



# STATE OF VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND | 2024

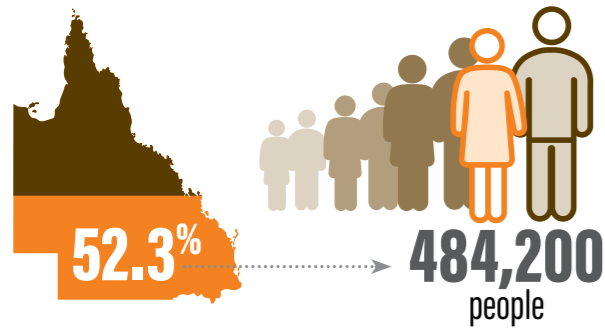
*Older people* 65+



**volunteering**  
queensland



# KEY FINDINGS FOR Older people <sup>65+</sup>

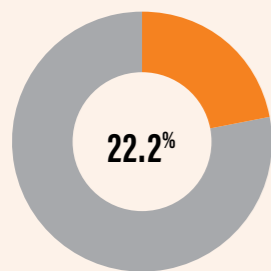


52.3% of Queensland residents aged 65 and over, or **484,200** people contributed to the community as volunteers (compared to the whole population of Queensland which is 64%)

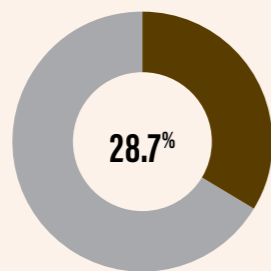
Older Queenslanders volunteer for an average of



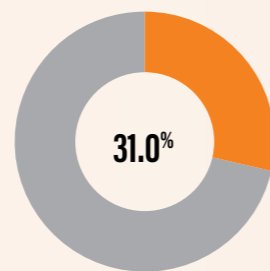
which equates to **111.1 million hours** in 2023



volunteer formally



volunteer informally

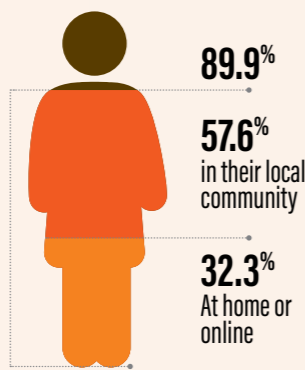


do both

Older Queenslanders are motivated to volunteer to:

- 77.1%** Help others
- 47.2%** For enjoyment
- 45.3%** To use my skills and experience
- 41.4%** To be active
- 38%** For social and community connection

89.9% of Older Queenslanders volunteer within their local community (57.6%) or at home or online (32.3%)



The ways in which Older Queenslanders contribute to their community are through:

- 21.3%** Governance roles
- 12.7%** Other community contribution
- 10.7%** Administrative support
- 9.5%** Teaching or coaching
- 8.5%** Faith based or cultural support

Older Queenslanders generally find out about volunteer opportunities by:

- Word of mouth
- 18.4%** Other
- 11.5%** Social media
- 11.2%** Google / searching online
- 10.8%** Traditional media (posters, newsletters, radio)



“ Meeting those beautiful people, it just fulfilled me. It was just very rewarding doing what I did ... has given me some purpose once I retired

## BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING

The top 5 barriers to volunteering more were:

- 41.8%** No time
- 14.5%** Costs
- 13.1%** Health reasons
- 12.3%** Burnout (over volunteering)
- 11.0%** Not interested in volunteering more

The top five barriers to non-volunteers participating were:

- 37.4%** No time
- 23.3%** Not sure how / never been asked
- 17.9%** Health reasons
- 17.6%** Not interested in volunteering
- 13.1%** Lack of confidence



**33%**

of older Queenslanders plan to volunteer the same or more in the next three years' time

## THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING FOR OLDER QUEENSLANDERS

Volunteering of Older Queenslanders brings



of benefits to Queensland

For every \$1 invested in volunteering for Older Queenslanders an **\$8.70** return is provided



Older Queensland Volunteers reported spending an average of **\$3.78** per hour on their volunteering with only **5.2%** of their expenses reimbursed by the organisations they volunteer with.

It would cost **\$4.6 billion** to replace the hours Older Queenslanders volunteer



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This comprehensive report investigates the significant role of older adults in volunteering within Queensland, analysing their contributions, motivations, and the challenges they face, as well as the economic and social value they add to the community. The findings underscore the essential role that older volunteers play in the fabric of Queensland society, contributing not only to the well-being of others but also enhancing their own lives through active participation.

## Key findings for older Queenslanders

- **Volunteer participation:** In 2023, 52.3% of Queensland residents aged 65 and over, totalling 484,200 individuals, actively contributed to the community through volunteering. This is noteworthy compared to the overall Queensland volunteering rate of 64%.
- **Volunteer hours:** On average, older Queenslanders volunteer for 19.1 hours per month, equating to 111.1 million hours in 2023.

### Type of volunteering:

- Formal volunteering: 22.2%
- Informal volunteering: 31%
- Both formal and informal: 28.7%

### Motivations for volunteering:

- Helping others: 77.1%
- Personal enjoyment: 47.2%
- Utilising skills and experience: 45.3%
- Staying active: 41.4%
- Social and community connection: 38%

**Location of volunteering:** 89.9% volunteer within their local community (57.6%) or at home or online (32.3%).

### Roles in volunteering:

- Governance: 21.3%
- Community contributions: 12.7%
- Administrative support: 10.7%
- Teaching or coaching: 9.5%
- Faith-based or cultural support: 8.5%

### Finding volunteer opportunities:

- Word of mouth: 74.4%
- Other sources: 18.4%
- Social media: 11.5%
- Online searches: 11.2%
- Traditional media: 10.8%

## Barriers to volunteering

### Top barriers for current volunteers:

- Lack of time: 41.8%
- Costs: 14.5%
- Health reasons: 13.1%
- Burnout: 12.3%
- Disinterest in more volunteering: 11.0%



### Top barriers for non-volunteers:

- Lack of time: 37.4%
- Uncertainty on how to start/ have never been asked: 23.3%
- Health reasons: 17.9%
- Lack of interest: 17.6%
- Lack of confidence: 13.1%

**Future volunteering plans:** 33.6% of older Queenslanders plan to maintain or increase their volunteering activities over the next three years.

## Key insights from older volunteers

- **Personal motivations:** Older volunteers are driven by a desire to give back to the community, utilise their skills, and stay socially and physically active. The transition to retirement often shifts their focus towards activities that provide personal satisfaction and community connection.
- **Challenges faced:** Common barriers include physical limitations, health issues, transportation difficulties, and societal stereotypes about aging. Many volunteers feel that their potential contributions are underestimated due to age-related biases.
- **Benefits of volunteering:** Participants reported significant benefits from volunteering, including improved mental health, enhanced social connections, and a stronger sense of purpose and identity.
- **Community impact:** Volunteering enables older adults to significantly impact their local communities, from governance roles to direct service provision and mentoring. Their involvement often leads to improved local services and enhanced community cohesion.

## Key insights from volunteer managers

- **Recruitment and retention:** Effective strategies for engaging older volunteers include targeted recruitment through familiar and trusted channels, flexible volunteering schedules, and roles that match the volunteers' interests and abilities.
- **Inclusion strategies:** Ensuring inclusivity and accessibility is crucial, especially for volunteers with physical or health limitations. Volunteer managers emphasise the importance of adapting roles and providing necessary support to accommodate all volunteers.
- **Valuing contributions:** Recognising and valuing the contributions of older volunteers is essential for their continued engagement. This involves not only acknowledgment and feedback but also providing opportunities for social interaction and community involvement.

## Key findings for value of volunteering for older Queenslanders

- **Economic value:** The volunteering activities of older Queenslanders bring an estimated \$15.8 billion in benefits to the state.
- **Cost-benefit analysis:** For every dollar invested in volunteering by older Queenslanders, a return of \$8.70 is realised, nearly doubling the state average of \$4.70.
- **Volunteer expenses:** Older Queensland volunteers report spending an average of \$3.78 per hour on volunteering activities, with only 5.2% of expenses reimbursed by the organisations they support.
- **Replacement cost:** It would cost approximately \$4.6 billion to replace the volunteer hours provided by older Queenslanders.

This report highlights the invaluable contributions of older adults to Queensland through volunteering. It demonstrates the need for targeted strategies to reduce barriers and enhance the volunteering experiences for older adults, ensuring that the benefits of volunteering continue to enrich the community and the volunteers themselves.

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# INTRODUCTION

In an era of significant demographic change, understanding the dynamics of ageing and the role of older people in society has never been more important. This report explores the multifaceted implications of an ageing population, with a particular focus on Queensland, Australia. As the proportion of older adults continues to rise, both in Queensland and globally, it presents challenges and opportunities that require careful analysis and considered responses.

The phenomenon of population ageing is driven by advances in healthcare, lower birth rates, and improved quality of life, leading to increased life expectancy. While these are positive developments, they also raise complex issues related to healthcare provision, economic sustainability, and social welfare. Central to this discussion is the concept of social isolation, a significant challenge that disproportionately affects older adults due to retirement, loss of social contacts, and reduced mobility.

Volunteering has emerged as a potential solution, offering older adults avenues for engagement, purpose, and social connection. This report investigates how volunteering not only connects older people with their communities but also acts as a strategic tool to enhance their well-being and societal participation. It examines barriers to volunteering, such as ageism, physical limitations, and socio-economic factors, and proposes strategies to improve inclusivity and reach.

The report begins with a comprehensive literature review, providing context on global ageing trends and the specific characteristics of these trends. Subsequent sections present quantitative and qualitative analyses of volunteering trends among older adults in Queensland, their motivations, challenges, and the societal benefits they generate. Insights from focus groups, incorporating the voices of older volunteers and the organisations that support them, enrich the narrative with personal experiences and operational perspectives.

Ultimately, this report aims to highlight the critical role of older people in volunteering and emphasise the need for policies and practices that support their active participation. In doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of how supporting an engaged, active older population benefits individuals and society, promoting a more inclusive and resilient community.



## SECTION 1: LITERATURE REVIEW



People worldwide are living longer, and globally the population of older adults (aged 65 and above) is increasing. So much so, that for the first time in 2018 the proportion of adults aged over 65 was larger than the proportion of children under five (United Nations, 2023). This trend towards an aging population can be attributed to advancements in medical technology, improved living standards, greater access to education, declining fertility rates, and healthier lifestyle choices (United et al.; World Health Organisation, 2022).

While this trend offers opportunities for longer and more socially engaged lives for some, it also brings challenges such as declining health and social isolation for others (Hogerbrugge, 2020; Queensland Government Statistician's Office, 2023; United Nations, 2023; World Health Organisation, 2022).

Currently, within Queensland, the proportion of residents aged 65 and older equates to approximately 897,075 individuals, with expectations for this number to reach one million by 2026 (Queensland Government Statistician's Office, 2023). With a larger proportion of older adults, there is increased demand for healthcare services and financial support, putting pressure on public resources. Additionally, a decrease in the working-age population will impact productivity and economic growth.

In addition to the socioeconomic challenges posed by an aging population, there is a growing concern about loneliness and social isolation among older adults. Research indicates that as individuals age, they may experience increased social isolation due to factors such as retirement, loss of loved ones and physical health limitations (Bartlett et al., 2013; Community Support and Services Committee, 2021; Tang et al., 2009).

Social isolation not only affects mental health but also has adverse effects on physical well-

being, increasing the risk of chronic health conditions and mortality (Bartlett et al., 2013; Berkman & Kawachi, 2000; Community Support & Services Committee, 2021; Tang et al., 2010; Warburton et al., 2007). Addressing social isolation and loneliness in a proactive manner has the potential to build community capacity and social networks. However, to successfully achieve this aim, it requires community-based interventions, social support networks, and access to meaningful social activities (Moren-Cross & Lin, 2006; Weir, 2023).

While social relationships are a known protective factor against chronic health conditions and mortality, the nature of the interaction matters. In order to be considered beneficial, social relationships must have factors of connection, homogeneity, mutual respect, and support (Moren-Cross & Lin, 2006).

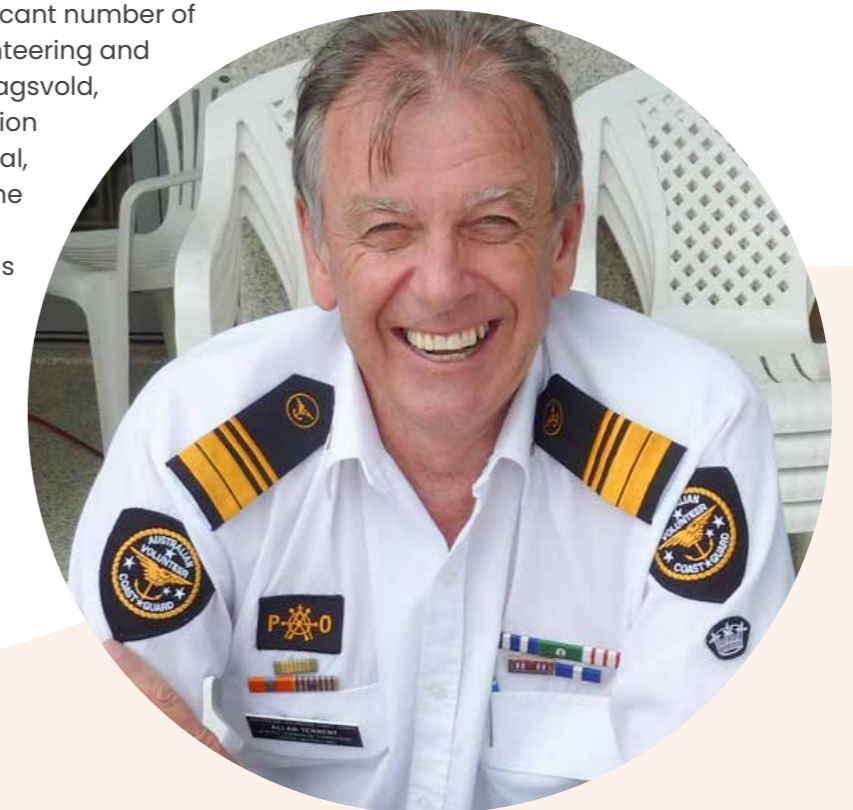
In contrast, negative social experiences have been shown to increase the risk of a wide range of chronic health conditions and mortality. Furthermore, the associated increase in levels of stress and psychological damage has been linked to problems with self-esteem and confidence and can promote a feeling of social exclusion (Baltes et al., 2019; Berkman & Kawachi, 2000; Moren-Cross & Lin, 2006).

One method of social engagement that has the potential to foster positive relationships is volunteering, as volunteering opportunities can bridge the gap for those who have limited social interactions. Existing social networks as we age often decline due to changes in work status, transportation requirements, health factors, and changes to household dynamics (for example, children leaving home, changing caring commitments and widowhood), (Komp et al., 2012; Tang, 2008).

Changes in financial conditions can also impede the ability to participate (Cho et al., 2018). The social relationships facilitated through volunteering can transcend social barriers, and create feelings of connection, respect and purpose (Moren-Cross & Lin, 2006). It is thought that the reasons behind this stem from the mutual benefits associated with helping others, as well as the personal feelings of being wanted and needed (Moren-Cross & Lin, 2006; Tang et al., 2010; Warburton et al., 2007).

Increasing academic attention has also been drawn to understanding the social and economic contributions older adults provide, including valued time, knowledge, and resources, and the implications and opportunities for future engagement (Lowe, 2012; Hogerbrugge, 2020; United Nations, 2023; World Health Organisation, 2022). These contributions serve not only to enhance the wellbeing of older adults but to also benefit the broader community.

However, despite this potential, a significant number of older adults express an interest in volunteering and are not currently involved (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020). This represents a significant portion of older adults who could offer emotional, practical, and educational support to the community while addressing their own emotional, spiritual, and cognitive needs as they age (Hogerbrugge, 2020; World Health Organisation, 2022).



## The impact of ageing

Older adults are full of complexity, and various factors may influence their behaviours and actions in a multitude of ways. Whilst acknowledging and appreciating the tremendous diversity in older individuals, it is important to examine their specific motivations, needs, and perceived barriers to volunteering that must first be addressed to harness the potential they bring.

Ageing progression can be defined as a loss of complexity in multiple physiological and cognitive processes and a reduced ability to adapt to the environment over time (Ahmad, 2018). However, the timing and order of change are incredibly varied due to genetic and environmental influences. For example, social determinants such as housing and community support, as well as individual characteristics such as sex, ethnicity, and socioeconomic standing will influence the aging process (Ahmad, 2018; Komp et al., 2012; Lachman, 2004).

However, one of the more subtle and nuanced shifts often overlooked is a change in mental attitudes. Changes in physiological functions can precipitate this, or it may be a response to significant life events and personal choices. Regardless of their motivation, often older adults need to become more selective with their time, energy and focus (Han et al., 2023; Weir, 2023).

This shift in attitude facilitates a transition towards an emphasis on emotional meaning in relationships. As emotional regulation becomes easier, older adults tend to become more conscientious (Baltes et al., 2019; Han et al., 2023; Weir, 2023), leading to greater social maturity. As these changes take hold and attitudes evolve, older adults will evaluate their social and volunteering participation with a measured approach, preferring to use the valuable time and resources available on activities that are deemed worthwhile and align with personal values (Baltes et al., 2019; Han et al., 2023; Weir, 2023).

There is also a notable change in memory and cognitive processing abilities as people age. This cognitive change is often misunderstood and serves as a source of negative stereotyping and



prejudice (Weir, 2023; Warburton et al., 2007). Stereotypes can often lead to misconceptions about memory, cognition, and aging and the discrimination and social shaming that arise from these misunderstanding often have negative social implications (United Nations, 2023).

To simplify, there are two forms of intelligence that have to do with memory and cognitive processing: fluid intelligence and crystallised intelligence. Fluid intelligence refers to the ability to think logically and solve problems in new situations, involving tasks such as reasoning, abstract thinking, and problem-solving independent of previously acquired knowledge. Often, this ability will decline with age (Tucker-Drob et al., 2022).

On the other hand, crystallised intelligence is based on knowledge and experience, encompassing abilities related to vocabulary, general information, and applied knowledge. Crystallised intelligence tends to remain strong and may even improve with age (Tucker-Drob et al., 2022). Moreover, studies indicate that older adults are often better at retaining attention and ignoring distractions when compared to middle-aged adults (Weir, 2023).

While it is important to acknowledge that changes do occur, it is also vital to apply this understanding in a manner that emphasises the strengths of older adults. Creating opportunities for intergenerational volunteering activities is one example where older individuals can pass on knowledge and skills, while younger individuals may be better suited to contribute to tasks requiring physical strength and fluid intelligence (Witucki Brown et al., 2011).

Extending this, exploratory research by Carr et al. (2018) indicates that initiating volunteer work can reduce disability levels, with benefits varying by intensity of engagement and gender. Notably, Principi et al. (2016) found that for older people with mild or severe health problems, depressive symptoms were negatively associated with their involvement in volunteer activities. Both articles suggest that volunteering could be a pivotal strategy in public health interventions aimed at delaying disability and promoting independence among the ageing population.

It is nonetheless pointed out that older Australians living with disability need transitional and ongoing support to have opportunities for active participation in the community as volunteers if desired (Balandin et al., 2006).

## Formal and informal volunteering

There is a socioeconomic, geographic (urban vs rural), and educational divide between formal and informal volunteers (Russell et al., 2020). Furthermore, when there is a poor fit between interests and motives in the volunteer role, the individual will disengage from the activity (Russell et al., 2020). This then brings us to ask: does formal or informal volunteering engagement matter, and what is the best option for older adults?

Formal volunteering opportunities provide avenues for expanding social networks, accessing resources, and enhancing community integration (Cao et al., 2023), and it is widely held that hours spent on formal volunteering is highest for those aged 65 and over (Taniguchi, 2012). Within an organisational framework, formal volunteering provides social connection, a sense of belonging, community engagement, and social status, all of which align with motivations for volunteering.

