployment, and activation on the ground is often rapid and targeted to immediate need, with safety and protections thoroughly but quickly assessed. The motivations and expectations of volunteers who step forward to assist are also different in pandemics and need to be carefully managed. The foremost guiding principles in pandemic and other disaster volunteering are, 'do no harm' and 'it's about the impacted community first'.

Although being the same but different, protection and safety should never be compromised when volunteering in pandemics. There is a need to both protect our most vulnerable citizens and our volunteers.

Pandemics, as experienced in the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak, have significant impacts on volunteers and on volunteer involving organisations. As activities and events are postponed or cancelled, income sources diminish, and business continuity and service delivery models adapted and delivered in a different way, volunteers are often stood down or withdraw their availability and willingness to undertake the tasks they would normally do.

Without the services of volunteers many tasks cannot get done in traditional ways through volunteer organisations. This is especially critical for those who are elderly, vulnerable and isolated, and require help in areas such as social connection, meal delivery, shopping, pick-up and drop-off of medication, transport to appointments, gardening and maintenance, and pet walking.

Individuals and groups in our community see this need and are very keen to help in some way, whether formally or informally.



## Formal and informal volunteering

You may already be volunteering with a recognised volunteer organisation, such as an arts, sports, school, faith-based, aged care, social support, environmental, health care, or an emergency services organisation. This is called formal volunteering and provides volunteers with a coordinated program that includes protections such as volunteer insurance, screening, training, management, and equipment.

In a pandemic a lot of formal volunteering is suspended, cancelled, or delivered in a different way, for example virtually via technology. This may have happened to the volunteering program at the organisation you volunteer with and to your volunteering role.

In some cases, more volunteers are needed by volunteer-involving organisations, particularly those that have a formal recognised role delivering critical services in pandemic response and recovery. Australian Red Cross and Salvation Army are examples of such organisations.

Whether or not formal volunteering is suspended or continues in a different way, people are still very keen and anxious to help others in need. They will continue to step forward and will self-activate and organise themselves in simple, plain, human ways to assist wherever they see a need.

During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic both in Australia and around the world we have seen inspiring and extraordinary examples of millions of people coming together in their local communities to help each other and those who are older, isolated, and vulnerable. You may have been a part of this citizen-led informal volunteering movement that provides vital support, but without the structure, coordination and protections provided to volunteers by formal volunteering.

In a pandemic, whether volunteering is through a formal or an informal situation, it is important that requirements for volunteer screening and protection are not reduced. There is a need to protect our most vulnerable and to also protect our volunteers.

There is also an immediate and longer term aim to sustain our valued volunteer workforce throughout the crisis and for future needs post the pandemic. With the uncertain economic and social impacts of a pandemic it is likely that the help of volunteers will be necessary and relied upon into the future.



# What is the best way I can help?

When responding to a pandemic, there are many factors we need to consider to ensure our own safety and the safety of others.

## The first and easiest way

The first and easiest way to help is to reach out to family, friends and neighbours. Let them know you are there to help. Here are four simple tips to follow:

- Consider how you approach people – you may not have met some of your neighbours before or may just know them from afar. Some neighbours may not have had visitors at their doors for many weeks. Write a short note to introduce yourself. Include your name, phone number and let them know you are a call away.
- Don't offer assistance if you are sick – your priority in a pandemic is to help stop the spread of the pandemic. It is important to follow government guidelines at all times.
- Don't enter people's homes unless absolutely necessary – phone or text them to let them know you are at their door. Always practice safety and hygiene and social distancing guidelines. Be clear about your duties. It is OK to ask for clarification.
- You are responsible for your own self-care – set boundaries and avoid burnout. Take regular breaks between activities. Looking after yourself should be a priority.

Some things you may offer to help with include:

### Food and essential supplies

- Ask for a shopping list and drop groceries at their front door or an agreed protected place.
- When delivering items it is important to comply with any guidelines to stop the spread of the pandemic, for example, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic social distancing guidelines included:
  - ♦ Notifying the person that you are nearby and remind them you will be making a contact-free delivery.
  - ♦ When arriving placing the delivery outside the front door or an agreed protected place.
  - ♦ Step back at least 1.5 metres and wait to confirm that they have collected the delivery.
- Help vulnerable people learn about online shopping if they're not already experts.

### Medical

- Offer to pick up prescriptions and medications from the pharmacy and drop at the front door or an agreed protected place. Ensure you abide by guidelines to stop the spread of the pandemic.
- Research new ways that vulnerable people can access medical treatment, for example, in the COVID-19 response telehealth was a new option for many people. Safely communicate these new options to your friends, family and neighbours.

### Social connection

- A friendly daily phone call or socially distanced wave or chat go a long way to making people feel connected, happy and valued.
- Help vulnerable people understand emerging technologies to stay connected with family, friends, and neighbours. Examples include video calls and group chats.
- Ask an older, vulnerable or isolated person to read a children's book, share a story, or cook a dish via a video recording, call or group chat and share these with neighbours.
- Pop a [Queensland Health Kindness Card](#) in your neighbour's letterbox or under their door.