Yet as indicated, opportunities to engage in formal volunteering may not be equally accessible to everyone due to barriers such as level of education, health, acquired skills, ability, and socioeconomic status (SES) (Park, Kim, & Cho, 2017; Russell et al., 2020). These obstacles can impede access, create barriers to participation, and diminish sustained motivation. Financial constraints are frequently cited as a barrier to involvement, as evidenced by numerous studies, yet there is limited research on strategies to address this (Park, Kim, & Cho, 2017).

Nevertheless, organisations are better positioned to mitigate barriers for vulnerable older adults, provided there is alignment between attributes, resources, and interests (Park et al., 2017; Tang, Morrow-Howell, & Hong, 2009). Some examples where organisations have been able to bridge the gap between barriers include introducing shared roles, creating flexibility, adjusting the environment

and offering financial compensation for incidental expenses (Tang et al., 2009).

Informal volunteering offers many of the same health and well-being benefits for older adults as formal volunteering, including social connection, a sense of belonging, and community involvement, with fewer barriers to participation. This mode of volunteering is particularly accessible for lower-income and marginalised groups as it is usually done through informal channels (Russell et al., 2020). Older adults who engage in informal volunteering typically undertake socially active tasks that are less physically demanding, such as providing transport, giving advice, or care-related aid (Russell et al., 2020). Despite the differences and accessibility, it was found that often older adults who participated in one form of volunteering also participated in the other concurrently (Russell et al., 2020).

Volunteering often necessitates stability, sacrifice, and ongoing commitment (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020). The decision for an older adult to participate involves assessing resource availability, personal motivation, and willingness. Additionally, there must be a reasonable alignment between an individual's skills and desires and what the organisation can offer (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020). Research indicates that incentives are perceived as more influential than barriers when considering taking on a volunteer role and can inspire those who may be uncertain (Warburton et al., 2007; Witucki Brown et al., 2011).

Some examples of incentives include developing an inclusive and social environment, offering flexible volunteer options, and shared roles, providing intergenerational opportunities, tailoring tasks to the skills on offer, and implementing training programs (Warburton et al., 2007). Some individuals also express a need for financial assistance to cover expenses and may not be able to do so without this support.

As many participants express a preference for direct invitations to volunteer, viewing it as a personal appeal and a recognition of their potential contribution, this may be a good recruitment strategy (Warburton et al., 2007). Alternatively, increasing publicity and adopting a proactive approach to volunteer recruitment could be beneficial. Some also suggested implementing 'come and try' days for individuals uncertain about their suitability for particular roles (Warburton et al., 2007).

## Ageism and volunteering

One of the most pervasive and socially accepted forms of discrimination is ageism. Ageism is a discriminatory prejudice that unfairly categorises, divides, and differentiates individuals based on inaccurate and negative stereotypes related to age. To underscore the prevalence of this discrimination, it is reported that 64% of older Australians have been affected by ageism in the last five years (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2022; World Health Organisation, 2022; Weir, 2023; Warburton et al., 2007).

These figures are concerning, as ageism is associated with detrimental effects on health, increased stress levels, social isolation, and reduced quality of life among older Australians (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021; Weir, 2023). Furthermore, ageism is frequently cited as a barrier to participation or as a factor contributing to the decline of volunteering activities (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021; Warburton et al., 2007; Weir, 2023).

Paradoxically, while organisations may view older volunteers as reliable, available, and experienced, they may



also hold misconceptions about their physical and mental health, skills, adaptability to change, technological competence, and training needs (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021; Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020).

On a personal level, a sense of self is often shaped by appraisal and feedback from others. Experiencing a negative stereotype in social situations will not only make the individual feel unwelcome but can often lead to an internalisation of ageist attitudes; attitudes that not only result in low self-esteem but may, in turn, generate unconscious negative behaviours, both towards themselves and others in their own age group (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020; Moren-Cross & Lin, 2006; Weir, 2023). Moreover, both low self-esteem and feeling unwelcome are not only perceived to be barriers to volunteering but also a predictor of social isolation (Moren-Cross & Lin, 2006).

Research indicates one of the best ways to reduce ageism is through education, as this not only diminishes bias and misconceptions but also fosters empathy (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021; Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020; Weir, 2023). Another proven effective strategy is creating opportunities for intergenerational mixing, particularly within volunteering activities (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021; Weir, 2023). This approach has demonstrated success in mitigating bias and misconceptions, particularly interpersonal ageism while promoting mutual understanding and empathy across generations.

Although sparse, there is also some literature that indicates older adults who were frequently engaged in formal social activities (such as volunteering) reported similar or higher levels of elder abuse than those with less frequent organised social participation (Yang, et al., 2021). This suggests that volunteering may not be an unqualified safe space from exploitation or harm for older people.

## Motives to volunteer

Despite the presence of barriers, motivation will ultimately drive the desire to volunteer. Stowe and Cooney (2015) suggest that behavioural choices influencing volunteering decisions may originate much earlier in life, as it was found that those who had volunteered previously were much more likely to do it again. However, current research across various organisations indicates that it was not income or previous volunteering experience that predicted individuals' volunteering but rather educational accomplishment. Those holding higher levels of education are 1.7 times more likely to volunteer (Tang, 2008; Dury et al., 2015; Han et al., 2023; Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020; Peters-Davis et al., 2001).

Two theories have been developed to explain this phenomenon. One theory suggests that higher education may evoke a sense of civic duty and purpose, encouraging a desire to contribute and mentor younger generations (Dury et al., 2015; Han et al., 2023; Omoto et al., 2000; Peters-Davis et al., 2001; Witucki Brown et al., 2011). The second theory suggests it may be attributed to the development of better coping mechanisms and individual agency, leading individuals to seek meaningful engagements post-retirement (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020). Higher education may also lead to more opportunities through improved social contacts, greater accumulation of wealth, and well-developed skill sets, thereby creating more avenues for volunteering that vulnerable populations do not have access to (McNamara & Gonzales, 2011).

When digging deeper into the motivations of not only volunteers but potential volunteers, we begin to get a clearer view of some of the existing social and cultural motivations. Retirement can occur gradually or suddenly, and for some individuals, it brings about a loss of purpose and social connection (Komp et al., 2012). Many older adults miss the social aspect of work, which serves as a significant motivating factor for those who choose to volunteer. While altruism has been identified as a motivator among active volunteers, it is a civic duty that appears to create a stronger desire to give back to the community and guide younger generations (Dury et al., 2015; Witucki Brown et al., 2011; Han et al., 2023).

Moreover, motivations often stem from more personal intentions, as many older adults cite seeking companionship, a sense of purpose, and personal growth, as well as a desire to learn new skills and to create a sense of personal satisfaction (Witucki Brown et al., 2011; Hansen & Slagsvold,



2020; Peters-Davis et al., 2001). Additionally, they may wish to utilise existing skills and feel valued or wanted. Regardless of the motivation, it is often the positive experience and feelings of personal satisfaction that occur while volunteering that lead to a desire to participate in more volunteering activities (Witucki Brown et al., 2011).

Understanding the motivations of a volunteer is important, but it's equally vital to recognise and comprehend perceived barriers and take an active role in addressing these concerns. Interestingly, non-volunteers tended to rate barriers as more significant than active volunteers (Warburton et al., 2007). While this topic is broad and diverse, certain common perceptions consistently emerged among both younger old adults (aged 65-75) and older old adults (aged 75+).

## Barriers to volunteering

One of the primary barriers cited by potential volunteers is perceptions about time and financial requirements (Warburton et al., 2007). Financial barriers are particularly prevalent, as evidenced by numerous studies (Cho et al., 2018; Morrow-Howell et al., 2009; Peters-Davis et al., 2001; Russell et al., 2020; Tang, Morrow-Howell, & Hong, 2009). This is exacerbated by socio-economic disadvantages such as limited access to opportunities, education, and poorer overall health trajectories, resulting in those with fewer resources being less likely to volunteer (Han et al., 2023; Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020; Park et al., 2017; Russell et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2009; Witucki Brown et al., 2011).

The second significant barrier to volunteering relates to a lack of information. Some adults encounter difficulties in finding activities that are appealing and offer flexibility, while others simply do not know how to source information or have not been approached (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020; Warburton et al., 2007; Witucki Brown et al., 2011).

Among those who had previously volunteered but did not plan to do so again, many cited transport concerns, health-related limitations, feeling bored or unwelcome (Warburton et al., 2007), being overcommitted, and fear or experience of age discrimination (Witucki Brown et al., 2011; Han et al., 2023; Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020). Organisational issues were also raised, with individuals expressing reservations about poorly managed organisations, underutilisation of offered skills and expertise and unfair or exploitative treatment (Penner, 2002; Warburton et al., 2007).

Others found administrative changes to company policies, such as the requirement of qualifications, insurance, or accreditation, to be overly complicated and not worth the time and cost of volunteering (Warburton et al., 2007).

Several studies have sought to define recruitment potential, referring to individuals who may align with socially defined predictors of volunteering. Although the circumstances and applicability vary, certain identifiable traits have been associated with volunteering. Altruism stands out, alongside an existing religious philosophy, higher education levels, higher household income, and good health status (Dury et al., 2015; Han et al., 2023; Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020; Komp et al., 2012; Tang, 2008; Witucki Brown et al., 2011).

Furthermore, individuals who are already actively engaged in social roles demonstrate a greater likelihood of participating in volunteering activities. Many are recruited through word-of-mouth referrals from existing family, friends, acquaintances, and community events (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020; Komp et al., 2012; Tang, 2008). However, while it is noted that predictors relate back to those who already have a social network in place, what is not alluded to is the ability to reach the vulnerable individuals without the established social networks or resources.

According to the Polidoras et al. (2023) there are 8.98 million Australians aged 50 and above, with 53% exhibiting one or more vulnerability indicators. Vulnerability indicators include sensory impairments (related to sight, hearing, or speech), cognitive impairments (intellectual or psychological), physical disabilities, or any combination of impairments (Queensland Government, 2022).

Vulnerable individuals experience lower levels of social integration, reduced financial and

emotional support, reduced contact with acquaintances or friends, and a diminished sense of community belonging (Park et al., 2017; Shandra, 2017). It is noted that those with vulnerabilities or disabilities often face significant disadvantages, including lower income, transportation barriers, poor health, inaccessible environments, negative stigma, and a lack of accommodation (Park et al., 2017; Shandra, 2017). Additionally, volunteering organisations themselves may contribute to these challenges by failing to consider necessary accommodations, inability to secure funding for accommodation, or a lack of awareness of effective strategies for recruiting individuals with disabilities (Shandra, 2017).

Poverty is also among the barriers experienced by older individuals, leading to fewer opportunities, poorer health trajectories, and limited resources (Park et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2009). Financial constraints often hinder their capacity to afford transportation, purchase attire, or fund other related expenses necessary for volunteering. Limited access to education and training coupled with higher rates of chronic health conditions due to inadequate healthcare further diminish their opportunities for engagement.

Social isolation exacerbates these challenges, as older adults in poverty may lack awareness of available opportunities and struggle to connect with organisations that might benefit from their service (Community Support and Services Committee, 2021). Additionally, caregiving responsibilities (for an aging partner or grandchildren) compound these barriers, while stigma and discrimination based on socioeconomic status may compound feelings of exclusion and a reluctance to volunteer (Park et al., 2017).

Addressing these barriers requires a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the multifaceted nature of poverty's impact on older adults' volunteering aims. Strategies can include providing support for transportation, offering financial assistance, proposing flexible opportunities that accommodate health and caregiving needs, and challenging systemic inequalities.

Moreover, raising awareness about the invaluable contributions older adults can make, and fostering inclusive environments that combat stigma and discrimination, will aid in creating accessible volunteer opportunities for all members of the community, irrespective of socioeconomic status. For example, home care, meal deliveries, and gardening assistance can serve as adaptable resources that free individuals' time, enabling formal volunteering opportunities among vulnerable older adults (Park et al., 2017).



## Cultural and linguistic diversity

Research that speaks directly to the volunteering experiences of First Nation People is underrepresented in literature, and research that speaks directly to the volunteering experiences of First Nations elders is absent. Culturally, it is acknowledged that there is a deep-rooted dedication and understanding of community well-being and often informal and unstructured time is generously given to community activities in First Nations (Kerr et al., 2001). However, these activities can often be underreported.

Speaking generally, it was found that in terms of volunteering opportunities outside First Nations groups, there were considerable barriers to overcome, such as inadequate cultural and linguistic training, lack of support for volunteers, feelings of exclusion due to language or cultural differences, and a general perception that efforts were largely unrecognised and unappreciated (Kerr et al., 2001). It is strongly suggested that future research focuses on this area, as there exists a significant gap in the literature.

Likewise, research on older adults from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities is limited, with existing studies often lacking specificity regarding age groups. However, although limited, literature addressing older CALD adults provides valuable insights into their integration within established organisations.

These studies suggest that older CALD adults are just as likely to volunteer as other Australians and often seek out individuals and environments that share similar values and identities, particularly amidst social, cultural, and language barriers that may hinder access to other opportunities (Grey et al., 2010; Handy & Greenspan, 2009).

Motivations for participation vary, often centring on establishing social connections, acquiring proficiency in the local language, and familiarising oneself with the practical and social customs of the host country (Handy & Greenspan, 2009). Cao et al. (2023) found that CALD participants who successfully integrated into volunteer programs reported deepening relationships that transcended both educational and cultural disparities, not only within their own cultural group but also across other nationalities. This phenomenon enhances the sense of community and overall well-being.

Recent research by Muller (2023) revealed that volunteering is deeply embedded within different cultures, with a strong focus on the beneficiaries of volunteering efforts rather than the volunteers themselves. However, acts of volunteering by multicultural communities are often undervalued and misunderstood, even though multicultural volunteers report significant social engagement and a sense of belonging, indicating that the benefits of multicultural volunteering extend beyond individual communities to society at large.

Muller went on to cite persistent barriers such as exclusion from mainstream volunteering opportunities, recognition, and decision-making. Multicultural volunteers with limited English proficiency tend to focus more on providing home and emotional support and express uncertainty about how to engage more deeply in volunteering. The research also addressed perceptions of racism within the volunteering sector. While volunteer managers are perceived as the least racist actors within the volunteering community, a notable portion of volunteers, inclusive of those aged 65 and over, have observed or experienced racism, indicating a need for volunteer involving organisations and advocacy groups to take action.



A U.S. study similarly found that 33% of older CALD individuals reported a lack of knowledge about how to access volunteering opportunities and those who did often encountered ageism, which led to a perception that their contributions were undervalued by society, especially among cultures that hold older adults in high esteem (Cao et al., 2023). An intriguing finding from Handy and Greenspan (2009) study also suggested that immigrants from countries with repressive regimes or military rule might resist volunteering due to negative associations with state or government conditions.

It has also been observed that despite a high degree of community engagement and a strong sense of attachment, a higher-than-expected degree of loneliness was reported in a recent sample of LGBTIQ+ volunteers, and it was notable that being transgender or gender diverse was a significant predictor of loneliness (Gates & Hughes, 2021). As within other diverse community cohorts, a UK framework for later-in-life care for LGBTIQ+ volunteers suggests specific cultural training for the organisations that intend to involve them (Hafford-Letchfield & Roberts, 2023).

## Conclusion

Overall, the integration of older adults into volunteer programs presents a significant opportunity for fostering social cohesion and enhancing individual well-being. Recognising and overcoming the barriers that restrict participation is essential, as is the adoption of successful strategies by organisations to fully utilise the latent capabilities of older volunteers (Handy & Greenspan, 2009).

By making concerted efforts to dismantle these barriers and champion inclusivity, society can enable older adults to make active, meaningful contributions to their communities, thereby reinforcing a sense of belonging and mutual support. Additionally, government entities can play a pivotal role in facilitating adults over the age of 65 volunteering, through the provision of resources and necessary support (Warburton et al., 2007).

This collaborative approach among individuals, communities, organisations, and governments can transform the landscape of those over 65 volunteering, leveraging the rich experiences and skills of older adults to enrich community life and improve societal well-being.



# SECTION 2: VOLUNTEERS 65 YEARS AND OVER

## Volunteer participation

In 2023, 52.3% of Queensland residents aged 65 and over, or 484,200 people, contributed to the community as volunteers.

Figure 1: Percentage of Queensland residents aged 65 and over who volunteer

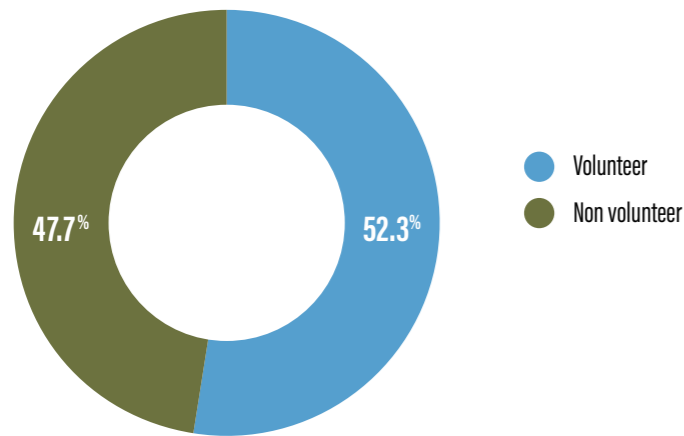
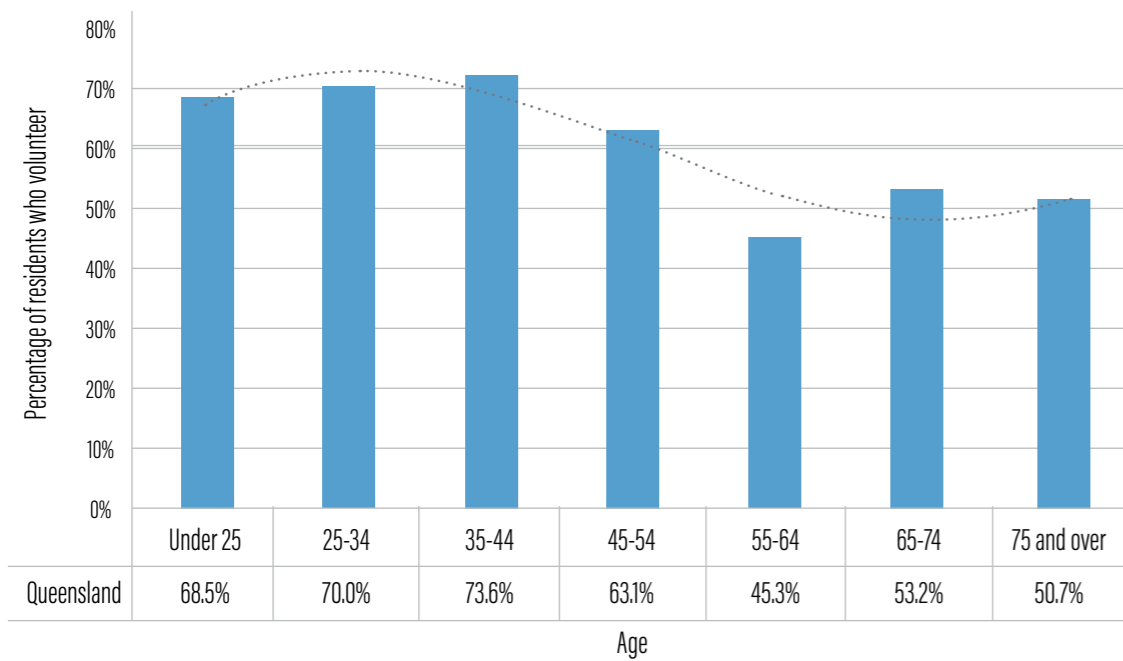


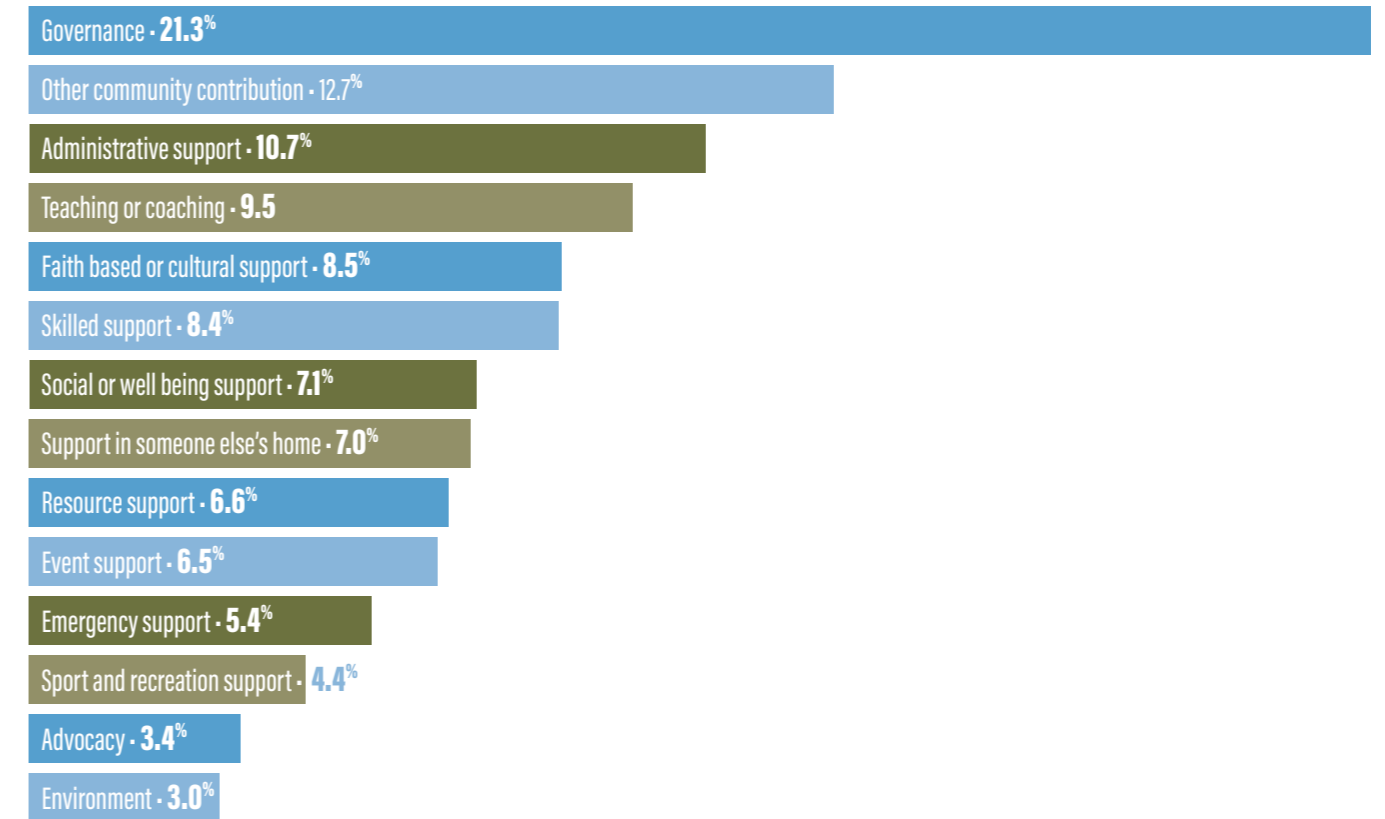
Figure 2: Volunteering participation in Queensland by age cohort



The grey trendline overlaid on this figure shows that the relationship between age and volunteering in Queensland is not linear and that different stages of life correlate with different levels of volunteering.

Queensland's older adults also identified various methods of contributing to their community as volunteers, as illustrated in the figure below. On average, they cited 1.4 different forms of volunteering from a list of 14 options (2.4 different forms for persons aged under 65).

Figure 3: The ways in which Queensland volunteers aged 65 years and over contribute to their community



Formal volunteering is defined in this research as volunteering with an organisation or community group, whereas informal volunteering refers to any other volunteering.

Table 1: Volunteering rates in Queensland

	Individuals 65+		Others	
	Percentage	Hours/month	Percentage	Hours/month
<b>All volunteers</b>	52.3%	19.2 hrs/month	66.2%	21.9 hrs/month
<b>Formal</b>	22.2%	14.5 hrs/month	33.0%	19.1 hrs/month
<b>Informal</b>	31.0%	11.4 hrs/month	46.6%	10.8 hrs/month
<b>Both</b>	28.7%		39.7%	

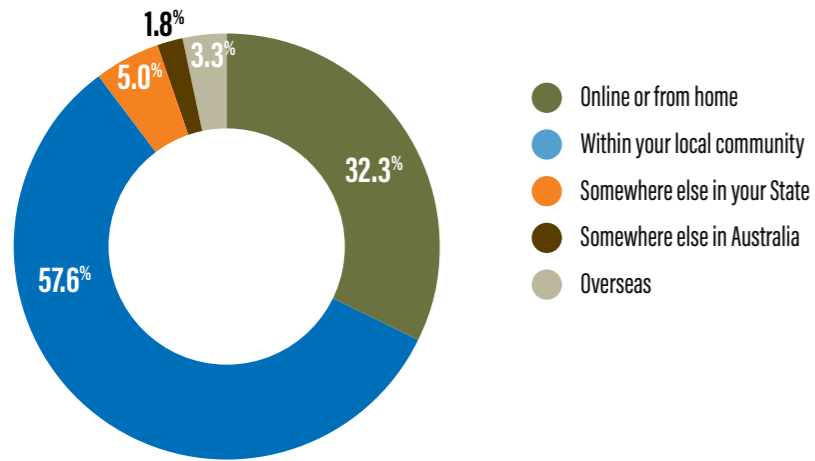
Overall, volunteers over the age of 65 in Queensland contributed an average of 19.1 hours per month, or 4.4 hours per week (5.1 hours per week for others). In aggregate, the contributions of older adult volunteers in Queensland amounted to 111.1 million hours over the previous 12 months.

## Place of volunteering

Nearly one-third of volunteering (32.3%) undertaken by individuals 65+ in Queensland was done online or from home, compared to 26.9% of volunteering done online or at home by persons aged under 65.

Older adults were also less likely to travel outside their local community to volunteer. Only 10.1% of volunteering was done by older adults elsewhere in the state, Australia or overseas, versus 21.6% by persons aged under 65.

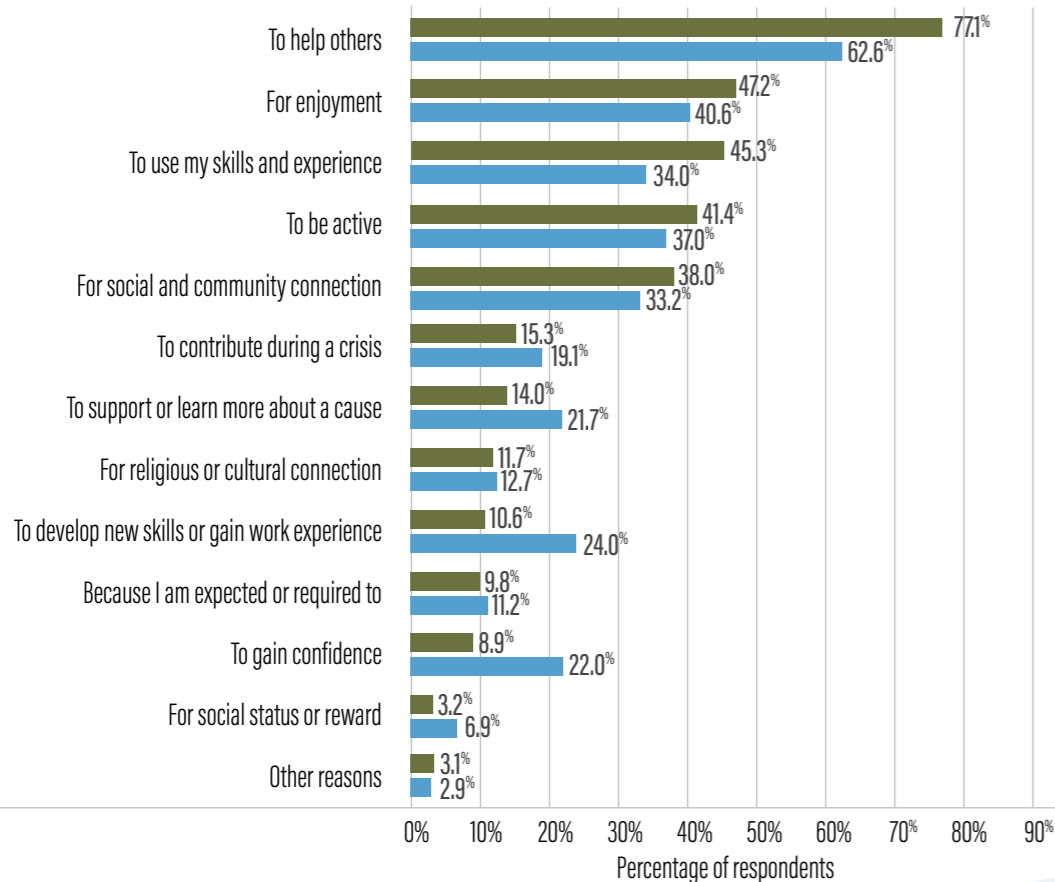
Figure 4: Where older adults volunteer in Queensland



## Volunteer motivations

Volunteers over the age of 65 and others in Queensland both reported an average of 3.3 different motives for volunteering from a list of 13 possible responses.

Figure 5: Motives for volunteering



Older adults were far more likely than other volunteers to be motivated by:

- Helping others (+14.5 ppt)
- Using their skills and experience (+11.3 ppt)

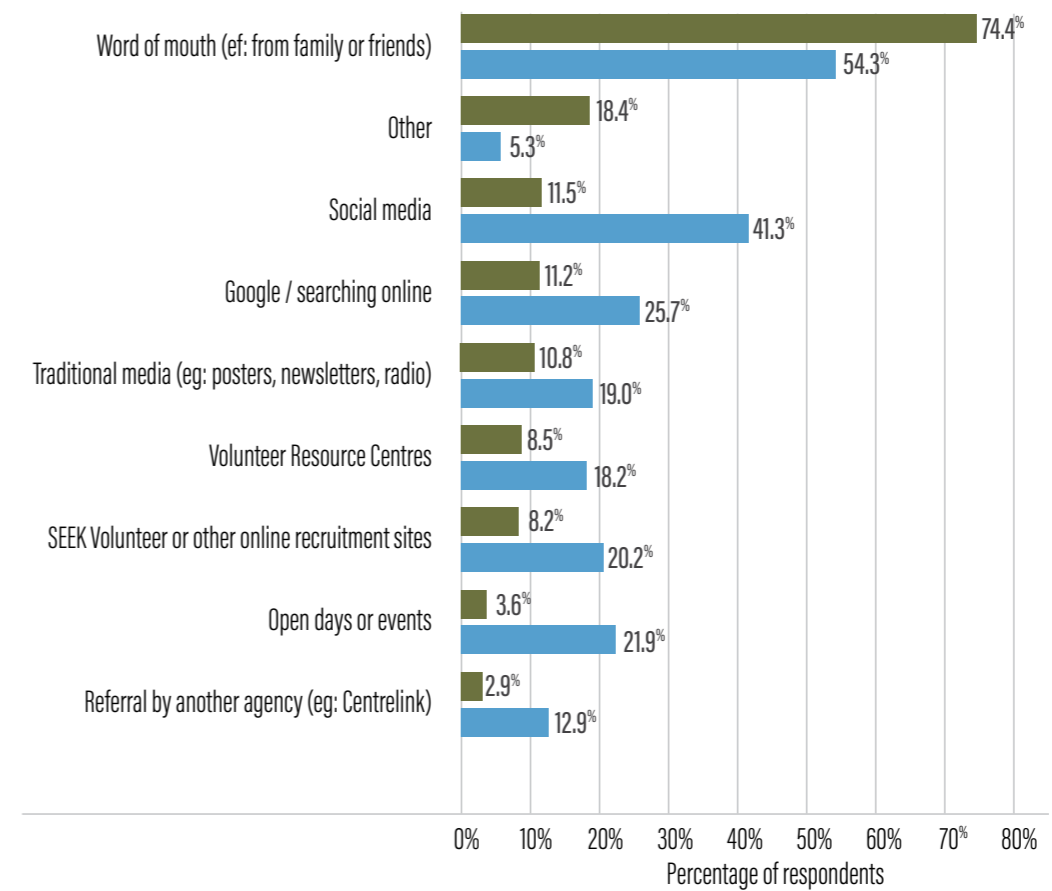
They were far less likely than other volunteers to be motivated by:

- Developing new skills or gaining work experience (-13.4 ppt)
- Gaining confidence (-13.1 ppt)

## Volunteer recruitment

On average, Queensland volunteers aged 65 and over cited utilising 1.6 different recruitment channels to find volunteering opportunities from a list of eight options (2.2 different channels per volunteer under 65).

Figure 6: How people find opportunities to volunteer in Queensland



Older adults were far more likely than other volunteers to find opportunities to volunteer by:

- Word of mouth (+20.0 ppt)

Older adults were far less likely than other volunteers to find opportunities to volunteer by:

- Social media (-29.9 ppt)
- Open days or events (-18.3 ppt)
- Google / searching online (-14.5 ppt)
- SEEK Volunteer or other online recruitment sites (-12.1 ppt)

## Social preference

Older adults in Queensland expressed a preference for volunteering alone from three options presented.

Figure 7: How individuals aged 65 and over prefer to volunteer in Queensland

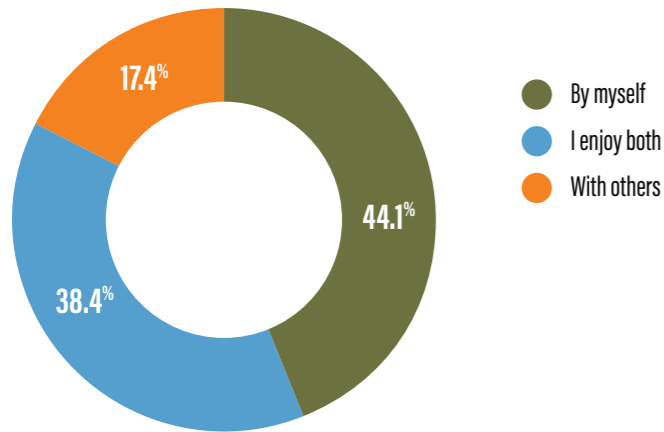


Table 2: Comparison of the social preferences for volunteering (individuals over the age of 65 v others)

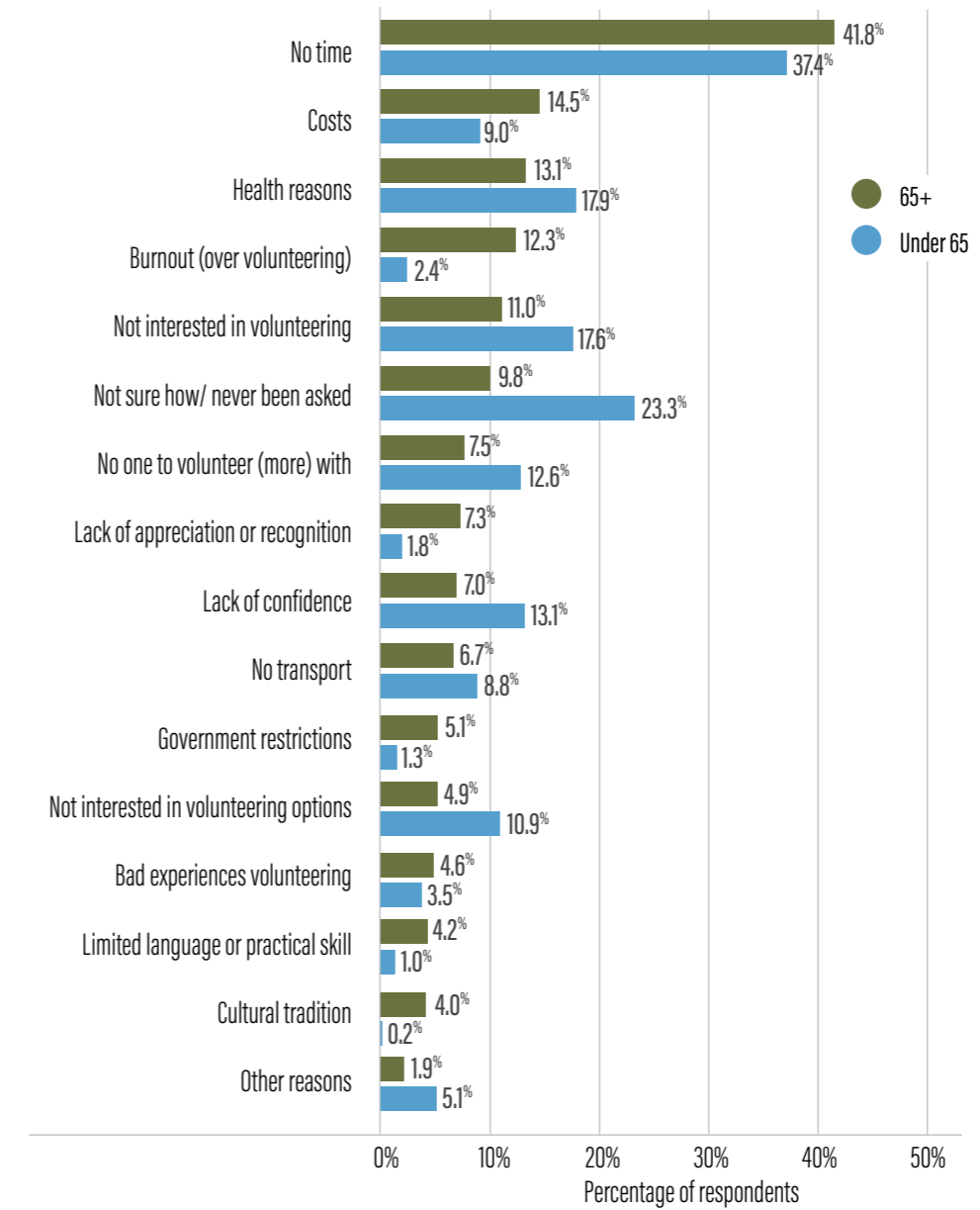
	Over 65	Under 65	Difference
<b>By myself</b>	44.1%	34.1%	<b>+10.0</b>
<b>I enjoy both</b>	38.4%	34.5%	<b>+3.9</b>
<b>With others</b>	17.4%	31.4%	<b>-14.0</b>



## Barriers to volunteering

Individuals over the age of 65 in Queensland (both volunteers and non-volunteers) reported an average of 1.3 barriers compared to an average of 1.6 barriers reported by persons under 65 from the list of 16 options presented to them.