## Stay connected with your volunteering organisation and team

- Whether your role has been suspended or you have elected to stand down from your volunteering during the pandemic, try to maintain a connection with your volunteer organisation even without the usual face-to-face contact. Your commitment, time, skill, and knowledge are valuable assets and may be useful to your organisation during the period of the pandemic and as things eventually return to pre-pandemic or 'new normal' post pandemic environment.
- Keep engaged socially by maintaining any strong social connections you have formed with other volunteers and staff in your organisation. Be sure to find platforms and methods that work for you all for non-work related conversations. These could include emails, sharing stories, letter or card writing, videoconferencing, online chat channels or apps, for example WhatsApp. Be sure to adhere to privacy principles if using personal emails or accounts. You also need to respect that some volunteers and staff may not wish to be involved in online social activities.
- If you are continuing with your volunteering, be open, agile, and flexible to possibilities of working remotely or in a modified version of your usual volunteer program.
- If you are volunteering remotely be sure to confirm with your organisation that you have the required resources and technology to participate. Also ensure that you know to whom you should report as well as when to report and on what matters.
- Look after yourself and stay safe and healthy. Know who you can talk to in your organisation and how to contact them if you are experiencing issues or challenges with your work or wellbeing, or if your personal circumstances have changed. [Beyond Blue](#) and similar organisations have numerous resources, tools and tips you can share.
- Master technology, as demonstrated in the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic technology was the primary vehicle for staying connected and maintaining wellbeing.
- Time off from volunteering is great opportunity to do some online training. During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic many training and development options were freely offered. You may like to identify skills or information that could be useful and sign up for a training session or program. Along with online training options, there are also a wide range of books and podcasts that could provide useful information and personal and professional development that supports your volunteering, health and wellbeing.
- If you are looking for a new volunteering role, this may be a very good time to explore other opportunities with your or another organisation. You can search the [Volunteering Qld website](#)



## How can I help with a pandemic response and recovery?

In addition to taking good care of yourself, continuing to support your current volunteering organisation, and helping family, friends and neighbours in your local community, you can search the [Volunteering Qld website](#) 24/7 to explore other available opportunities.

You may also like to create your own unique personal volunteer profile, which will see available roles of interest forwarded to you.

When accepted for a role please ensure that you check with the organisation to ensure they have protocols and good processes in place regarding volunteer safety and wellbeing when volunteering in a pandemic. It's important you understand the risks of volunteering.

Be aware that although existing volunteer insurance of a volunteer applies to their volunteer roles, there is no insurance cover if you contract a pandemic virus such as the 2020 COVID-19 virus. There is also no insurance cover for any pandemic related illness contracted as a result of having the virus. This insurance exclusion applies to all staff (paid and voluntary) in most organisations. The reason being that there is no way to categorically prove where the pandemic virus was originally contracted.

During a pandemic, as well as a national response, individual States or Territories may coordinate their own responses to address particular needs in their jurisdiction. For example, during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic the [Queensland Government's Care Army](#) was created, mobilising over 30,000 registered volunteers to be matched and deployed to formal volunteer organisations to deliver services to older and vulnerable Queenslanders.

The Care Army also highlighted and acknowledged the important work of the fast growing informal self-activated volunteer movement that stepped forward during required isolation and lock-downs to assist family, friends, neighbours and in particular older, isolated and vulnerable people in their local community. People in need were also able to contact the Care Army helpline for support, and organisations requiring volunteers contacted Volunteering Queensland for Care army helpers.

The primary focus of the Care Army was social connection and provision of essential services such as the delivery of groceries and medicines for Queensland's older, vulnerable and isolated citizens. This was through phone calls, video chats to check on the wellbeing, transport to appointments, general gardening and external home maintenance, walking pets, help with technology, letterbox drops, and delivery of food, medication and essential items. The work of Care Army volunteers was extended to assisting schools with delivery of computers and learning packs to students in need, and supporting volunteer involving organisations to sustain their business through and post the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

The safety, health, wellbeing, protection and privacy of Care Army volunteers and those they assist was carefully coordinated and of primary importance. Organisations to which Care Army volunteers were matched were required to have volunteer insurance. They were also made aware of and asked to ensure that all necessary screenings, risk assessments, good volunteer management practices, and personal protective equipment (PPE) were in place.

The Care Army was created to support immediate response and longer term recovery needs. Volunteers were able to join the Care Army through [Volunteering Queensland's Emergency Volunteering website \(EV CREW\)](#)

## Citizen self-activation/ Community helpers

You may be one of the millions of concerned people who have stepped forward and self-activated to volunteer informally in your local community supporting people in need. Community helpers have provided support in myriad ways including connecting with those in need via a phone call, a closed window, a letterbox drop, or a Facebook group to let them know that assistance is available for shopping, picking up medications, or a friendly chat.

These fine expressions of human care and kindness at a local level can make a real difference and are to be commended at uncertain times such as a pandemic. They are a coordinated or uncoordinated spontaneous well-meaning desire to help. When considering this type of informal volunteering, please be mindful of privacy, safety and the care and wellbeing of both yourself, other volunteers, and the person you are helping, and always adhere to the guiding principles of 'do no harm' and 'it's about the impacted community first'.

These self-organising groups are a positive development but there are some risks that need to be considered. Whether it is formal or informal, the organisers of any volunteering have a duty of care to volunteers and to the people they serve.