Figure 8: Barriers to individuals over the age of 65 volunteering in Queensland (volunteers v non-volunteers)



The top five barriers to older Queensland volunteers volunteering more were, in order:

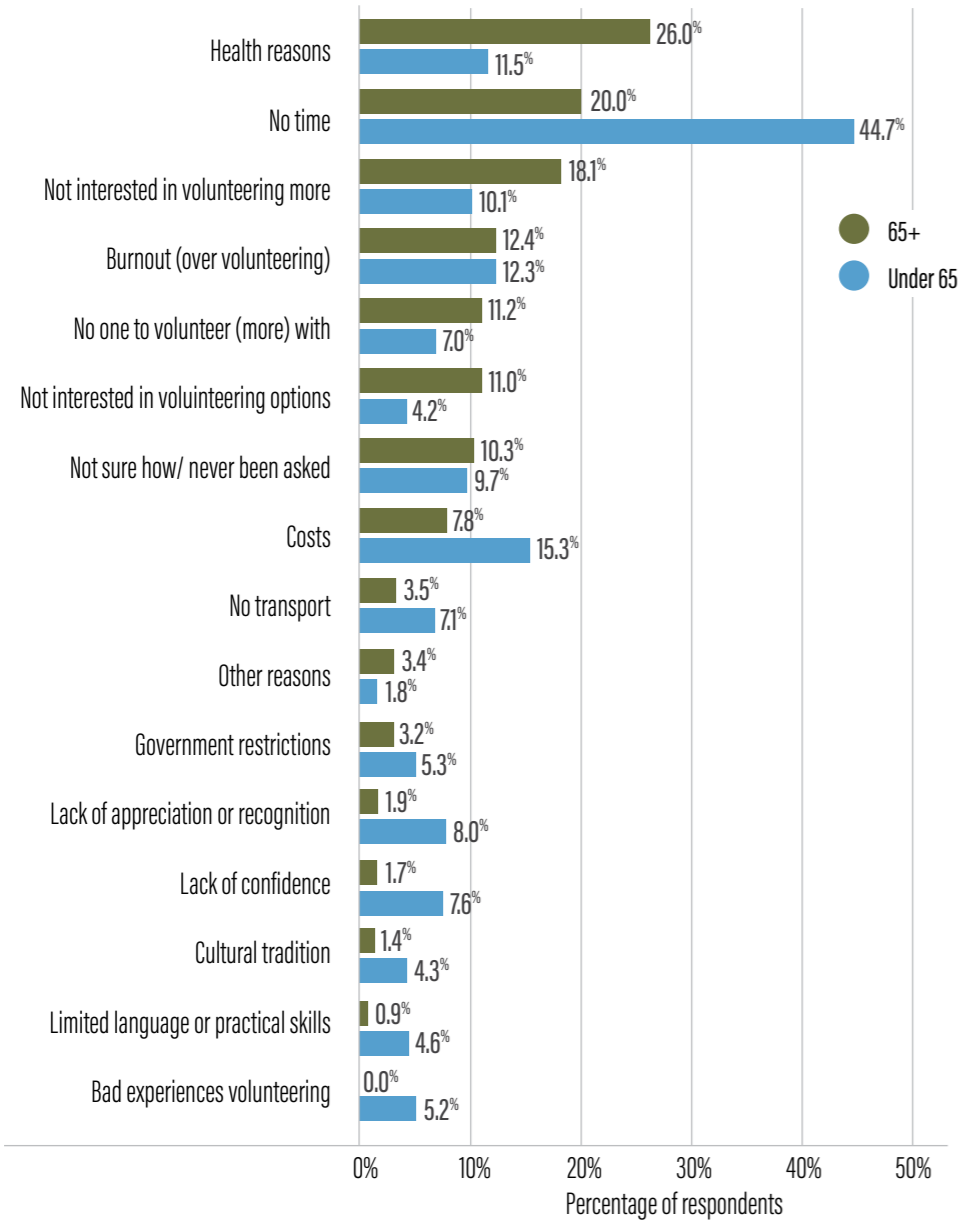
1. No time – 41.8%
2. Costs – 14.5%
3. Health reasons – 13.1%
4. Burnout (over-volunteering) – 12.3%
5. Not interested in volunteering more – 11.0%

The top five barriers to older Queensland non-volunteers participating were, in order:

1. No time – 37.4%
2. Not sure how / never been asked – 23.3%
3. Health reasons – 17.9%
4. Not interested in volunteering – 17.6%
5. Lack of confidence – 13.1%

These additional figures show the differences for volunteers and non-volunteers by age bracket.

Figure 9: Barriers to volunteers volunteering more in Queensland (individuals over the age of 65 v others)

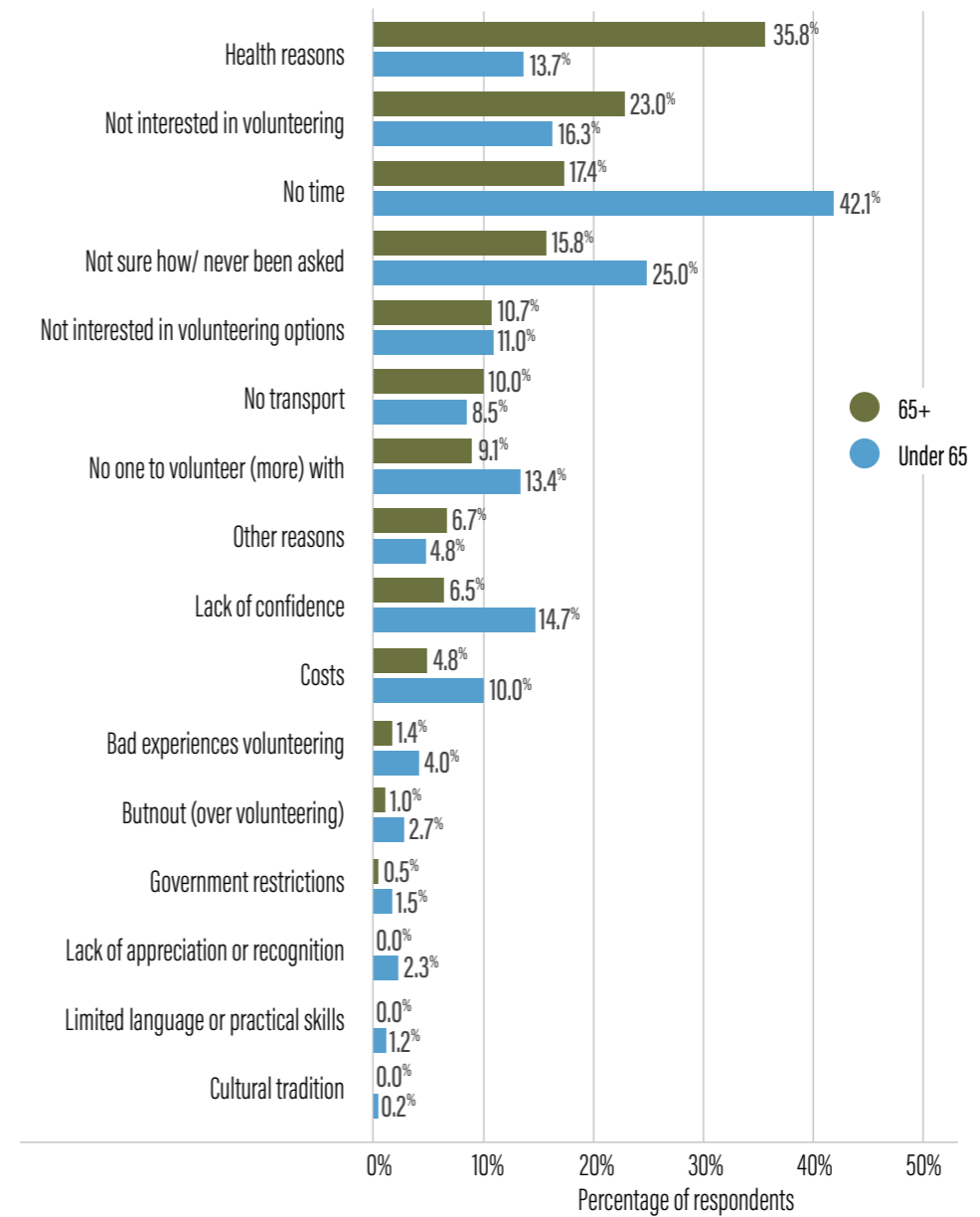


Older volunteers were far more likely than other volunteers to report the following barriers:

- Health reasons (+14.5 ppt)
- Not interested in volunteering more (+8.0 ppt)
- Not interested in volunteering options in my area (+6.9 ppt)

Older volunteers were far less likely than other volunteers to report time (-24.7 ppt) and cost (-7.6 ppt) as barriers to their volunteering.

Figure 10: Barriers to non-volunteers volunteering in Queensland (individuals over the age of 65 v others)



Older people who had not volunteered in the last 12 months were far more likely than other non-volunteers to report their health as a barrier to volunteering (+22.1 ppt).

Older people who had not volunteered in the last 12 months were far less likely than other non-volunteers to report the following barriers to their volunteering:

- No time (-24.7 ppt)
- Not sure how / never been asked (-9.2 ppt)
- Lack of confidence (-8.2 ppt)

## Things that make volunteering harder

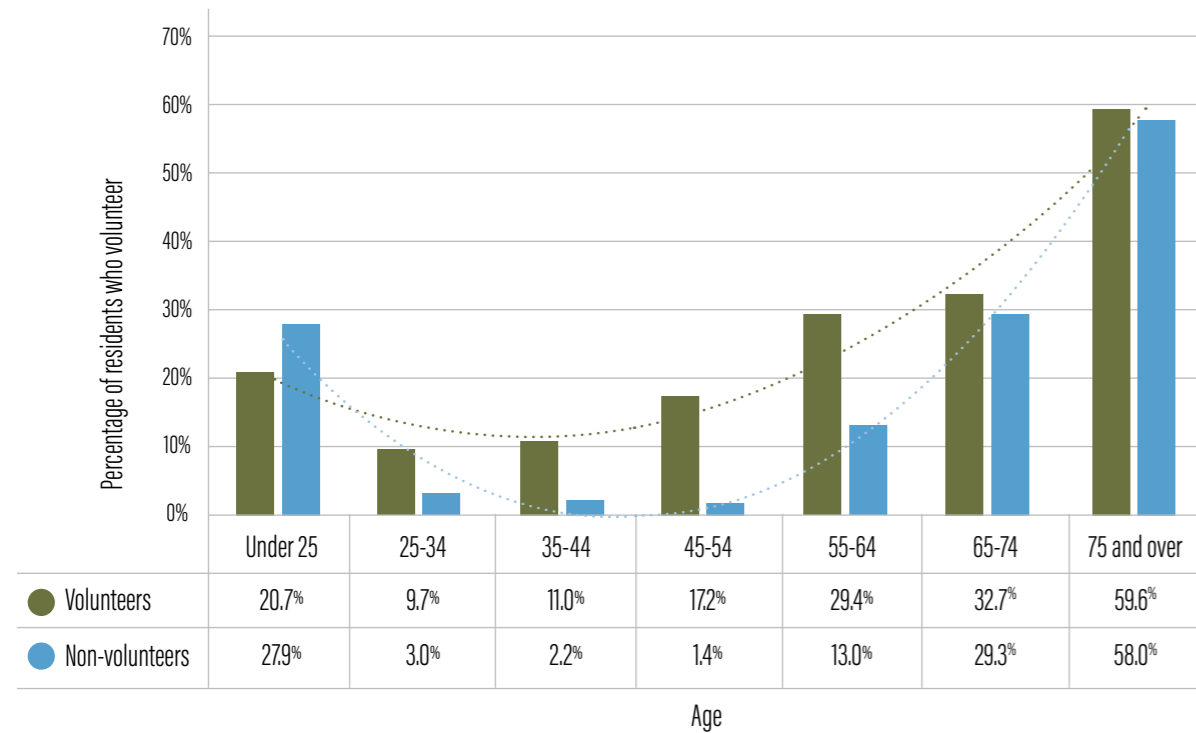
For context, 53.3% of individuals 65+ and 49.5% of others in Queensland reported that one or more of the following demographic factors limited their ability to volunteer with others.

Note that the sample sizes for the following analyses are quite small and more likely to be prone to error.

### Age

The data reveals how various age groups in Queensland perceived their age as a barrier to volunteering with others.

Figure 11: Those who report that their age makes it harder to volunteer with others



### Gender

People over 65 were less likely than others to perceive their gender as something that made it harder to volunteer with others.

Table 3: Those who report that their gender makes it harder to volunteer with others

	Over 65	Under 65
Gender	1.5%	6.5%

### Location

People over 65 were less likely than others to perceive their location as something that made it harder to volunteer with others.

Table 4: Those who report that their gender makes it harder to volunteer with others

	Over 65	Under 65
Gender	10.2%	6.5%

## Employment

Of those in employment, people over 65 were less likely than others to perceive their employer as someone who made it harder to volunteer with others.

Table 5: Those who report that their employer makes it harder to volunteer with others

	Over 65	Under 65
Employer	5.3%	11.1%

## Ethnicity and language

Of those who identified as non-Anglo-Australian, people over 65 were less likely than individuals 65 and over to perceive their cultural identity as something that made it harder to volunteer with others.

Table 6: Those who report that their cultural identity makes it harder to volunteer with others

	Over 65	Under 65
Cultural identity	3.4%	7.1%

No one aged over 65 in the sample of Queensland residents reported speaking English as an additional language.

## Sexual identity

Of those who identified as other than heterosexual, people over 65 were less likely than others to perceive their sexual identity as something that made it harder to volunteer with others.

Table 7: Those who report that their sexual identity makes it harder to volunteer with others

	Over 65	Under 65
Sexual identity	10.7%	12.4%

## Disability

Of those who identified as living with disability, people over 65 were more likely than others to perceive their disability as something that made it harder to volunteer with others.

Table 8: Those who report that their disability makes it harder to volunteer with others

	Over 65	Under 65
Disability	75.8%	52.7%

## Caregivers

Of those who identified as having caring duties at home, people over 65 were more likely than others to perceive their caring duties as something that made it harder to volunteer with others.

Table 9: Those who report that their caring duties make it harder to volunteer with others

	Over 65	Under 65
Caregivers	40.5%	25.8%

## Intent

The intent of individuals 65+ to be volunteering in three years' time is revealed in the following figures.

Figure 12: Future intent of Queensland residents to volunteer in three years' time

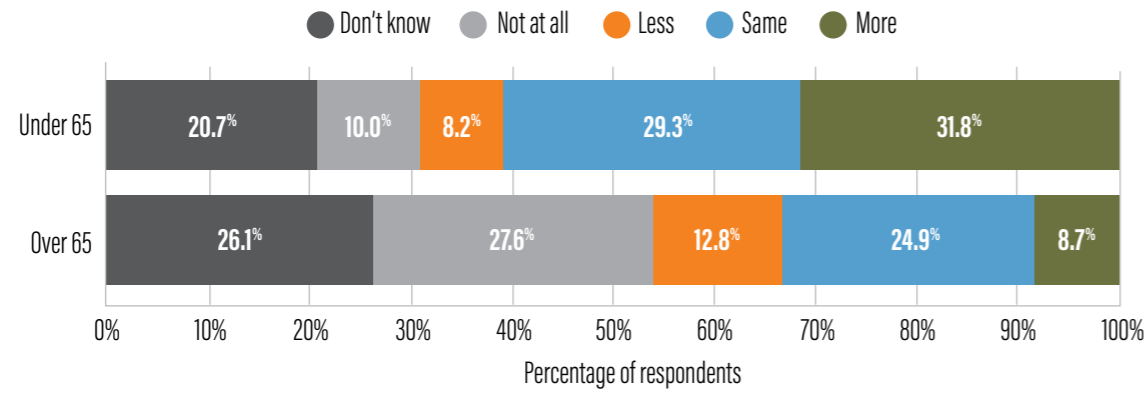


Figure 13: Future intent of Queensland volunteers to volunteer in three years' time

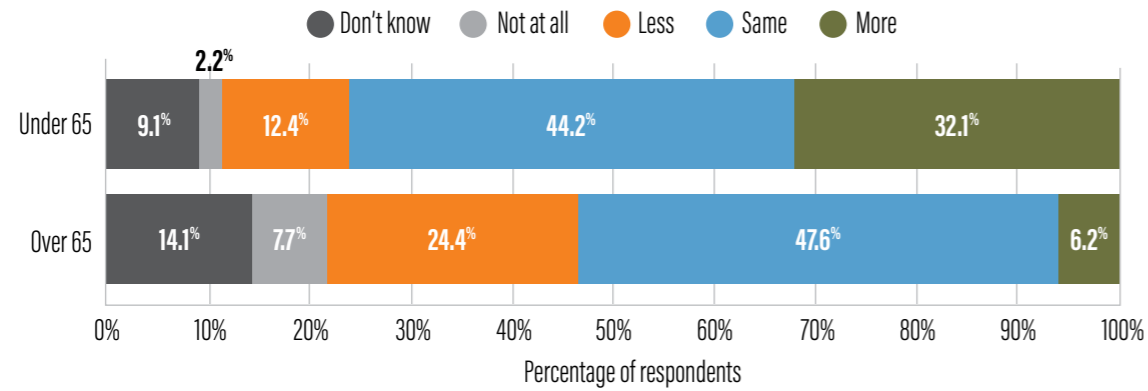
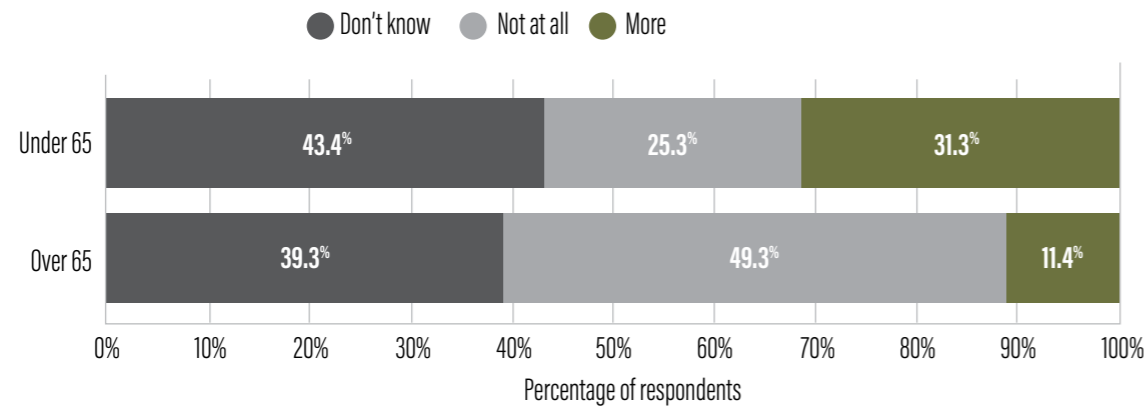


Figure 14: Future intent of Queensland non-volunteers to volunteer in three years' time





## SECTION 3: THE VOICE OF OLDER VOLUNTEERS

A series of focus groups were conducted to better understand the volunteering experiences of older people and the volunteer managers facilitating this demographic across Queensland.

Six focus groups were held with the following cohorts:

- Inala Elders Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation
- Older volunteers from the Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN)
- Managers of older volunteers (Brisbane and regional)
- Older volunteers (Brisbane and regional)

Responses were also received in written format from those unable to attend the focus group sessions. The objective was to capture qualitative data on their experiences, challenges, and insights.

Participants were carefully selected through a targeted recruitment strategy involving collaboration with local community organisations, social media outreach, and email invitations aimed at databases of participants actively involved in or managing older volunteers.

The participant pool was screened by Volunteering Queensland to ensure that those participating broadly represented a diverse range of genders, ages, and geographical groups among older adults engaged in volunteering in Queensland.

Each focus group session lasted approximately 90–120 minutes and was held face-to-face (virtually or in-person) in settings conducive to interactive discussions, allowing participants to freely share their thoughts and experiences.

The discussions were moderated by a trained facilitator who guided the conversations to stay within the scope of the study while ensuring that all participants had the opportunity to contribute.

The sessions commenced with a brief overview of the study's objectives, followed by participant introductions. The dialogue was structured around pre-determined, thematic questions but was flexible enough to accommodate natural, participant-led discussions, enriching the collected data.

Consent was obtained from all participants prior to the discussions, with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Each session was recorded, transcribed, and deidentified, and the data was systematically coded to identify and analyse recurring themes and patterns.

While insightful, the findings from these focus groups are acknowledged to have limitations due to the potential self-selecting nature of the participants and the small number of focus group sessions, which might not fully encapsulate the broad spectrum of volunteer experiences of older Queenslanders.