First and foremost, it is important to keep both volunteers and the community safe and avoid the spread of the virus.

### If you are organising informal groups, consider the following:

- **New volunteers:** You will need to carefully think about how you will manage and support people and especially those that may not have volunteered before. Be aware that sometimes people express an interest but then are ultimately unable to help. You will need a plan.
- **Manage expectations:** Volunteers will have good intentions and be enthusiastic about helping others. However, in a pandemic environment there are obvious limitations such as age, health, location, and varied needs. There may also be more volunteers than required initially but think medium to long term. People drop in and out.
- **Be clear:** Ensure each volunteer understands the job at hand, including any risks. A brief job description will also provide clarity when deciding who is or isn't suitable for the volunteer role.
- **Consider people's literacy levels:** The messages or information you provide to volunteers about their role or to community members about the current situation should be appropriate, accurate, consistent, easy to understand, and constantly reinforced.

### Four important challenges and considerations for self-activating groups:

- **Authorisation:** For mobility of volunteers in a restricted travel or full lock-down situation. Groups may need to check in with and gain approval from authorities to be out and about helping others in need.
- **Safety and security:** Personal and other's safety and security needs to be carefully considered to ensure no harm.
- **Insurance:** Self-activating groups are not covered by volunteer insurance. There is currently no solution to this, and volunteers need to be aware of this important consideration.
- **Information:** Provision of information such as what the needs and roles are, safety and security matters, regulations, communication channels, and any logistical or technical issues, is important. This can be done via websites, social media sites, newsletters, letter drops, or tele and video links. Messages and information need to be consistent, come from trusted sources, and constantly reinforced to volunteers.

Further advice and information can be sourced by contacting Volunteering Queensland's EV CREW team at [emergencyvol@volunteeringqld.org.au](mailto:emergencyvol@volunteeringqld.org.au) or at [emergencyvolunteering.com.au](http://emergencyvolunteering.com.au)

# What's the best way you can prevent the spread of a pandemic?

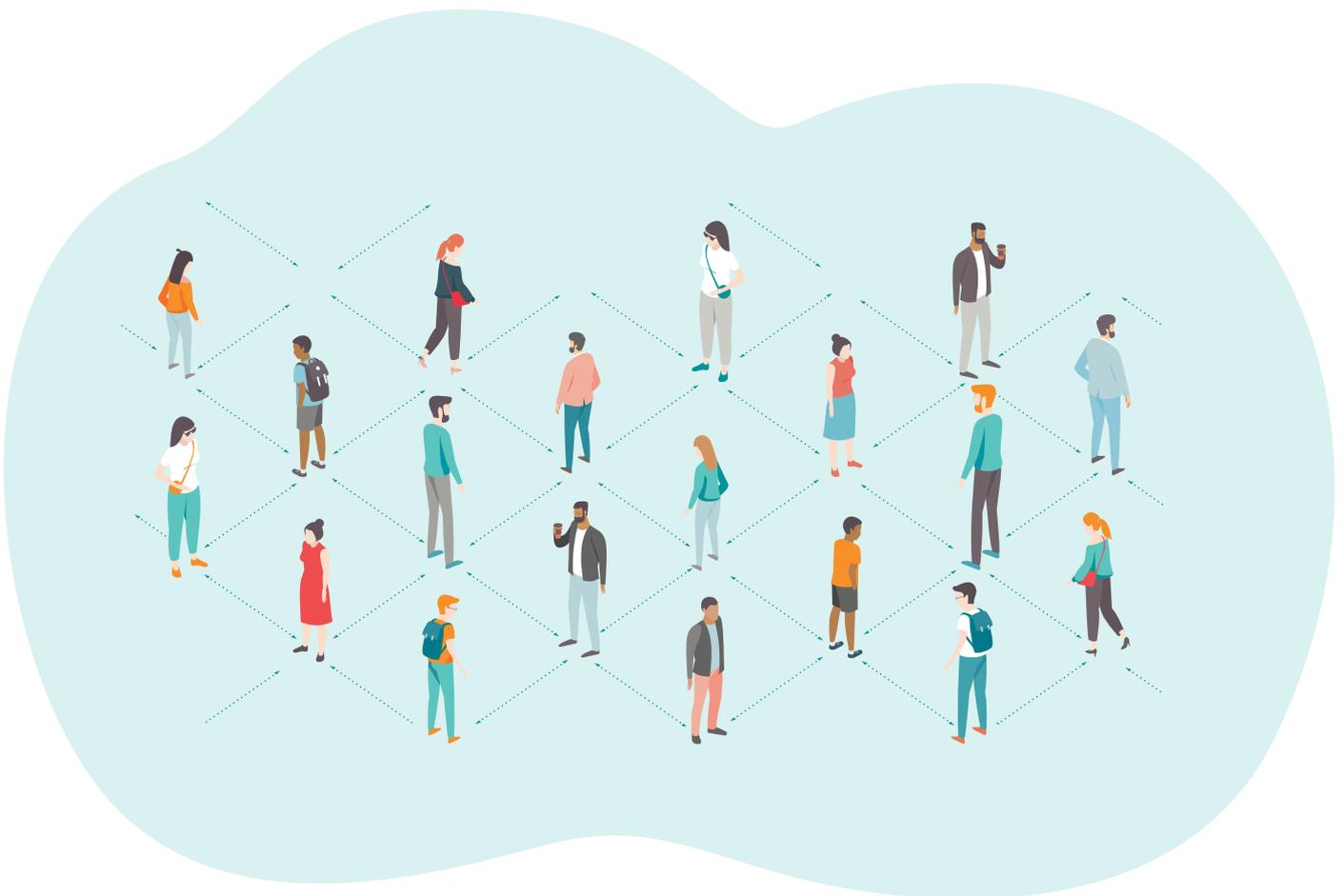
Different pandemics will require different approaches to prevent the spread. It is imperative you regularly access information provided by trusted authorities such as [Queensland Health](#) to stay up to date on how to stop the spread of a pandemic.

## Examples of how to prevent the spread during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic

- **Keep your hands clean:**
  - ♦ Washing your hands frequently and thoroughly for at least 20 seconds means that you can prevent viruses from entering your body. That means washing your hands when you've been out and about, before you eat, and after you use the restroom. [View 6 steps to successful everyday hand washing.](#)
  - ♦ Use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser if soap and water are not available. Remember to wash your hands as soon as you have access to soap and water.
  - ♦ Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- **Maintain a social distance:**
  - ♦ Try to stay at least 1.5 metres away from people, and refrain from physical touch such as shaking hands or hugging.
  - ♦ Avoid contact with anyone who has symptoms such as fever, a cough, sore throat, fatigue, and shortness of breath.
- **Practice good respiratory etiquette:**
  - ♦ Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or flexed elbow when coughing or sneezing. Discard tissue immediately into a closed bin and wash your hands with soap and water.
- **Only use a surgical mask if needed:**
  - ♦ Surgical masks are only helpful if you have symptoms of the pandemic virus or another infection that could impact a vulnerable person and are used to prevent it spreading to others. If you're well, you do not need to wear a surgical mask.
  - ♦ During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, opinions varied about the wearing of masks. As restrictions lessened, some governments around the world mandated that people wear masks as a precaution when they went out into public spaces. As a personal choice you may prefer to wear a mask when out in public places.



- ◆ If you are a person who touches their face often, you may consider wearing a mask as a barrier to touching.
- **Keep your environment clean:**
  - ◆ Viruses can live on hard surfaces for up to 48 hours. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home and work environment.
- **Keep your doctor informed:**
  - ◆ If you are unwell with pandemic-like symptoms, call ahead of time to book an appointment with your doctor. Tell your doctor about your symptoms, travel history and any recent close contact with someone who has the pandemic virus.
- **Self-isolate when required:**
  - ◆ Stay home if you are unwell. Do not attend work, volunteering, events, or meetings.
  - ◆ You should self-isolate for 14 days if you have travelled overseas or if you travel interstate to other Australian States and Territories. You should also self-isolate if you have been in close contact with a person with a confirmed case of the pandemic virus. Please visit the [Queensland Health website](#) and follow their latest advice.
- **Look after your health and well-being:**
  - ◆ Looking after your personal physical and mental health and wellbeing by staying connected with others, eating a healthy balanced diet, getting regular physical activity, sleeping well, and reducing stress is important at this and all times.



# Volunteer rights and responsibilities

Volunteering is defined by Volunteering Australia (2015) as - **Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain**. As a volunteer you therefore have the opportunity to exercise self-determination and do something that is important to you.

Volunteering is a choice made by you to help your community. If you choose to volunteer formally through an organisation, both you and the organisation you volunteer with are responsible for making sure you are safe and enjoy a positive experience in your role. This is facilitated through good volunteer management practices that are informed by guiding principles that define both a volunteer's rights and responsibilities.

Although volunteering in a pandemic is both the same but also different to regular volunteering in terms of immediacy of need, duration, situation and focus, these rights and responsibilities still apply. They may need to be prioritised and compressed according to urgency and relevance to the situation at hand.

## Volunteers have the right to:

- Receive information about the organisation.
- A clearly written role description.
- Know to whom they are accountable.
- Be recognised as a valued team member.
- Be supported and supervised.
- A healthy and safe working environment.
- Be protected by appropriate [insurance](#).
- Say no if they feel they are being exploited.
- Be engaged as a volunteer in accordance with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation.
- Be reimbursed for any approved out-of-pocket expenses, if applicable.
- Be advised of any travel reimbursement policy, if applicable.
- Be informed and consulted on matters that directly or indirectly affect them and their work.
- Be made aware of the grievance procedure.
- Orientation and any applicable training.
- Information about policies and procedures that affect their work.
- Have their confidential and personal information dealt with in accordance with the Privacy Act 1988 (Commonwealth).

## Volunteers have a responsibility to:

- Be reliable and on time.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Carry out the tasks defined in the role description.
- Be accountable.
- Be committed to the organisation.
- Undertake training as requested.
- Ask for support when they need it.
- Give notice before they leave.
- Value and support other team members.
- Carry out the work they have agreed to do responsibly and ethically.
- Notify the organisation as soon as possible of absences.
- Adhere to policies and procedures.
- Adhere to applicable legislation, such as equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation.