Nonetheless, the collected data offers valuable insights into the motivations, challenges, and benefits of volunteering among older populations in diverse contexts within the state.



**“ I got very stimulated by seeing people’s growth, and self-belief in themselves. So that’s why I got involved. That’s very stimulating for me. ”**

Participants from across Queensland, including both regional and central districts, displayed similar patterns of engagement and attitudes towards volunteering, with no notable geographic differences, though variations were evident across cultural and social groups.

### The volunteers' perspective

A total of 59 people who identified as older volunteers participated in the focus groups, and a semi-structured discussion guide was developed to steer the conversation. Key questions included:

- Why you volunteer
  - o Why did you start volunteering?
  - o Have your reasons for volunteering changed over time? How?
- How volunteering affects you
  - o How has volunteering affected your health and happiness?
  - o Have you ever had trouble volunteering because of your age or health? How did you deal with it?
- Age and volunteering
  - o Do you think the way society views older people affects their desire to volunteer?
  - o Are there wrong ideas about what older volunteers can do? How can we change these views?
- Volunteer stories
  - o What’s the best or worst experience you’ve had volunteering as an older person?
  - o How does your volunteering now help you grow as a person?
- Building community
  - o Has volunteering helped you make friends or feel more a part of the community?
  - o Can you share a story where volunteering led to a special connection or friendship?
- Making it better
  - o What changes would you like to see in volunteer programs for older people?
  - o How would you encourage someone who’s unsure about volunteering because they’re older?

It was generally found that the experience of older volunteers in Queensland is vibrant, varied, and inclusive of groups with distinct identities, needs, and experiences.

The volunteers are united by their desire to stay active and engaged during their retirement years. This demographic includes individuals who bring a wealth of experience and skills to their roles, often seeking to utilise their professional backgrounds in meaningful ways that benefit their communities. They are also motivated by the desire for personal growth and social interaction.

While these groups share the common goal of contributing positively to their communities, their experiences and the scope of their activities are shaped by distinct challenges related to their identities and physical capabilities.

## Volunteer motivations

Aspirations and communal needs intersect through volunteer work, evolving in distinct ways across diverse groups. Examining why these individuals begin volunteering and how their reasons change over time can help us appreciate the unique and shared drivers that influence their contributions.

### Initial motives for volunteering

All participants began their volunteer journey from different standpoints influenced by their cultural, personal, and societal contexts. The broader group of older volunteers shared similar initial motivations to those with disabilities, revolving around the desire to remain productive and use their post-retirement time constructively. Many were driven to give back to the community by leveraging their accumulated life and professional experiences, which provided them with a structured outlet for engagement and contribution.

Older volunteers with disabilities, however, faced unique challenges that influenced their participation in volunteering activities, including physical barriers and a lack of adequately accessible volunteering opportunities. Despite these challenges, their involvement was driven by a desire to remain active, contribute to society, and advocate for rights and inclusivity within the disability community. This group often worked within structures that aimed to modify traditional volunteering roles to accommodate their physical needs, highlighting the necessity for adaptive changes within volunteer programs.

In contrast, the First Nations Elders were deeply connected to their cultural practices and community values. Their volunteering was often an extension of traditional roles played within their communities, such as passing on skills, stories, and cultural knowledge. This group's approach to volunteering was fundamentally communal, with a strong emphasis on maintaining and teaching cultural heritage, which enriched their community and provided a link to past and future generations.

“ I can't play anymore because of my age. My fitness, I can't run around anymore. But you love the game that much then you give up time to help coach kids to play the game.



### Evolution of motivations over time

As motivations for volunteering were initially shaped by individual and cultural influences, they tended to evolve over time in response to changing physical, social and personal dynamics.

Generally, volunteers aged 65 and over saw a shift in their motivations, with their focus moving towards personal fulfilment and lighter, socially engaging activities that were less physically demanding. This shift was often due to the natural aging process, which redefined their capabilities. Many older volunteers also spoke of volunteering to benefit their children during their family years (for example, at school and sports) before transitioning to volunteering that more properly aligned with their personal interests later in life.

However, while the core cultural drivers remained stable for the First Nations Elders, the focus often deepened towards preserving and teaching cultural heritage. This evolution reflected a natural progression of their lifelong journey, especially as they transitioned into Elder community roles.

In the case of older volunteers with disabilities, the evolution of motivations pointed to an expanding emphasis beyond social interactions and the health benefits of staying active. What began as a necessity for physical activity and social engagement gradually incorporated a stronger desire for recognition and to combat isolation.

## The impact of volunteering

Volunteering not only meets community needs but also benefits the volunteers themselves, boosting their health and happiness while helping them tackle personal challenges like aging or health issues. However, it was noted that the personal effects of volunteering could vary widely across different social, cultural, and geographical groups.

### Effects of volunteering on health and happiness

Many older volunteers reported that volunteering contributed positively to their physical and mental health by keeping them active.

Many older volunteers reported that volunteering had a positive impact on their physical and mental health by keeping them active, which is particularly vital for those managing health issues related to physical or psychological disabilities. One participant, who had multiple sclerosis, discussed the physical limitations and psychological benefits of volunteering. Despite facing physical barriers, she emphasised that volunteering helped keep her depression at bay by keeping her actively engaged.

More importantly, the social connections and sense of purpose gained through volunteering significantly enhanced life satisfaction and happiness for many participants. Older volunteers living with disabilities particularly emphasised how volunteering combatted feelings of isolation and depression. One participant vividly articulated the personal importance of volunteering, describing its transformative effect on their life. Volunteering provided not just a means to stay active and utilise their skills productively but also helped them manage their mental health through meaningful engagement.

“ I think volunteering is very good for the haze, so we keep us occupied, our mind. Because if you don't do that, you get dementia very quick. That's a very important thing. You keep moving and moving, your mind must be busy.



**“ I used to push the trolley around and pick up books or stuff like that, now I can’t push that trolley, maybe I’ll just sit at the desk and ask someone else to go and I’ll just pack the books or something like that. So yeah, you just got to find other ways.**

First Nations Elders saw these benefits through the lens of cultural engagement. Volunteering strengthened communal bonds and continued cultural traditions, which are integral to collective and individual well-being. The happiness derived from these activities was deeply connected to their own sense of identity and belonging, illustrating how their well-being was communally rather than individually framed.

#### **Changes related to age or health while volunteering.**

Challenges related to age or health presented differently across groups. As volunteers encountered age-related physical limitations, the trend was to seek out less physically demanding roles. This was achieved either through volunteers self-selecting activities that matched their physical capabilities or through organisations adapting roles to meet these evolving needs.

One participant spoke of having faced significant barriers due to non-wheelchair-friendly environments and public transport issues. Her strategy involved intense planning and advocating for better accessibility, trying to balance her desire to volunteer with the physical toll it took.

Challenges for the First Nation Elders often stemmed from external misunderstandings of their cultural practices rather than internal limitations like age or health. They navigated these challenges by fostering better communication, cultural respect, and safety in volunteer settings.

They went on to explain that safety in this context meant ensuring cultural, emotional, and physical safety, where cultural safety involved respect and protection for cultural identities and practices, emotional safety ensured supportive and inclusive environments that prevented isolation, and physical safety, guaranteed accessible settings that catered to health and mobility needs.

## **Age and volunteering**

Exploring societal views on age and their influence on volunteering among older volunteers revealed significant insights into the barriers and misconceptions they face. It was found that the prevailing stereotypes about the capabilities of older people as volunteers materially impacted their participation.

### **Societal views on age and their impact on volunteering**

Older volunteers often felt that society underestimated their physical and cognitive abilities, which could affect their motivation to volunteer. It was found that misconceptions about older adults’ ability to learn new skills or adapt to new roles could deter their participation in volunteering. These ideas often stemmed from ageist stereotypes that painted older adults as technologically backward or resistant to change.

Volunteers with disabilities often face compounded stereotypes concerning their age, their physical and their psychological capabilities. This dual stigma could diminish their desire to volunteer, as they felt less valued and more marginalised. Societal assumptions, that they need help rather than can provide help, could be particularly discouraging.

In the First Nations community, on the other hand, Elders were traditionally respected, and their contributions were valued highly, which positively influenced their desire to volunteer. This respect motivated them to pass on cultural knowledge and practices through volunteering. However, in mixed or non-Indigenous volunteering environments, they were still likely to experience ageism, which was perhaps more confronting given their cultural context.

It should be finally noted that many older volunteers felt their time was taken for granted in that individuals and organisations assumed that, because they were no longer working, they had infinite time to give. Not only did many older people take on additional caring duties in later life (such as for grandchildren or aging spouses), but they also may have continued with part-time work or had long-term travel plans. It was felt that this may have prevented some older people from volunteering, especially if they felt pressured to make a permanently scheduled commitment.

**“ When I look in the mirror, I don’t recognise the woman there, but I try to, in my mind, I haven’t gotten older, and I have a disability, but in my head, I don’t have a disability, and I would like to think that is what is seen.**

“ You know that word, discrimination? We should change that to inclusion. And when we change that word to inclusion, then discrimination doesn't become a dirty word, tainted in any way.

### Other misconceptions

Beyond ageism, some older volunteers shared the following experiences of discrimination.

The discriminatory experiences that older people with disabilities encountered when the volunteering infrastructure did not accommodate their physical needs have already been spoken about elsewhere in this report. However, when these older adults also came from culturally diverse backgrounds, the lack of culturally adapted resources and communication further complicated their ability to engage fully and effectively in volunteering.

Experiences of racism were also reported by the First Nations Elders, who sometimes faced both overt and subtle racism when volunteering outside their mob. These experiences could range from cultural insensitivity, such as ignoring their cultural perspectives or traditions, to direct derogatory comments.

### Strategies to change societal views

By confronting and changing these age and other related prejudices, it was believed that the inclusivity and effectiveness of volunteer programs could be enhanced, redefining the narrative around aging and volunteerism.

To that end, it was felt that promoting positive stories and case studies of older adults engaging actively in volunteering could help shift public perceptions. Highlighting their successes and contributions could counteract stereotypes and show the diversity of roles that older people could excel in.

Furthermore, it was suggested that volunteer organisations could design programs that explicitly utilised the skills and experiences of older adults, including those with disabilities. Programs that matched older adults with roles that suited their capabilities and interests would optimise their contributions and enhance their engagement levels.

Another suggested strategy for shifting societal views was advocating for policies supporting older people volunteering. Policies could include incentives for organisations to engage older volunteers, training programs to equip older adults with new skills, and accessibility improvements that accommodated both disability- and age-related physical limitations.

## Volunteer stories

Older volunteers' retelling of their personal experiences in volunteering provided deep insights into the impacts and personal growth volunteering has on one's life and the lives of others.

### Best and worst volunteer experiences

Positive stories from the volunteers in the focus groups frequently included impactful social interactions, such as mentoring younger individuals or helping people through difficult times, which provided satisfaction and a sense of purpose. For example, one speaker described supporting young victims of crime through support, education, and empowerment, which was deeply fulfilling.

I'm very happy with what I'm doing, and the reasons haven't changed. I volunteer assisting children that can't get into sport and activities. Their fees are paid. We drive them to training,

we drive them to games look after them. There's unfortunately a lot of racism on the field when they play soccer, we have to deal with that.

The most enriching experiences for First Nations Elders often involved organising and participating in community gatherings and cultural ceremonies. These activities not only helped preserve their traditions but also strengthened community bonds. Additional efforts to support vulnerable populations in their community, such as the homeless, had a notable impact on the broader community. Elders played a crucial role in connecting these individuals to support services and went beyond merely linking them with aid by directly providing food to those who typically went without.

Many of the best experiences related by older adults with disabilities involved scenarios where their volunteering led to significant personal or communal achievements, such as organising events that successfully accommodated people with various disabilities, or advocacy roles that resulted in improved local policies or facilities for the disabled.

One story highlighted an innovative approach to advocacy that involved a personal demonstration with a shopping centre manager. In this demonstration, the manager was invited to navigate the challenges of using public restrooms while in a wheelchair. The demonstration showcased the practical difficulties in a light-hearted yet enlightening manner, which led to immediate enhancements in the facilities.

Conversely, the negative volunteering experiences often stemmed from organisational inefficiencies, physical or logistical barriers, or ageism, where volunteer managers were dismissive of participants' abilities due to unjustified assumptions about their age. Such underestimation led to inappropriate role assignments or unfulfilling responsibilities, leading to feelings of frustration and exclusion.

Countering another age-related stereotype – that older people are inflexible and resistant to change – several participants individually expressed frustration over their inability to implement changes that would make their service more efficient, facing organisational barriers that hindered these improvements. This often created feelings of being undervalued and unheard, leading some participants to eventually leave their volunteering roles.

One particularly distressing story about attempts to volunteer was related to inadequate accessibility at volunteering sites. This included not just physical barriers that made it difficult for her to use her wheelchair but also organisational oversights, such as not considering the need for accessible transportation and appropriate restroom facilities. Her experience showed that the lack of preparation and consideration for volunteers with physical disabilities not only hindered their ability to volunteer but also impacted their dignity and independence.

Volunteering outside of one's immediate community can also lead to challenging experiences, particularly when one encounters systemic biases or cultural misunderstandings.

This was especially disheartening for First Nations Elders, who sometimes faced situations where their cultural practices were misinterpreted or disrespected. A common issue occurred when elders were not properly acknowledged at events or activities, both in terms of the time they contributed and through basic respects such as offering food or water.



“Half the time we have sent people here, our elders out in the past, we’ve sent them to an event or an activity, and then they’ve come back and found out that they got their own way there somehow, they got their own way home. They haven’t been fed. They’ve sat there in a church or, in a mood ceremony or something. So then they come back feeling like shit, like they’ve given their entire day for the three to four hours.”

### Personal growth through volunteering

For many older adults, volunteering encouraged them to engage in lifelong learning, whether through acquiring new skills necessary for their roles or interacting with a diverse range of people. This continuous learning and interaction enhanced their cognitive and social skills, keeping them mentally and socially active.

Similarly, volunteering helped First Nations Elders individually grow by reinforcing their roles as cultural bearers and leaders. The act of teaching younger generations and leading community events served as both personal enrichment and a communal duty, enhancing their sense of self and purpose within the mob.

For older people with disabilities, volunteering offered a path to develop resilience and advocacy skills. Adapting to different roles and advocating for more inclusive practices allowed them to grow in confidence and assertiveness.

### Strategies for enhancing volunteer experiences.

While the negative experiences underscored the need for more thoughtful inclusion and accessibility, the positive experiences and deep personal satisfaction reported by volunteers reaffirmed the value of their continued engagement.

Strategies stemming from these shared stories showed how some of the existing gaps might be bridged. By ensuring that older volunteers were recognised for their contributions and matched with roles that suit their skills and physical capabilities, negative experiences could be minimised and their contributions maximised.

Promoting better integration of cultural practices in volunteer settings could also enhance experiences for all volunteers. Education sessions for non-Indigenous volunteers and coordinators on cultural respect and inclusion could mitigate poor experiences.

For older people with disabilities, organisations needed to focus on creating accessible environments that consider physical limitations from the start. Regular feedback loops between volunteers and organisations could help identify and rectify issues swiftly and respectfully.

## Building community

Older volunteers felt that their service often transcended the simple act of giving their time and effort; it fostered community bonds, nurtured friendships, and integrated them into the social fabric of their locales.

### Community integration and friendship formation

Participants emphasised a preference for volunteering opportunities situated within their own communities. This preference stemmed from the desire for accessibility and convenience, facilitating more regular engagement with less travel. Additionally, local opportunities enabled volunteers to directly witness the impact of their efforts. Furthermore, older volunteers noted the social benefits of local volunteering, citing it as instrumental in forming new friendships and enhancing their sense of community belonging.

In contrast, for First Nation Elders, volunteering within their community carries additional significance. It serves not only to support local initiatives but also as a means to strengthen cultural ties. This community-centric approach is less about forming new friendships and more about reinforcing existing relationships and familial ties to uphold the socio-cultural structure of their community.

Similarly, older volunteers with disabilities had expressed a preference for opportunities in familiar environments. This preference had been particularly important given the potential accessibility challenges they faced. Volunteering in familiar surroundings reduced anxiety and increased comfort levels, making the volunteer work more enjoyable and sustainable.

Furthermore, for older adults with disabilities, volunteering often helped them feel more integrated into the community by connecting them with others who shared similar challenges and engaging in activities promoting mutual support and understanding. These activities provided social connections and built a network of support that was important to their well-being.

“Volunteering in familiar places removes a lot of barriers for us. It’s about feeling comfortable and empowered to contribute.”

### Stories of connections and friendships formed through volunteering.

One way to illustrate the differences and similarities experienced in volunteering was through sharing stories of connection.

One volunteer involved in a mentoring program for troubled youth described how they helped a young person navigate through difficult times to achieve academic and personal success. This mentoring relationship grew into a strong bond that enriched both their lives, with the youth crediting the volunteer with changing his trajectory from potential delinquency to university graduation.

Another story emphasises the ability to cultivate a sense of belonging and appreciation. One volunteer at a community centre designed for individuals with disabilities shared how volunteering there allowed her to meet another volunteer with similar physical limitations and a shared zest for life. Their joint activities at the centre made their daily challenges more manageable, and they forged a genuine friendship.

Going beyond communal needs to one of shared cultural knowledge and practices also created a deeply personal and meaningful contribution for the First Nation Elders. One memorable story involved an elder who organised a local Aboriginal festival, which brought the community together and revived traditional practices that younger generations had not experienced.

“These kids have to make good choices and stay away from the bad choices which just inspires me every time I go and see them.”

## Making it better

The changes suggested for volunteer programs for older adults involved respecting and integrating their life experiences, physical and cultural needs, and potential contributions. By making these programs more accessible, flexible, and culturally relevant and by offering proper support, the appeal of volunteering for older adults could be significantly enhanced.

### **Desired changes in volunteer programs for adults 65+**

Focus group participants emphasised the need for more tailored opportunities that leveraged the older demographic's skills, experiences, and capacities. Three specific requests repeated among participants were:

1. A need for flexible scheduling to accommodate physical limitations and health needs, such as offering split shifts or allowing volunteers to decide on the day of their availability, rather than assigning rostered days.
2. An increase in the range of roles that utilised the knowledge and professional backgrounds of older adults, and
3. Increased support and recognition of their contributions.

Older volunteers suggested that these changes would not only make volunteering more accessible and fulfilling for older adults but also enhance their engagement and impact within the community.

Furthermore, there was an expressed desire for organisations to design more volunteer programs that explicitly promote inclusivity and interaction among participants. Programs that encourage collaborative projects and group activities were felt to be particularly rewarding, enhancing the formation of friendships and strengthening community bonds.

One speaker's experience with a refugee family stood out as a particularly touching example of how volunteering could break cultural barriers and foster deep, personal connections.

**“ She cooks bread. Just so lovely. And she invites me in for tea. And we sit down, and she has a beautiful way of doing things. She has a little table in her lounge room, and a little burn stove, and she cooks coffee in a pot for me, and we sit there and make ginger coffee, talk about things.**

This was not an isolated event, as many speakers shared similar experiences, indicating that volunteering opened avenues for cultural exchange, mutual support, understanding, and relationship building that might not have formed otherwise.

Volunteers from the First Nations community expressed a desire for programs specifically designed to respect and incorporate their cultural practices. It was also felt that the First Nations community would benefit from structurally supporting Elder volunteers through better resources, accommodations, and transportation services, making volunteering more accessible and less physically taxing for them.

A related change advocated for in volunteer programs involved making them more accessible to older adults with disabilities. This included making volunteering sites and activities accessible, ensuring that they could participate fully and effectively.

It was also suggested that integrating adaptive tools and technologies to assist older people with disabilities while volunteering could significantly enhance their participation rates and the quality of their volunteer experience.