## Should I continue volunteering with my volunteer involving organisation during a pandemic?

As a volunteer, you are under no obligation to continue to volunteer if you are concerned or do not feel comfortable or safe doing so. Please advise the organisation you volunteer with if you would prefer not to volunteer during the pandemic. There may be alternative opportunities available to volunteer online or remotely from your home or another location.

If you do continue in your volunteering role, your organisation has an obligation under Work Health and Safety legislation to provide adequate health and safety protection. You may wish to have a conversation with your volunteer organisation around any concerns you have and about alternative ways to volunteer and stay engaged with the organisation and its cause.

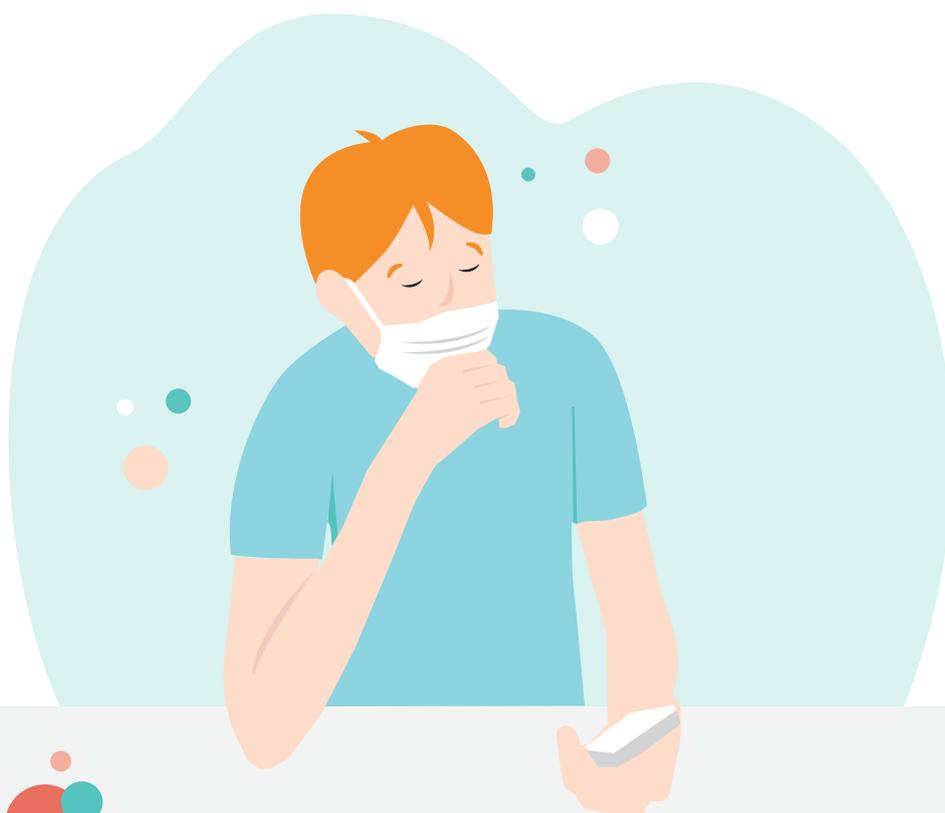
Ensure you consider your own health and wellbeing as a priority when considering whether or not to continue in your volunteering position. During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, the advice of the Commonwealth Department of Health was that people at risk of COVID-19 should limit contact with others and stay home. If you were in the category of someone at risk of COVID-19 ([click here](#) to view the list) it was suggested that you ask your volunteering organisation if volunteering from home was possible. Always ensure that you follow the advice of trusted authorities such as the Department of Health.

### When should I not volunteer?

The safety and wellbeing of you and your family and limiting the spread of a pandemic is a main priority. Follow directions of trusted authorities such as [Queensland Health](#) and your doctor, and check in with the organisation you volunteer with for guidelines on when you cannot continue to volunteer during the pandemic.

For example, during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, it was advised that you should not volunteer if you:

- Travelled or have been in contact with someone who recently travelled overseas or interstate.
- Were or had been in close contact with someone infected with COVID-19.
- Were unwell or experienced an acute respiratory infection such as a cold, flu or sinus infection.



## Checklist for things to consider when volunteering in a pandemic



### CHECKLIST

Stay up to date with all of the information from trusted authorities to remain informed about the pandemic. During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic [Queensland Health](#) and the [Department of Health](#) were the main trusted sources of information.

Practice good hygiene at all times to stop the spread.

Consider your own personal circumstances, health and wellbeing, and if it is safe for you to continue to volunteer? During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, there were a number of people who were considered at risk to the pandemic, that list can be viewed [here](#).

Determine whether you would like to continue to volunteer and if you are open, agile and flexible to your volunteering role being modified, for example volunteering remotely from home.