### **Encouraging older adults unsure about volunteering**

Participants from all groups collectively shared their experiences and highlighted the approaches that they personally found most inclusive and encouraging when first introduced to volunteering. They suggested that these methods could be effectively used to encourage other older individuals who may be hesitant about volunteering.

**“ I also found that using skills that I had during my working life I found it important to be able to continue to use those skills. And that's what helped me select what I wanted to do.**

Whereas many volunteer involving organisations promoted the roles they needed filled, focusing instead on the personal benefits such as improved health, expanded social networks, and enhanced mental activity may be more enticing to the older demographic. Highlighting these advantages could persuasively demonstrate the positive impact volunteering had on personal well-being, making it an attractive option for older people looking for ways to enrich their lives and stay active in the community.

Furthermore, emphasising the social benefits of volunteering, such as making new friends and enhancing community connections, could greatly appeal to those who may feel isolated.

Many participants discussed the advantages of volunteering within their communities, noting it enhanced social interactions and cultivated a sense of belonging and mutual support, bridging social and cultural divides. A sense of community connection and integration were vital for this demographic, as it spoke to their values and social needs. By engaging older individuals in activities that promoted community bonding, not only were they integrated into volunteering within a safe and familiar environment, but their sense of personal security and community belonging was also reinforced. In this context familiar local environments included not only community festivals, events, RSLs, libraries, and community centres but also local children, families, and community websites.

The dual benefits of volunteering and community belonging could be achieved by engaging existing local organisations, such as Neighbourhood Centres and Volunteer Resource Centres, to organise and facilitate local opportunities.

Building on this sense of connection, a buddy system also provided substantial support for those initially uncertain about volunteering. Pairing new volunteers with experienced ones helped guide them through the process and facilitated their integration into the volunteer community. This eased their initial concerns and showcased the inclusive and supportive environment of the volunteer programs.

Sharing success stories of other older adults who had found joy and personal growth in volunteering could motivate those who were hesitant. This was particularly important for individuals with disabilities, as seeing their peers succeed could alleviate concerns about the practicalities of volunteering with a disability.

Similarly, encouraging individual First Nations Elders could be effectively achieved through success stories of existing older volunteers. One First Nations Elder discussed how he became involved with volunteering through influence from community leaders and soon recognised the personal satisfaction it brought him. Furthermore, offering positions that allowed them to act as mentors to younger generations could also be particularly enticing, as they often valued opportunities to impart wisdom and guide the youth.

Lastly, it was felt that introducing trial periods or opportunities for gradual involvement might also help ease older people into volunteering, allowing them to start with small, manageable tasks as they built confidence.

**“ The biggest reason volunteers volunteer is word of mouth. Come along with me, I love going here. Just come and give it a go.**



## The volunteer managers' experience

The insights from volunteer manager participants in the focus groups gave unique insight into the complexities involved in managing older volunteers. The diversity of participant backgrounds and perspectives revealed several issues around evolving needs and organisational directions.

The spontaneous conversations that flowed across tables as participants exchanged ideas, expertise, and experiences uncovered strategies and challenges that captured the essence of effective volunteer management tailored to older individuals, emphasising adaptability, inclusiveness, and meaningful engagement in all interactions.

A total of 35 volunteer managers participated in the focus groups, and a semi-structured discussion guide was developed to steer the conversation. Key questions included:

- Finding and keeping volunteers
  - How do you attract older volunteers?
  - What methods work best for keeping older volunteers engaged?
- Making everyone feel welcome
  - What does diversity and inclusion mean for your organisation?
  - How do you accommodate older volunteers with physical or mental challenges?
- Overcoming challenges
  - What other challenges do you face with older volunteers?
  - Have you tried any new ideas to make volunteering easier or better for older people?
- Listening to volunteers
  - How do you get feedback from older volunteers, and what do you do with it?
  - What special contributions do older volunteers make to your organisation?
- Supporting older volunteers
  - How do you advocate for volunteering by older people outside your organisation?
  - Can you recommend any resources for organisations that work with older volunteers?

- Advice for the future
  - What advice do you have for organisations that want to support older volunteers?
  - What trends are you seeing in volunteering by older people, and how is your organisation getting ready for the future?

Overall, it was felt that managing older volunteers—whether exclusively or in mixed demographics—was stimulating and rewarding, but depended upon an understanding of human relations and community dynamics.

## Finding and keeping volunteers

Organisations greatly benefited from older volunteers' depth of knowledge and commitment by creating an environment that valued and supported them through thoughtful engagement strategies, recognition, and appropriate accommodations.

### Attracting older volunteers

Traditional methods like flyers and community newsletters were emphasised as particularly effective for this age group, who typically are not as engaged with digital platforms as younger groups. One speaker highlighted that “old-fashioned flyers” in letterboxes resonated more with older volunteers than online advertisements. It was suggested that older volunteers were more likely to be influenced by familiar, local and tangible forms of communication.

Furthermore, the importance of word-of-mouth in recruiting older volunteers was noted as anomalous. Experience showed that this demographic tended to prefer and trust recommendations from peers and community members, making personal referrals a powerful tool for attracting new volunteers.

Lastly, engaging with community groups, clubs, and local media (such as community newspapers, radio and noticeboards) to reach potential volunteers was strongly endorsed. This strategy leveraged existing spaces where potential volunteers were already active.

“Just making sure that they're appreciated, that they know that they're appreciated. Just saying the words to them is sometimes worth more than anything else. Thanks for your time today, we really appreciate it.”

### Retaining and engaging older volunteers

Volunteer managers focused as much on retention as recruitment, ensuring that once volunteers were engaged, they were kept motivated and satisfied with their roles within the organisation.

Feeling valued was a significant motivator for continued engagement in this demographic. Regularly acknowledging the contributions of older volunteers, celebrating milestones, and providing personal recognition were highlighted as important for retention.

Furthermore, organising gatherings and events where volunteers could socialise helped build a sense of community, belonging, and teamwork. This kept older volunteers engaged and enriched their social interactions, providing them with a sense of purpose and connection. One speaker even included long-standing volunteers who had since ‘retired’ from their service with their organisation in these gatherings. This was noted as a valuable way to continue their volunteer alumni's social connection and inclusion.

Maintaining open lines of communication and actively seeking feedback from older volunteers was also advanced as a way for organisations to adjust practices to better meet their needs. Regular check-ins and feedback sessions ensured that volunteers felt heard and valued, which was critical for their continued engagement and support.

### **Making everyone feel welcome.**

Volunteer managers continued to emphasise the importance of creating an inclusive and accommodating environment for older volunteers. They explored the broad concepts of diversity and inclusion within their organisations and discussed specific practices that supported volunteers with physical or mental challenges. The conversations stressed the essential role of implementing strategies that ensured all volunteers, regardless of age or ability, felt valued and could contribute effectively.

**“ Respect really, showing that we value our volunteers and them knowing that they don't want to leave because the way they're valued and feeling part of a family.**



### **Diversity and inclusion**

Having a volunteer base that reflected the diverse community they served was important to most volunteer manager respondents. Several participants discussed the importance of cultural sensitivity, particularly in multilingual and multicultural environments. Inclusion was facilitated by ensuring that language barriers were addressed, with one organisation achieving this through involving family members in the volunteer process. Others had provided direct language support, which made volunteering accessible to a broader demographic.

**“ It's also understanding that diversity brings amazing new ideas to a workplace. People from different backgrounds have a different view on life and they often help us understand how we can do things better and understanding that workplaces need to change their perspectives.**

Training programs on cultural sensitivity and inclusivity also helped older volunteers understand and respect the diversity they would encounter among those they assisted. One speaker mentioned that cultural and generational gaps had in the past led to misunderstandings or inappropriate behaviour. For some managers, volunteering was the place where older volunteers could have their generational prejudices challenged and positively reset.

Another speaker explained how they intentionally subverted norms to include volunteers as members of their organisation. By giving these volunteers voting rights on organisational matters, diverse inputs into decision-making processes were invited. This approach valued the contributions and opinions of all volunteers, regardless of their position or tenure.

### **Accommodating physical or mental challenges**

Accommodating older volunteers with physical or cognitive challenges required thoughtful adjustments and tailored support systems to ensure their effective participation.

Designing volunteer roles that could be adapted to suit volunteers' physical limitations or health conditions required observation and patience. It was important to look for areas that volunteers struggled with and listen to their needs. For example, providing roles that could be performed while seated or that did not require heavy lifting could help accommodate those with physical challenges. Likewise, offering flexible volunteering could help volunteers maintain their involvement without compromising their health.

Some organisations employed assistive technologies and tools to help volunteers with physical or cognitive challenges. This included software that enhanced communication for those with hearing impairments or physical modifications to the workspace to make it more accessible. These tools were designed to be user-friendly and accommodate the privacy preferences of older adults.

Part of the awareness and acknowledgment included ensuring that communication was accessible to everyone, which may have involved providing materials in multiple formats (large print, audio, braille) and using clear, simple language in verbal and written communications.

Just as important as addressing the physical challenges was recognising and supporting volunteers' mental health. This could be achieved through training sessions on mental health awareness, providing access to support services, and designing volunteer roles that facilitated mental well-being. One participant mentioned providing quieter rooms or additional help as needed to accommodate volunteers with mental health conditions like cognitive decline, which ensured they could contribute without undue stress or confusion.



## Overcoming challenges

The challenges of integrating older volunteers into modern volunteering roles were met with thoughtful strategies that respected their limitations and valued their contributions. Volunteer managers identified several innovative solutions to make volunteering more accessible and enjoyable for the older demographic.

### *Adaptive thinking and innovative approaches*

One notable practice that enhanced the volunteering role for a broader range of older adults was offering financial incentives or reimbursements for expenses, such as transportation and meals. This approach helped alleviate any financial burdens that might deter older adults from volunteering, especially those on fixed incomes or who were cost-sensitive.

Likewise, being able to craft personalised engagement plans that considered the individual interests, skills, and physical capabilities of older volunteers could boost their motivation and satisfaction. This involved matching volunteers with roles that genuinely interested them.

As another speaker noted, older volunteers may also have exhibited resistance to new methods or changes within the organisation. This could include reluctance to adopt new technologies or new ways of doing things, which could slow down adaptation and integration within the team.

Recognising the technological challenges, some organisations reverted to face-to-face (as opposed to universally introduced online) training. This approach helped build stronger relationships and could be more effective than digital methods for those who preferred personal interaction.

Another strategy employed to address some of the technology challenges included the use of friendly technology, like a simple communication app, which helped keep older volunteers informed and engaged without overwhelming them with complex digital platforms.

Just as important as adjusting the physical environment was the ability to offer flexible scheduling. In many organisations, older volunteers could choose shifts that suited their energy levels, and their personal schedules could help maintain their involvement without causing burnout or exhaustion.

Finally, implementing effective systems for feedback allowed volunteers to express their thoughts and suggestions on challenges and needs.

“Give them a bit of role sharing. If they want to do a day here and a day somewhere else or swap with another volunteer. I know there's some logistical issues around insurances and that, but we can make it work and give people some flexibility



## Listening to volunteers

As mentioned, effective feedback systems were considered invaluable for making volunteers feel heard and for continuous improvement. Volunteer managers reported using several formal and informal methods to collect this feedback.

### *Assessing the impact of volunteer contributions*

One key was to make these surveys accessible through a variety of methods, such as suggestion boxes, regular meetings, and tailored surveys to enable efficient, insightful feedback collection.

“So if I've got some volunteers that are saying, they're really struggling with the computer and they'd really like some more computer training, then that will become part of the program. I use their feedback so that they can see that it's valuable feedback. And that way they feel as if they're being heard and what they're doing.

Some organisations tracked specific performance metrics related to volunteer activities, such as the number of hours contributed, tasks completed, or the impact of volunteer-led projects on the community. This quantitative data provided a clear picture of how volunteers were contributing to the organisation.

Holding regular review sessions or meetings with volunteers allowed for ongoing assessment and discussion of their contributions. This could be an informal check-in or a more structured review, providing a platform for volunteers to share their experiences and for coordinators to offer feedback.

In cases where volunteers may have had cognitive or physical difficulties that made communication challenging, feedback was sometimes gathered indirectly through family members or during group meetings where volunteers felt more at ease to express their thoughts.

Information gathered from assessing volunteer contributions was primarily used to improve volunteer programs. Feedback and performance data insights guided decisions on training needs, role adjustments, and support structures to enhance volunteer engagement and effectiveness.

Understanding the impacts and areas for improvement helped shape future initiatives and aligned volunteer efforts more closely with the organisation's overall goals.

### *Unique contributions*

Older volunteers brought a myriad of benefits to the organisations they worked with, contributing in ways that were often unique to their demographic.

- **Differing perspectives:** The perspectives that older volunteers brought could enhance problem-solving and creativity within the organisation. Their insights from different life experiences could contribute to discussions and innovative solutions.
- **Mentoring:** With their extensive experience, older volunteers were excellent mentors to younger volunteers and staff. They could provide guidance and training, passing on skills that were not easily acquired otherwise.
- **Reliability and commitment:** As highlighted by several speakers, older volunteers tended to be very reliable and committed. They often showed a higher level of dedication to their roles, which could set a standard for other volunteers.

- **Bridging generational gaps:** Older volunteers helped bridge the generational gap within organisations. They brought a traditional perspective that could meld well with the fresh ideas from younger volunteers, creating a balanced and inclusive environment.
- **Cultural enrichment:** Older volunteers often carried with them a rich sense of history and culture which could enrich the programs and services offered by the organisation. They helped maintain cultural continuity and ensured that traditional skills and knowledge were preserved and passed on.

## Supporting older volunteers

In the discussions regarding support for older volunteers, key themes emerged around advocacy for their participation beyond the organisational boundaries and the need for resources that could bolster their volunteering efforts.

### Advocacy for older volunteers

Several organisations actively shared opportunities and stories of older volunteers within community networks and local media. By showcasing their skills and commitment in various forums, organisations helped promote a positive and capable image of older volunteers. As one speaker pointed out, this not only highlighted the volunteers' contributions but also had the potential to encourage other organisations to engage this demographic.

“ But one thing I've been doing is promoting a lot of about volunteering on the radio. So whenever I go on there, I'm always making a real point that there is something. Volunteering roles of all types, that there's something available for all interests, skills, ability, availability.



Many organisations also leveraged social media to share success stories and opportunities related to older volunteers. And whereas social media campaigns might not reach older volunteers directly, it was felt they could be particularly effective in reaching family members of older adults who could encourage them to volunteer.

Some volunteer managers also strategically shared resources and volunteers with other community organisations to maximise the impact and utilisation of older volunteers. This was especially valuable for older volunteers who were able to transition to more physically and cognitively appropriate roles as their faculties declined.

“ I love seeing other people and other organisations succeed. So yeah, I think we do it that way. We're very socially conscious to keep the conversation going.

### Resources for organisations

A number of resources were recommended for development or adoption to improve the volunteer sector's inclusion and engagement with older people.

**Training and development programs:** Resources like online and paper-based training modules tailored for older volunteers were recommended across all sectors. Good practices recommended in this regard included highly visual, plain English resources delivered in shorter sessions. Volunteer manager training and development incorporating many of the focus group lessons learned were also felt to be important.

**Guidelines and best practices manuals:** In addition to supporting direct training for volunteer managers, publications that outline best practices for managing older volunteers were also seen as invaluable. These could include tips on inclusive practices, flexible scheduling, and accommodating specific needs related to aging.

**Volunteer management software:** Software and apps like “Assemble” and “Better Impact” that managed volunteer information, schedules, and feedback were also seen as useful. Acknowledging the technological limits of many older volunteers, these resources nevertheless helped organisations keep track of their volunteers' preferences, skills, and availability, freeing up time for more direct engagement.

**Community partnerships:** Engaging with local community centres, councils, and other volunteer organisations provided additional resources and support networks for older volunteers. These partnerships were felt to have the potential to enhance resource sharing, training, and advocacy efforts.

**Health and wellness programs:** It was felt that providing resources that focused on the physical and mental well-being of older volunteers was important. Programs that offered health checks, fitness classes, and mental health support catered specifically to older adults' needs were recommended.

### Advice for the future

Volunteer managers were cautiously optimistic about the future of engaging older Queenslanders in volunteering, recognising the valuable contributions that they made. They acknowledged the shifting expectations and dynamics among older people and the need for more flexible, tailored volunteering roles that catered to a variety of capabilities, availability, and interests.



With a focus on enhancing accessibility, providing continuous education, and fostering intergenerational connections, managers were preparing to integrate more inclusive, adaptive strategies that not only addressed today's challenges but also anticipated the evolving needs of a rapidly growing demographic source of volunteers.

Insights from older volunteers and the managers who support them are a rich resource for organisations looking to maintain or grow their volunteer services.

## Conclusion

This study on the volunteering experiences of older people across Queensland has provided valuable insights into the motivations, challenges, and impacts of volunteerism among diverse groups, including First Nation Elders, older volunteers with disabilities, and volunteer managers. The qualitative data gathered from the focus groups reveals a rich tapestry of experiences that underscore the importance of tailored, inclusive volunteer programs that leverage the unique skills and experiences of older adults.

The findings highlight the significant benefits of volunteering for older adults, such as enhanced health, happiness, and community connection. These benefits are particularly pronounced when volunteer roles are adapted to accommodate physical capabilities and cultural sensitivities, as seen in the experiences of older volunteers with disabilities and First Nation Elders.

Nonetheless, the study identifies persistent societal stereotypes and logistical barriers that can hinder older adults' participation in volunteering. Organisations must, therefore, actively challenge these stereotypes and improve the accessibility and inclusivity of their programs if they want to realise the full potential of their older volunteers. This can be achieved through better communication, cultural respect, and providing roles that truly match the capabilities and interests of older volunteers.

In conclusion, building a culture that respects and utilises the rich experiences of older volunteers not only enhances their well-being but also enriches the communities they serve. Future efforts should focus on expanding the accessibility and inclusivity of volunteer programs to ensure that the valuable contributions of older Queenslanders are fully realised. As society continues to evolve, so too should our approach to engaging and supporting older volunteers, ensuring that volunteerism remains a fulfilling and impactful part of their lives.



# SECTION 4: THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING FOR INDIVIDUALS 65+

## Key findings

Cost-benefit analysis is the Australian government preferred approach to valuing the social and economic impacts of an activity or intervention. A discussion of the cost-benefit methodology and its application in this Section can be found in Appendix A of the State of Volunteering in Queensland Report (2024).

The value of volunteering to Queensland across the entire community is the sum of the social and economic benefits enabled. This analysis values the benefits delivered by older volunteers at **\$15.8 billion**.

This amount is significantly greater than previous estimates based only on price or economic impact, yet it is likely to be an underestimate given the limitations of the available data and forensic techniques.

Table 10: Costs and benefits of individuals aged 65 and over volunteering in Queensland (2023)

Costs (\$ million)			
Direct costs		Sub-totals	Totals
Volunteer expenses	\$398.4		
Volunteer involving organisation expenses	\$1,012.3	\$1,410.8	
<b>Opportunity costs</b>			
Volunteers' time	\$354.6		
Volunteering investments	\$59.4	\$414.0	<b>\$ 1,824.7</b>
Benefits (\$ million)			
<b>Commercial benefits</b>			
Producers' surplus	\$246.3		
Productivity premium	\$351.7	\$598.0	
<b>Civic benefits</b>			
Employment	\$789.7		
Taxes	\$312.4		
Volunteers' labour	\$4,609.7	\$5,711.8	
<b>Individual benefits</b>			
Volunteers' dividend		\$9,493.7	<b>\$15,803.5</b>
Social return on investment			\$13,978.8
<b>Benefit: cost ratio</b>	<b>8.7:1</b>		

By contrasting the net value of volunteering by older people in Queensland with the cost of inputs, it can be seen that for every dollar invested, **\$8.70** is returned (the benefit-to-cost ratio)<sup>1</sup>.

The net (or social) return on investment – the difference between benefits and costs – is **\$14.0 billion**.

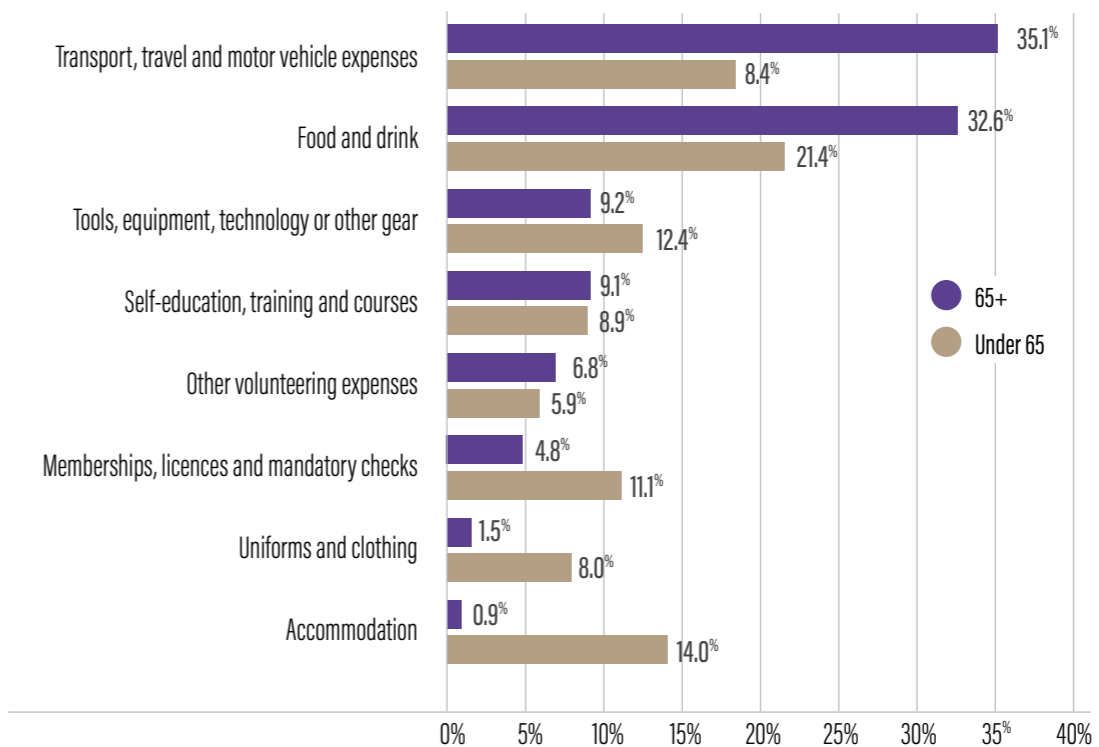
## Direct costs

### Volunteer expenses

Volunteers aged 65 and over in Queensland reported spending an average of \$72.30 per month, or \$3.78 per hour they volunteered. In 2023, this was a gross amount of \$870 per volunteer, compared to a gross amount of \$4,440 per volunteer aged under 65.

Volunteers aged 65 and over in Queensland also reported that, on average, they were reimbursed for 5.2% of their expenses, compared to 20.6% of expenses reported as being reimbursed for volunteers aged under 65.

Figure 15: Breakdown of volunteer expenses each month by category in Queensland



The total direct costs to volunteers in Queensland over the 12 months are calculated by annualising the average cost to volunteers each month (net of reimbursements) and multiplying that amount by the number of volunteers.

This means that for the 12-month period analysed, the net out-of-pocket costs (direct expenses) for volunteers aged 65 and over in Queensland totalled **\$398.4 million**.

<sup>1</sup> It is noted that the benefit-to-cost ratio of adults aged 65 and over volunteering of 8.7 is much higher than the whole of Queensland's benefit-to-cost ratio of 4.7:1. This is principally because of the large gap between the opportunity and replacement costs of volunteers 65+ labour (see the note in the sub-section below on replacement cost). Other minor effects include much lower direct costs to volunteers and lower (but less so proportionally) productivity premium

## Volunteer involving organisation expenses

Organisations in Queensland that involve volunteers reported spending an average of \$94.95 per volunteer per month, or \$5.09 per formal volunteer hour.

The total direct costs incurred by volunteer involving organisations in Queensland over a 12-month period (proportional to individuals 65+) are calculated by annualising the average monthly cost per volunteer to these organisations and multiplying it by the number of formal volunteers in the State aged 65 and over.

In 2023, the direct cost (proportional to individuals 65+) to volunteer involving organisations in Queensland was \$1.0 billion.

## Opportunity costs

### Volunteers' time

To accurately calculate the opportunity cost to volunteers of their labour, this analysis takes into account the variability in wages among different groups. The opportunity cost is calculated using the average weekly earnings for both part-time and full-time workers within each age cohort.

This average is then reduced by a 35% effective rate of tax, which accounts for all forms of direct and indirect taxation. The resulting hourly rate is further adjusted to reflect the workforce composition of Queensland, comprising full-time, part-time, and non-participating individuals, segmented by age group.

A straightforward leisure/work trade-off model is then applied, valuing the opportunity cost of a volunteer hour at the income that could be earned by working an additional hour. This approach assumes a flexible labour market model and assumes the availability of additional work opportunities.

The opportunity cost of leisure varies by age: it is relatively low for the very young and the very old, who are less likely to be participating in the workforce or may be underemployed. The opportunity cost is higher for age groups with greater workforce participation and labour market value.

According to this model, the hours contributed to the Queensland community by individuals aged 65 and over through volunteering equate to an opportunity cost of **\$354.6 million**. This figure is a monetary estimate of what older adults who both work and volunteer gave up in potential earnings by dedicating their time to unpaid work.

Table 11: Opportunity costs of hours contributed to the community by volunteers

Age	Opportunity cost of volunteers' time \$/hr	Average hours volunteered per month	Total volunteers	Total opportunity cost (\$millions)
15-24	\$9.27	22.6	474,000	\$1,190.7
25-34	\$21.92	24.3	530,500	\$3,391.8
35-44	\$27.94	21.3	545,600	\$3,890.9
45-54	\$28.29	13.3	449,100	\$2,027.1
55-64	\$20.46	27.8	294,200	\$2,008.5
<b>65+</b>	<b>\$3.19</b>	<b>19.1</b>	<b>484,200</b>	<b>\$354.6</b>
				<b>\$12,863.7</b>

<sup>2</sup>In this calculation, informal volunteers are not included because, according to the definition used in this report, volunteer managers do not oversee or support informal volunteering activities

## Volunteering investments

A similar assumption is made about the opportunity cost of purchases made by both individuals 65+ who volunteer and the organisations that utilise them.

If these purchases were withheld (in a hypothetical scenario where the community places no value on volunteering), then their financial resources could be redirected toward long-term investment opportunities, considered here to be the next best alternative use.

The metric used for evaluating what that profit might be (the long-term investment opportunity cost) is the 10-year Australian government bond rate, which stood at 4.2% in October 2023, the time this calculation was made. Using this rate as a benchmark, an estimate of the financial implications of the resources allocated to volunteering activities for individuals aged 65+ can be made.

Therefore, in 2023 the gross opportunity cost – that is, the potential value of gains missed out on by individuals and organisations due to their expenditure on older adults volunteering – is 4.2% of the direct costs enabling volunteering (\$1.4 billion), or **\$59.4 million**.

## Commercial benefits

### Producers' surplus

The term "producers' surplus" refers to the economic benefits that producers gain from selling their goods or services in the market. This benefit is calculated as the difference between the price a producer receives and the minimum price they would be willing to accept for it. This surplus can be alternatively described, albeit not perfectly, as net profit.

In Queensland, businesses receive a net commercial benefit linked to the sales of goods or services that are either intermediate or final products consumed in the course of older individuals' volunteering.

Input-output modelling is a method used in economics to understand how different sectors within an economy interact with each other. It illustrates the flow of goods and services between sectors, helping to predict the output effect of a change in demand for a particular industry.

Employing input-output modelling methodology, it is found that the \$1.4 billion spent on older people's volunteering increases the Queensland economy's overall output by \$2.4 billion. This calculation includes the production of intermediate goods and accounts for imports worth \$0.6 billion.

Considering that material inputs and existing infrastructure are already accounted for, when the cost of labour and taxes is subtracted from this gross value added, a theoretical producers' surplus of **\$246.3 million** is revealed.

This surplus is a fair return on investment for providers of capital and is assumed to offset the opportunity cost of using land or buildings for other purposes. It is important to clarify that this surplus to producers is distributed among all firms in Queensland contributing intermediate or final goods and/or services consumed by the volunteering activities of individuals 65 and over, not just those directly involved in older adults volunteering.

### Productivity premium

Applying a productivity multiplier of 14.7% to the cost to employers of labour per age cohort (replacement cost) as per the formula in Appendix A of the State of Volunteering in Queensland Report (2024) enables the quantification of a 'productivity premium' enjoyed by employers as a result of their employees' volunteering.

The extent to which individuals aged 65 and over volunteering in Queensland improved the productivity of employees is estimated to be **\$351.7 million**.

Note that this benefit only applies to the hours worked by individuals aged 65 and over in Queensland who also volunteer.

This benefit is also separate from the (soon to be discussed) well-being benefit directly enjoyed by older volunteers, even if a fraction of the productivity premium is returned to employees in the form of increased wages.

## Civic benefits

### Employment

The input-output model shows that individuals aged 65 and over who were motivated to volunteer in Queensland generated 12,100 jobs across all sectors of the economy. Of these, 8,200 were full-time positions.

It is important to note that these are not jobs solely within the volunteering sector; rather, these jobs are created economy-wide. For instance, volunteering contributes to the demand for professional services such as training, administration, and logistics. This creates new employment opportunities in those industries.

The model quantifies the wage benefits generated by these jobs as being worth \$789.7 million. This figure directly benefits households, augmenting their disposable income and, consequently, their purchasing power.

This also means an equivalent welfare cost is avoided by the government. As more people become employed thanks to the ripple effects of volunteering expenditure, fewer people rely on unemployment benefits or other forms of social assistance. This results in an equivalent saving for the government, which can reallocate these saved funds to other critical sectors like healthcare, or they can choose to reinvest in volunteering.

### Taxes

The input-output model also reveals that the volunteering-related expenditure of Queensland's older people (\$1.4 billion) generates **\$312.4 million** in tax revenue for the government.

It is important to note that the tax revenue generated is not necessarily proportional to the investment made by each tier of government in the volunteering sector. Different levels of government – federal, State, and local – may contribute different amounts to support volunteering but may benefit differently from the generated tax revenue.

Yet despite generating significant tax revenue, it is unlikely that the government will reinvest an equivalent amount back into the volunteering sector. In other words, the financial contributions that the volunteering sector makes to public coffers may not be fully reciprocated through government funding or support for volunteering activities.

### Volunteers' labour

It was noted in Section 1 of this report that individuals 65+ who volunteer in Queensland contributed 9.3 million hours of their time to various individuals, causes and organisations. The replacement cost of that labour is the expense that beneficiaries would incur if they had to hire paid professionals to do the same work.

Because people who volunteer bring a diverse set of skills and professional experience to their roles, adding



specialised value to the services they provide, volunteer labour cannot be simply substituted for minimum wage workers. It is more accurate to use median wage data tailored to each age cohort of volunteers, accounting for the varying levels of expertise and skill sets they offer.

In addition to the base wage, there are several other costs associated with employment that need to be taken into account. These include the administrative and capital overheads that would be incurred for each working hour, as well as the minimum requirements of the Australian government's superannuation guarantee. To allow for these, an additional 15% has been added to the median wage data for each age group.

This approach assumes that the value of the activities provided by each volunteer is equivalent to the value of their direct employment, accounting for their age. This is not a perfect accounting of the value of the services provided by volunteers but is more reliable than approaches that price volunteer labour at the minimum wage. Improving the replacement cost method is encouraged as a direction for future research.<sup>3</sup>

On these terms, the cost to the Queensland community (and avoided by government) of replacing the volunteer labour of people aged 65+ would be **\$4.6 billion**.

Table 12: Replacement cost of hours donated to the community by Queensland volunteers

Age	Replacement cost of volunteers' time \$/hr	Average hours volunteered per month	Total volunteers	Total replacement cost per year (\$millions)
15-24	\$20.59	22.6	474,000	\$2,644.8
25-34	\$45.28	24.3	530,500	\$7,005.7
35-44	\$55.68	21.3	545,600	\$7,755.3
45-54	\$58.44	13.3	449,100	\$4,187.5
55-64	\$52.29	27.8	294,200	\$5,134.8
<b>65+</b>	<b>\$41.49</b>	<b>19.1</b>	<b>484,200</b>	<b>\$4,609.7</b>
				<b>\$31,337.8</b>

Note that the replacement cost of a volunteer's labour is much greater than the opportunity cost of a volunteer's time. This is because the replacement cost includes all the costs an employer would have to pay (including taxes, superannuation and administrative costs), whereas the opportunity cost is only a measure of what a volunteer would receive 'cash-in-hand' if they were paid.

Opportunity cost is also discounted by the number of people not in the labour force. Using this approach, if a person is not working, then there is no opportunity cost to their time when it comes to volunteering.

Therefore, the opportunity cost of time for people over 65 is quite low at an average of \$3.19 per person, as most people at this age are no longer working. However, of the people who are working at this age, their average replacement cost to employers is \$41.49 per hour.



<sup>3</sup> The potential intrinsic value that results from a volunteer's willingness to donate their time at below market rates is considered in the Volunteer dividend, below.

## Individual benefits

### Well-being

The benefits described to this point are the tangible benefits provided to the community, also known as the 'outputs' of volunteering. These outputs have been quantified to illustrate the new value they add to others.

Now, the focus shifts to explore another important dimension of volunteering: the intrinsic satisfaction or well-being benefits that volunteers themselves experience as a result of their participation. This aspect values the emotional and psychological rewards that volunteers gain.

In economic terms, when individuals engage with volunteering through an act or a purchase, it is assumed they derive some level of benefit or utility from that decision. The rational economic framework suggests that people act to maximise this utility and would not intentionally make decisions that diminish it. Consequently, each act of volunteering and its related consumption comes with an implied benefit to the individual beyond the value added to employers and the community.

At a minimum, this benefit is equal to the costs individuals bear in the pursuit of their volunteering. Therefore, using the revealed preference method, it can be said that in Queensland, older volunteers enjoyed at least \$774.7 million in individual benefits from their volunteering. This is the sum of the money they spent (\$420.1 million) and time they contributed (\$354.6 million).

But how much more would individuals be willing to pay to experience the full range of benefits that come from volunteering? And what about those who are not volunteers – do they derive benefits from the volunteering of others, even if they are not directly participating?

In the sample of over 6,800 Australian residents, it was found that being a volunteer was associated with a 4.4-point increase in life satisfaction, a proxy for well-being. Whereas only 0.6% of the overall variance in well-being could be explained by volunteering, there was a less than one in 1,000 chance that the relationship observed was due to random error.

Surprisingly, the number of hours spent volunteering did not significantly impact one's sense of well-being. This indicates that the mere act of volunteering is enough to produce well-benefits, without a specific volume requirement.

According to the formula described in Appendix A of the State of Volunteering in Queensland Report (2024), the monetised value of a consumer's surplus associated with a 4.4-point increase in life satisfaction in Queensland is \$19,600 per annum.

When this value is extrapolated to the population of older volunteers in Queensland, it translates into a well-being benefit of **\$9.5 billion**.

### Important note

Expressions of consumer surplus essentially measure satisfaction and should not be confused with a willingness on the part of volunteers to pay more. In terms of value, increasing prices would result in a real loss for current volunteers. This is because the dividends enjoyed by volunteers would be converted into producers' surplus for no net gain to them as consumers, increasing the real and opportunity costs of entry and forcing some volunteers out.

As it is demonstrated in the State of Volunteering in Queensland Report (2024), a more efficient gain can be realised by converting non-volunteers into volunteers and incentivising those who are under-volunteering to volunteer more. Deliberately exploiting the currently high levels of consumer surplus – by either increasing prices or withdrawing subsidies – is likely to be counterproductive.

## Conclusion

The particular benefits that individuals and the community receive from the volunteers 65 and over in Queensland are not unique. Viewed in isolation, they may not even be that efficient. For example, older people might equally improve their quality of life by watching sport; they could also transfer their social obligations to government in the form of increased taxes.

Nonetheless, the data is compelling: an annual return of 870% on every dollar invested would set off a financial frenzy if it were tied to a commercial investment. This suggests that the scale and impact of volunteering have been historically undervalued and under-recognised in public discourse.

Notably, over half of Queensland residents aged 65 and over volunteer in some form, a figure significantly higher than official government estimates. Yet it is also evident that older people's volunteering in Queensland has room for further growth.

From an economic standpoint, this report challenges the traditional view that the value of volunteering is merely the minimum-wage replacement cost of its labour. Rather, volunteering has a much broader economic impact, affecting almost every activity in the State. Consequently, there is a strong case for better resource allocation and knowledge sharing within the volunteering sector to leverage its full potential.

Ultimately, the cost-benefit analysis reveals that the external benefits of volunteering far outweigh the social costs, making the activity economically efficient. Moreover, it indicates that increased investment in volunteering could produce exponential returns.

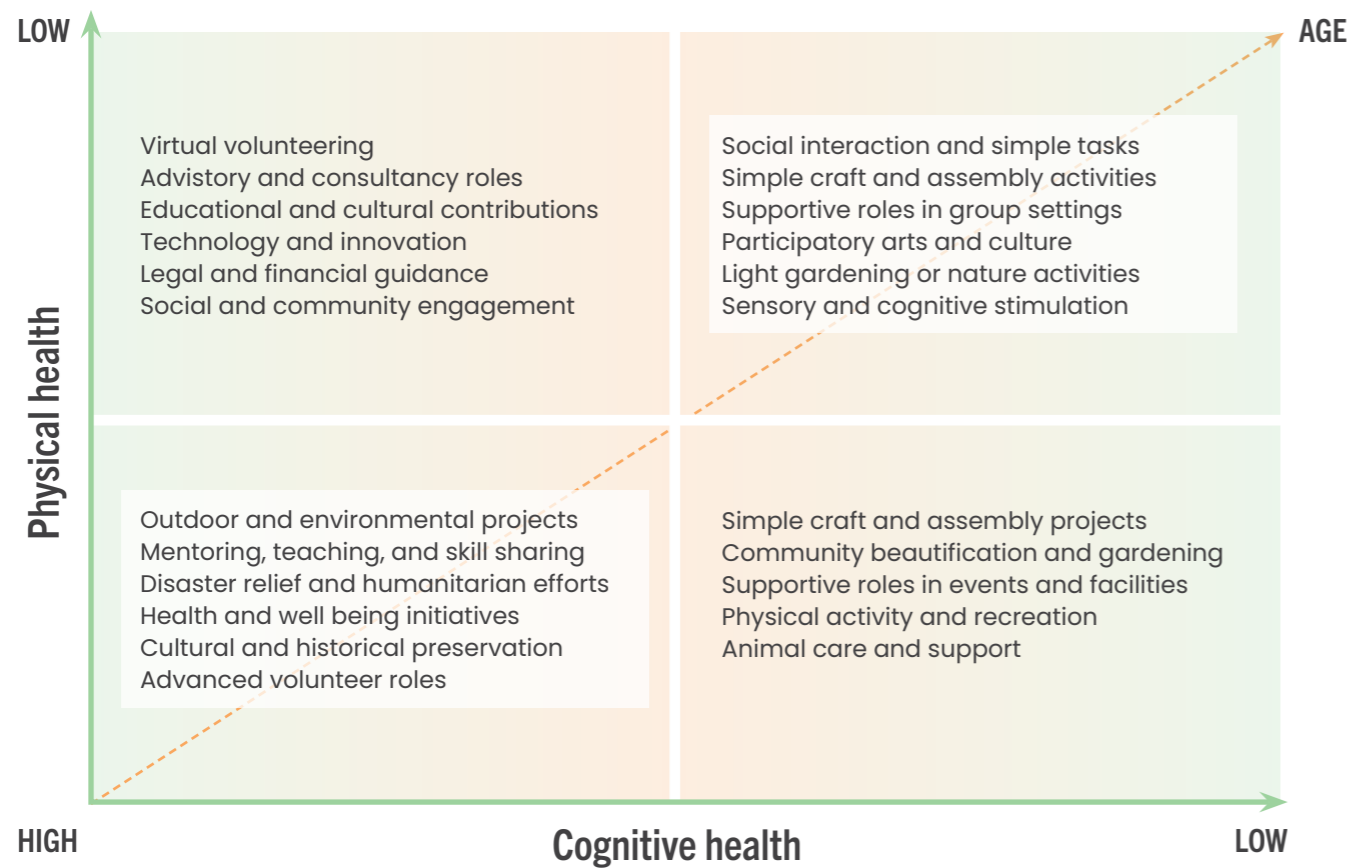
For while the study has limitations that warrant further research, it offers a foundational framework that decision-makers in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors can use for ongoing improvements in how volunteers aged 65 and over are promoted and managed.