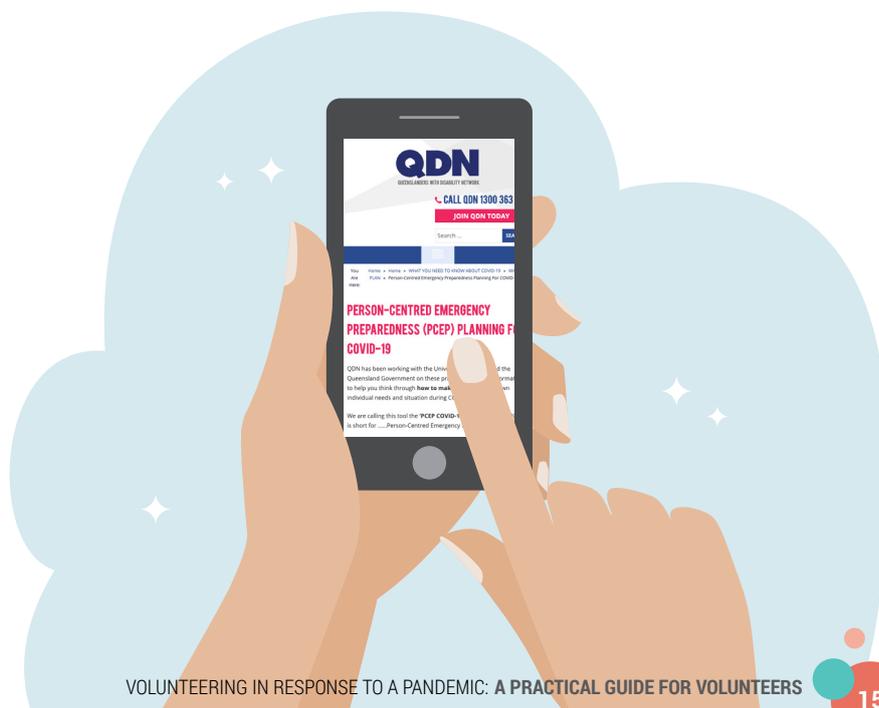
Maintain communication with your volunteer organisation to ensure they know your plans, and you know their plans.

Regardless of whether you are continuing to volunteer or not, keep in touch with your volunteer organisation so that the valuable connections and contributions you have made can resume when the situation changes.

If you have capacity to take on additional volunteering roles, register as an emergency volunteer so organisations who are looking for volunteers to assist can contact you: [www.emergencyvolunteering.com.au/qld](http://www.emergencyvolunteering.com.au/qld)

Ensure you prioritise your health and wellbeing (see the section on [How to Maintain Mental Wellbeing and Stay Connected](#))

Ensure you are prepared to get through the pandemic by working through the [Person Centred Emergency Preparedness Tool](#)



## Checklist for staying in touch with your volunteer organisation

Whether your volunteering role has changed, or you are unable to continue your volunteering role at this time, it is important to stay in touch with your volunteer organisation. There will be a time when the pandemic is over, and organisations will need volunteers such as you.



### CHECKLIST

Advise the organisation of your plans and that you wish to stay connected with them.

If you are able to undertake emerging volunteer roles during a pandemic, let the organisation know so they can reach out to you if opportunities arise.

Ask the organisation to keep you updated with the work they are undertaking and that you would like to be kept informed about the impact the organisation and its volunteers make.

Subscribe to the organisation's newsletter if it has one.

Touch base on a regular basis with the organisation to advise them you are still engaged in what they are doing. Discuss this with your organisation first but monthly or bi-monthly would be a guide.

Consider setting up (with the organisation's approval) a non-work related platform where volunteers can stay socially connected. This could be by email, videoconferencing, online chats or apps (such as What's App). Be mindful to adhere to privacy principles if using personal emails or accounts. You also need to respect that some volunteers may not wish to be involved in online social activities.



## Can I volunteer from home?

Pandemics can change the way we connect with others in the community so some volunteering roles may need to change during the course of a pandemic to stop it spreading.

If you would like to experience and contribute as an online virtual volunteer, there are a range of opportunities available where you can volunteer from home to stay connected while helping to reduce the isolation of vulnerable people or assisting with the ongoing needs of a range of important causes.

You can search the [Volunteering Qld website](#) to view virtual volunteering roles available in Queensland. Examples include mentoring people through virtual meetings, transcribing documents for a museum, tutoring and helping students with learning, sewing and knitting from home, reviewing and creating resources and promotional materials for a not-for-profit, helping people use technology better, and checking in with socially isolated people through a friendly daily phone call.

## Checklist for effectively volunteering from home

If your volunteering position has been modified so you are now volunteering from home, check the following with your volunteer involving organisation:

✓	CHECKLIST
	Ensure your new role is documented and that you fully understand the role you will be undertaking.
	Check that you have a safe workspace to volunteer from home.
	Consider whether you will incur additional expenses when volunteering from home such as electricity and internet costs, ask if your organisation is able to reimburse you for these expenses.
	Do you have access to the appropriate technology, resources, and equipment you need to undertake the volunteering role?
	Ensure that you know to whom, when and on what matters you need to report.
	Have you been trained in how to undertake your new role? You can always request more training if you feel that you need it.
	Ensure you consider clear boundaries between your volunteering role and daily life as you want to avoid burnout during these uncertain times. Communicate the days and times you volunteer to your organisation and ensure you only volunteer within these times.
	Check in regularly with your organisation and provide updates on the progress you are making. Request any additional support you may need.
	Look after yourself and stay safe and healthy. Know who you can talk to in your organisation and how to contact them if you are experiencing issues or challenges with your work or wellbeing, or if your personal circumstances have changed. <a href="#">Beyond Blue</a> and similar organisations have numerous resources, tools and tips you can share.

For tips on how to look after your mental health when working from home [click here](#).

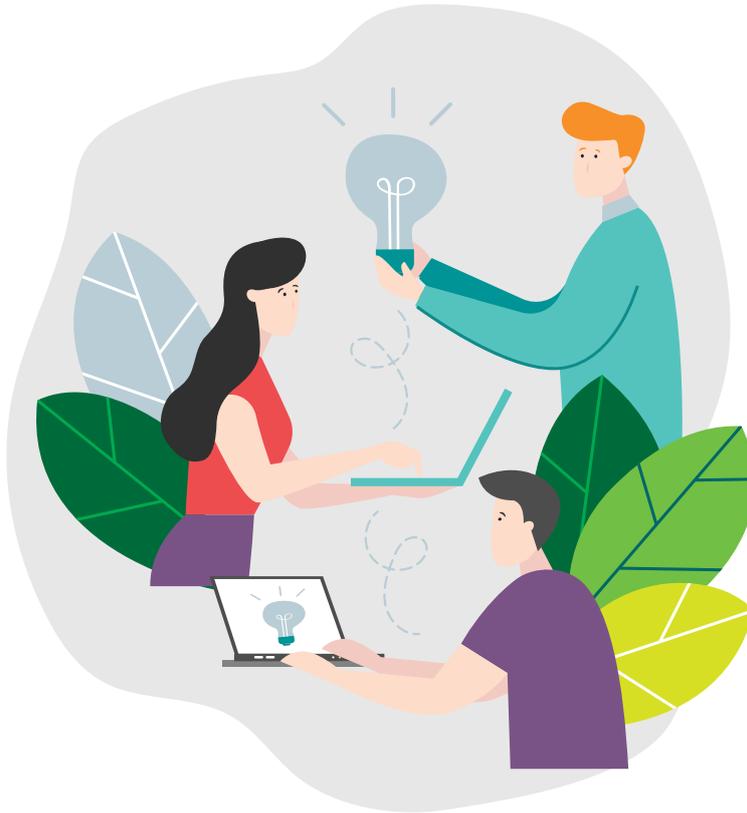
To ensure your working space at home is safe, undertake an assessment using [this checklist](#).

## Centrelink-approved volunteering activities during a pandemic – have my obligations changed?

During a pandemic, a volunteer's mutual obligation requirements to Centrelink may be affected.

For example, during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, the Commonwealth Government announced a number of changes to mutual obligation requirements for job seekers to reduce or eliminate the need for face-to-face contact when requested by a job seeker or job service provider. The changes included the suspension until further notice of mutual obligation requirements and other activities delivered in face-to-face and group settings that could not be delivered online. For information on how this affected Services Australia participants, see their [website](#).





## How to maintain mental wellbeing and stay connected

Staying connected and maintaining your mental wellbeing are crucial through a pandemic. If during a pandemic you find that you experience prolonged feelings of disconnection, loneliness, anger, anxiousness, depression, sleeplessness, being overwhelmed, or not being able to function seek help by contacting your doctor and by reaching out to connect to and speak and share with others.

The mental health and wellbeing impacts of self-isolation and social distancing related to pandemics, may be immediate or delayed, with some people experiencing anxiety, depression or trauma and needing support up to six to nine months or more after the pandemic is under control.

### As a volunteer you are encouraged to:

- Self-manage your reaction to a pandemic.
- Reflect on your volunteering, your role, your feelings about returning to your volunteer organisation, and potential new ways you might like to contribute through volunteering.
- Stay in touch with fellow volunteers with whom you have formed a connection, sharing challenges, positive experiences, and reinventing ways to keep in touch.
- Seek help if needed. Contact your doctor or organisations such as [Beyond Blue](#) or [Lifeline](#).
- Be open to being adaptable and agile. As a result of a pandemic volunteering as we know it may temporarily or permanently change.

There are many excellent resources available to help including:

- Beyond Blue created a [dedicated website](#) in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic that included:
  - ♦ 24/7 counselling.
  - ♦ User friendly resources.
  - ♦ A particularly helpful article on [10 ways to take care of yourself](#)
- The Queensland Government produced a helpful article on [how to look after your mental wellbeing](#)

# I want to volunteer after the pandemic, how can I get involved?

## Choose a role that's a good match for you

Be mindful that volunteering in a pandemic or any crisis can be stressful, physical and challenging, so try not to push yourself too hard or take on more than you can do. In disaster and emergency situations volunteers are often required to support people and communities through their long-term recovery journey. You may feel that volunteering during longer term recovery better suits your circumstances and availability.

Here are a few questions you should consider when thinking about volunteering in a pandemic. Many are also relevant to volunteering outside of a crisis:

- What are my motivations for volunteering?
- Is there a cause that's close to my heart?
- What skills do I want to contribute or learn?
- Does the volunteer organisation's values match my own and am I willing to contribute to achieving its purpose?
- Would I like to enjoy social experiences and make new friends through my volunteering?
- What expectations do I have from my volunteering?
- How much time can I commit?
- Do I have personal circumstances and concerns that may influence my ability to fully engage in certain types of volunteering?
- Am I able to take direction and work as a part of a team?
- Am I prepared to do any required training and screening?  
Please note that screening costs are generally at no cost to a volunteer.
- Would I find any required travel to and from the volunteer experience onerous?

There are many externalities that demand our attention and pull us in different directions. Finding a cause, group or organisation that you're passionate about will enable you to give more of yourself, develop professionally and as a person, experience satisfaction, make like-minded friends and acquaintances, and be the change you want to see in the world – all change starts with you.

## What areas can you volunteer in?

There are so many other ways you can choose to volunteer that may not be directly involved with pandemic response but are critical to your community's road to recovery and help build community and individual resilience for future crises.

You can help by volunteering with local arts, sports, schools, aged care, health care, social support, environmental, youth and family, or service or emergency services organisations. You can take action on climate change, help people experiencing homelessness, support disadvantaged children and families, or assist refugees. You may like to get involved in gender equality, democracy, social justice, stopping racism, animal welfare, or other causes. Perhaps you prefer to share, use or develop your skills and interests in research, administration, tutoring, mentoring, marketing, retail, management, technology, or as a member of a board or committee.

There are one off festivals, events and episodic experiences, short-term projects, long-term roles, virtual volunteering from the comfort of your home or workplace, and even micro volunteering.

Whichever opportunity you choose, you'll be helping to strengthen and connect your community and enriching your personal and professional development.

## Get started!

We can connect you to volunteering opportunities that suit your passions, motivations, expectations, availability, and location.

Visit our [search opportunities page](#) to view volunteering opportunities available across Queensland!

Tips for making the most of our volunteering site:

- You can search for opportunities through our [roles list](#), map or our [event volunteering page](#).
- Try using keywords or filtering by availability.
- Once you've found an opportunity, you can apply for the position by pressing the 'express interest' button.
- Once you enter your details on the online form and hit the 'submit' button, your details will be sent to the organisation advertising the volunteering opportunity.
- You will then get a confirmation email with the organisation's details.

If you haven't heard from the organisation within a week, give them a quick call to discuss your interest.

Spend more time volunteering and less time filling in forms by creating your own [personalised Volunteer Profile](#) then you don't have to fill in your details for each role you apply for, plus you can have new opportunities emailed directly to you

You can also share your volunteer story and inspire others at #VolunteersofQLD

## How Volunteering Queensland can help

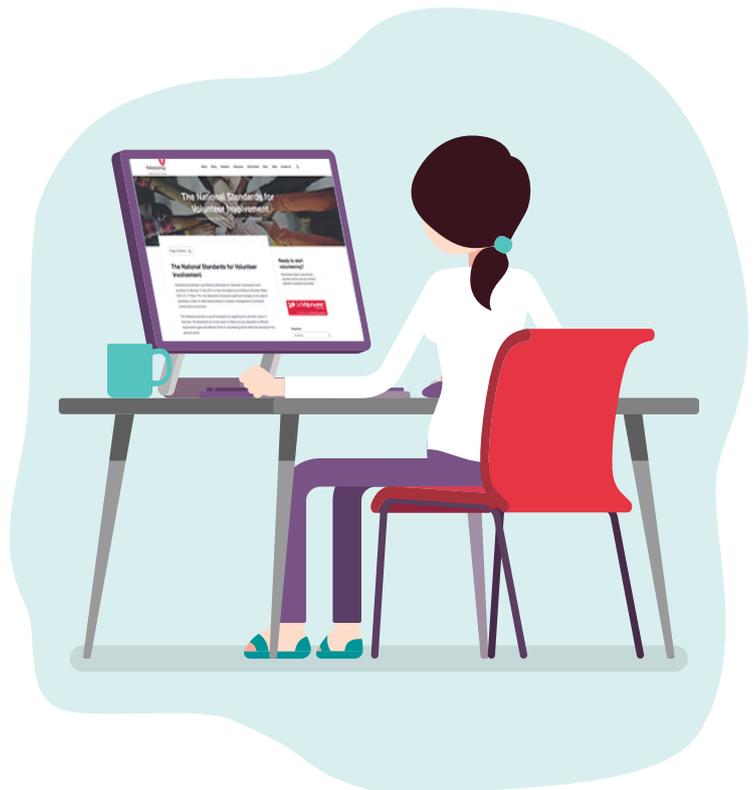
Volunteering Queensland can assist by providing:

- Information, advice, support, training, and resources.
- An e newsletter and social media sites that keep you informed and up to date on all matters volunteering. Details can be found on our [website](#)
- A website and a central point of registration for volunteering in disasters – [emergencyvolunteering.com.au](#)
- A volunteer matching platform for general volunteering – [volunteeringqld.org.au](#)

Volunteering Queensland can be contacted at: [volunteeringqld.org.au](#)

Always remember that volunteer involving organisations greatly value the contribution of their volunteers not just as an unpaid asset but as essential members of the organisation and its workforce participating in the democratic and decision-making processes of the organisation. Volunteers like you are instrumental in achieving the mission and delivering the services of a volunteer organisation.

You contribute to the economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing of Queensland and Australia, and you will be needed as our community emerges from a pandemic into a new normal.



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A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEERS



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