# APPENDIX A: HEALTH CHALLENGES

Figure 1 is a quick reference guide that can be used by volunteer-involving organisations when considering activities to engage older volunteers. The examples given are neither exclusive nor exhaustive; rather, the guide is intended as a starting point or reference for volunteer managers considering the roles their non-homogenous cohort of older volunteers can potentially fulfil. Users can and should interchange activities with appropriate discretion in the context of their service delivery.

Figure 16: Volunteering opportunities for adults over 65 by physical and cognitive health



## High physical and cognitive health

Adults aged 65 and over with **high physical** and **high cognitive** health have a broad spectrum of volunteering opportunities available to them. Their robust health enables them to undertake tasks that are both mentally stimulating and physically demanding, allowing for a wide range of contributions to their communities. These include, but are not limited to:

- Outdoor and environmental projects
  - Participating in local or even international conservation projects, including tracking, monitoring, and protecting wildlife, as well as restoring natural habitats.
  - Leading or assisting in outdoor adventure programs for young people, which could include hiking, camping, or kayaking, requiring both physical stamina and the ability to educate and mentor youth.

- Mentoring, teaching, and skill sharing
  - Offering their expertise to mentor young professionals in their field, providing guidance, career advice, and support.
  - Leading community classes on topics of interest or expertise, such as computer skills, foreign languages, music, or art, which can enrich the cultural fabric of their community.
- Disaster relief and humanitarian efforts
  - Joining international aid organisations to provide support in crisis situations around the world, which may involve building infrastructure, teaching, or healthcare assistance.
  - Training with local emergency response teams to provide immediate support in the event of natural disasters, accidents, or community crises.
- Health and well-being initiatives
  - Leading workshops or seminars focused on health education, nutrition, and wellness, leveraging their knowledge to improve community health outcomes.
  - Designing and leading fitness or wellness programs tailored to other 65+ adults, promoting an active lifestyle, and leveraging their high physical health to serve as role models.
- Cultural and historical preservation
  - Working as a docent or guide in museums or historical sites, sharing knowledge with visitors, and contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage.
  - Participating in archaeological digs or historical preservation projects that require both physical activity and cognitive understanding of historical contexts.
- Strategic volunteer roles
  - Taking on leadership positions in nonprofit organisations, such as board membership or project leadership, where their experience and cognitive abilities can help guide strategic decisions and initiatives.
  - Contributing to research projects or think tanks focused on social, environmental, or technological advancements, where their analytical skills and knowledge can contribute to groundbreaking work.

For adults aged 65 and over possessing both high physical and cognitive capabilities, several important aspects should be considered when selecting volunteering opportunities. It is important that they have the autonomy to choose activities that resonate with their interests and values (Baltes et al., 2019). Providing flexibility in their commitments allows them to manage their time effectively, catering to personal schedules and other obligations (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020).

The activities should align with their existing skills while offering a diverse range of opportunities to keep them engaged and stimulated (Warburton et al., 2007). Recruitment methods for these roles should be both personal and informal, creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. Moreover, these opportunities should serve as a platform for learning new skills and fostering self-development, ensuring that the tasks are challenging, varied, and actively engage the volunteer (Tang, Morrow-Howell, & Hong, 2009).

This approach not only enhances the volunteering experience but also contributes significantly to the personal growth and satisfaction of adults 65+ with high physical and cognitive health.



## High physical and low cognitive health

For adults aged 65 and over with **high physical health** but **lower cognitive abilities**, volunteering opportunities should focus on tasks that are physically engaging yet straightforward and repetitive, minimising the need for complex problem-solving or intensive memory tasks (Tucker-Drob et al., 2022). These activities can offer a sense of accomplishment and purpose while accommodating their cognitive capabilities. Here are expanded suggestions:

- Simple craft and assembly projects
  - Engaging in simple craft projects that can be donated to hospitals, shelters, or overseas troops, such as knitting scarves, making simple jewellery, or assembling care packages. These tasks can provide a sense of purpose and accomplishment with clear, repetitive steps.
  - Participating in projects that require assembling educational materials for schools, hygiene kits for shelters, or meal packages for food banks. These tasks often involve repetitive actions that can be soothing and provide a tangible contribution to the community.
- Community beautification and gardening
  - Helping to maintain community gardens, which can include planting, weeding, and watering. This not only requires physical activity but also contributes to beautifying the community and providing fresh produce to local food banks or community members.
  - Participating in organised efforts to clean parks, beaches, or neighbourhood streets. These activities are not only physically engaging but also offer immediate satisfaction from seeing the direct impact of one's efforts on the environment.
- Supportive roles in events and facilities
  - Assisting in local community events, such as marathons, festivals, or charity walks, where they can help with setting up, handing out water, or directing participants. These tasks are physically active but straightforward and come with the benefit of being part of community celebrations.
  - Offering their time to help with simple maintenance tasks at community centres, schools, or places of worship, such as painting, gardening, or minor repairs. These activities can be physically demanding but do not require complex cognitive engagement.
- Physical activity and recreation
  - Assisting in organising and supporting individuals 65+ sports leagues, such as bowling, swimming, or golf. This can include helping to keep score, organising equipment, or providing general assistance during events.
  - Leading a walking group for individuals 65+, promoting physical health and offering an opportunity for social interaction without the need for complex planning or strategy.
- Animal care and support
  - Providing care and support in animal shelters, such as walking dogs, cleaning enclosures, or feeding animals. These tasks are physically engaging and provide the emotional reward of caring for animals in need.
  - Assisting in therapeutic riding programs for children or adults with disabilities. This can involve leading horses, preparing equipment, or supporting riders, combining physical activity with the rewarding experience of contributing to others' well-being.

When engaging volunteers aged 65+ with high physical but lower cognitive health, it is essential to adopt personal recruitment methods that make them feel directly invited and valued. Activities should be well-organised on their behalf, ensuring they can participate without the stress of planning or coordination (Tucker-Drob et al., 2022). Offering short-term assignments allows for a sense of accomplishment without a long-term commitment, and

providing flexible options for time commitments accommodates personal schedules and energy levels (Ahmad, 2018).

It is also important to present clear and accessible information at all times to avoid confusion and to ensure tasks focus on leveraging existing skill sets, steering clear of unfamiliar or abstract tasks that could cause frustration (Ahmad, 2018). Providing options for both social and individual roles cater to varying preferences for interaction, and there should be a strong awareness and provision for accommodations to ensure their physical participation is not hindered.

Finally, allocating resources to facilitate these accommodations guarantees a supportive and inclusive volunteering environment.

## Low physical and high cognitive health

Adults aged 65 and over with **low physical** but **high cognitive** health can offer invaluable contributions through volunteering opportunities that leverage their mental acuity, experience, and wisdom without requiring strenuous physical activity. These roles can be intellectually stimulating and fulfilling, allowing older adults to remain actively engaged with their communities. Here are expanded suggestions for such roles:

- Virtual volunteering
  - Using video conferencing tools to provide tutoring services to students in a variety of subjects or to offer career advice and mentorship to young professionals. This role leverages their expertise and experience while accommodating physical limitations.
  - Offering skills in administration or management to help nonprofits with tasks such as data entry, scheduling, correspondence, or grant writing, all of which can be done from home.
- Advisory and consultancy roles
  - Serving on the boards of charities, nonprofit organisations, or community groups, providing guidance, governance, and strategic planning based on years of professional experience.
  - Offering consultancy services to start-ups and small businesses in areas of expertise, such as marketing, finance, legal advice, or business strategy, helping them to grow and succeed.
- Educational and cultural contributions
  - Participating in speaking engagements at local schools, universities, or community centres on topics of expertise or interest, stimulating intellectual discussion and sharing knowledge.
  - Contributing articles, blogs, or research papers to publications, websites, or community newsletters. This can also include writing historical or cultural research projects that document local history or contribute to community knowledge.
- Technology and innovation
  - Providing technology support and education to individuals 65 and over helping them navigate digital devices, the internet, or software applications, all of which are increasingly important in today's society.
  - Participating in or advising on projects that focus on innovation, technology development, or community improvement initiatives, where strategic thinking and experience can drive progress.
- Legal and financial
  - Offering legal advice pro bono to those in need, such as low-income individuals, nonprofits, or small community organisations, leveraging years of legal expertise without the need for physical exertion.

- o Leading workshops or one-on-one sessions on financial planning, retirement, or budgeting, providing valuable knowledge to help others manage their finances effectively.
- Social and community engagement
  - o Organising and leading book clubs, discussion groups, or debate clubs, stimulating intellectual conversation and community engagement among participants.
  - o Participating in programs that connect older adults with younger generations, sharing wisdom, stories, and life lessons, fostering understanding and connections across ages.

For adults aged 65 and over who have low physical but high cognitive health, employing personal recruitment methods is key to making them feel individually valued and understood (Warburton et al., 2007). It is similarly beneficial to offer flexible, short-term engagements that accommodate varying availability and commitment preferences (Ahmad, 2018).

Pairing these adults 65 and over with two or three others of similar age to share roles can lighten the load and foster a sense of teamwork and community (Tang, Morrow-Howell, & Hong, 2009). Providing opportunities online can greatly enhance accessibility, allowing participation from the comfort of home without the need for physical exertion. These roles should be less physically demanding, focusing instead on intellectual engagement and problem-solving (Russell et al., 2020).

Additionally, creating opportunities for learning new skills and self-development is important, ensuring that the assignments remain challenging and varied to keep the mind active and engaged. Individuals 65 and over should be granted autonomy in choosing their level of involvement and the specific tasks they take on, allowing them to align their volunteering with personal interests and expertise (Warburton et al., 2007; Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020).

Awareness and provision of accommodations are essential to address any physical limitations, ensuring all volunteers can participate fully. Providing resources for accommodation means actively removing barriers to participation and creating an inclusive environment where every senior feels capable and valued (Shandra, 2017).

## Low physical and cognitive health

Adults aged 65 and over with **low physical and cognitive health** can still find meaningful and accessible volunteering opportunities that cater to their abilities while providing them with a sense of purpose and belonging. The key is to find activities that are simple, offer supported transport or are located on-site, do not require extensive physical exertion, and are straightforward enough to accommodate cognitive challenges. Here are suggestions tailored to their unique needs:

- Social interaction and simple tasks
  - o Welcoming visitors at community centres, hospitals, or events. This role can often be performed seated and offers a great way to interact socially with a wide range of people.
  - o Participating in programs that allow them to share their life stories or simply engage in conversation with others, including intergenerational storytelling programs that connect them with younger people.
- Simple craft and assembly activities
  - o Engaging in very simple craft projects that can be done sitting down, such as making greeting cards, decorating pots for community planting, or assembling simple jewellery. These projects can be adapted to suit their abilities and can provide a

sense of accomplishment.

- o Helping with packing or sorting items at food banks or charity organisations, where tasks can be adapted to their capabilities and performed in a seated position if necessary.
- Supportive roles in group settings
  - o Participating in activities at senior centres or residential care homes, such as helping to set tables, organise library books, or simply being a companion to others. These tasks are low-intensity and foster a sense of community.
  - o Helping nonprofit organisations with their mailings by stuffing envelopes, a task that is simple, can be done seated, and provides a valuable service to the organisation.
- Participatory arts and culture
  - o Joining community choirs or music groups designed for individuals 65+, which can be adapted to their abilities. Music can be a powerful tool for cognitive engagement and social interaction.
  - o Participating in art programs tailored to individuals 65+, focusing on simple artistic activities like painting, drawing, or clay modelling. These programs are often designed to be inclusive of all abilities and can provide therapeutic benefits.
- Light gardening or nature activities
  - o Engaging in light gardening activities, such as potting plants or simple weeding, which can be done seated and offer the therapeutic benefits of nature.
  - o Joining bird-watching groups or participating in nature observation activities that do not require extensive physical mobility but offer engagement with the natural world and social interaction.
- Sensory and cognitive stimulation
  - o Supported participation in the maintenance of sensory gardens, which are designed to stimulate the senses and are accessible to people with a wide range of physical and cognitive abilities.

For volunteers aged 65 and over facing both physical and cognitive health challenges, it is important to organise activities specifically tailored to their needs, ensuring a supportive and accessible environment (Shandra, 2017). Providing options for a personal carer to accompany them during their volunteer activities can offer additional support and reassurance.

Assignments should be simple and short-term, allowing for a sense of achievement without the stress of complex tasks or long-term commitments. These activities should ideally be free from stringent time constraints, offering flexibility to accommodate varying levels of energy and health on any given day (Shandra, 2017).

It is also useful to avoid tasks that are unfamiliar or abstract, which could potentially cause confusion or frustration. Instead, focusing on tasks that are straightforward and provide clear instructions can help in maintaining a sense of competence and contribution (Hogerbrugge, 2020).

Emphasising socially oriented activities can be particularly rewarding, offering opportunities for interaction and engagement with others, which is vital for fostering a sense of community and belonging. These considerations ensure that volunteering remains a positive and enriching experience for adults 65+, regardless of their physical and cognitive capabilities.

## APPENDIX B: ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

This reference guide consolidates all information on economic challenges as cited in the literature, providing a succinct resource for easy reference.

As the literature indicates, individuals 65+ (regardless of their health or cognitive status) often encounter economic barriers to their volunteering. These challenges arise from fixed incomes, limited savings, and potential costs associated with volunteering, such as transportation and material costs (Cho et al., 2018; Morrow-Howell et al., 2009; Peters-Davis et al., 2001; Russell et al., 2020; Tang, Morrow-Howell, & Hong, 2009). Additionally, some individuals 65+ might lack access to necessary resources like internet connectivity or suitable technology, which can limit their participation in certain volunteer activities (Witucki Brown et al., 2011)..

Identified in the literature are several strategies that can be implemented to address these barriers and encourage more adults aged 65 and over to volunteer.

### 1. Providing transport

Providing transport can significantly lower the barriers for adults over the age of 65 wanting to volunteer, especially those in areas with poor public transport options or who no longer drive. This could involve reimbursing public transport costs, arranging volunteer carpool systems, or offering a shuttle service to and from volunteer sites.

### 2. Financial incentives

While volunteering does not typically include payment for services rendered, financial incentives can help mitigate costs for adults aged 65 and over. This might include stipends to cover meals and incidental costs or even small honorariums for roles that require significant time commitment or expertise.

### 3. Supported participation

Conducting training sessions and organising volunteer activities within older adults' own communities or living environments makes participation more convenient and accessible. This also leverages adults aged 65 and over familiarity with their surroundings, potentially increasing their engagement and effectiveness.

### 4. Allocated resources

Ensuring that individuals over the age of 65 have access to the necessary resources to participate effectively in volunteering roles. Supplying required technology for online volunteering, providing uniforms or other necessary attire for specific roles, or giving access to educational materials for tutoring or mentoring are all ways to support volunteers 65+.

### 5. Personalise recruitment

Using personal recruitment methods helps tailor volunteer opportunities to individuals aged 65 and over, considering their economic situation, interests, and capabilities. Personalised outreach can identify and address the specific barriers each volunteer might face, including economic challenges.



### 6. Social facilitation

Organising social events for volunteers can help build a sense of community and belonging, which is particularly valuable for older adults. These events, whether simple gatherings or virtual meet-ups, provide social stimulation and recognition without adding financial strain.

### 7. Provide Recognition

Acknowledging the contributions of volunteers 65+ through formal recognition events, awards, or certificates can provide a sense of achievement and appreciation. Although not a direct economic benefit, recognition increases the intrinsic value of volunteering, making individuals 65+ feel that their contributions are worthwhile and appreciated.

By adopting these strategies, volunteer management can become more thoughtful, recognising and addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by individuals 65 and over. Making volunteering more accessible and rewarding enables organisations to tap into the wealth of experience and time that older adults have to offer, benefiting both the individuals involved and the broader community.



# APPENDIX C: CULTURAL CHALLENGES

This reference guide consolidates all information on cultural challenges as cited in the literature, providing a succinct resource for easy reference.

Many adults aged 65 and over from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds encounter distinct challenges when volunteering. These challenges go beyond language barriers and cultural differences to often include a lack of familiarity with local volunteering practices or a sense of exclusion (Grey et al., 2010; Handy & Greenspan, 2009). The literature suggests several strategies that can be employed to address these issues and make volunteering more inclusive and rewarding for them.

## 1. Cultural training

Offering cultural training to both volunteers and organisational staff can help bridge cultural gaps, fostering mutual understanding and respect. This training should cover cultural sensitivities, communication styles, and the cultural background of the volunteers, enhancing cohesion and effectiveness within the volunteer environment (Kerr et al., 2001).

## 2. Role-specific training

Providing role-specific training is also vital, ensuring that individuals 65+ have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their volunteering duties confidently. This training should be accessible and considerate of language barriers, potentially offering materials in multiple languages or through interpreters.

## 3. Buddy system

Implementing a peer system can facilitate integration, pairing new volunteers with experienced ones who can guide them through the initial stages of their volunteering journey. This system can help new volunteers feel more welcome and supported, easing the transition into their roles.

## 4. Resource allocation

Providing resources is essential, especially for those who may not have access to the necessary materials or technology needed for their volunteering activities. These resources could include language support services, access to computers and the internet, and transportation services.

## 5. Cultural Integration

Creating opportunities to celebrate and share their native culture and values can make the volunteering experience more enriching for everyone involved. This could include cultural events, workshops, or festivals that allow volunteers 65+ to showcase their heritage and contribute to a diverse and inclusive community.

## 6. Social facilitation

Facilitating social events can help build a sense of community and belonging among volunteers, providing a space for them to connect, share experiences, and support each other outside of their formal volunteering roles.



## 7. Gradual engagement

Allowing individuals 65 and over to start with simple activities and gradually build on these as they become more culturally and linguistically comfortable and confident in their roles can provide a pathway for continuous engagement and development.

## 8. Provide Recognition

Recognising the service of volunteers through awards, certificates, or public acknowledgment can significantly enhance their sense of achievement and contribution, making them feel valued and appreciated.

## 9. Personalise recruitment

Employing both personal and informal methods of recruitment, such as word-of-mouth or community outreach, can make the process more accessible and inviting for older individuals from diverse backgrounds, helping to address any apprehensions they may have about volunteering.

By implementing these strategies, organisations can create a more welcoming and supportive environment for volunteers 65+ from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, ensuring that they have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to their communities while also feeling valued and respected.



## APPENDIX D: NON-VOLUNTEERS

This reference guide consolidates all information on non-volunteers as cited in the literature, providing a succinct resource for easy reference.

Many individuals over the age of 65 who have the potential and desire to volunteer may not currently be doing so due to various barriers. These can range from not knowing where to find opportunities that match their interests and abilities, to concerns about the time commitment, ageism, or simply feeling out of place or undervalued in volunteer settings (Warburton et al., 2007). The literature indicates that addressing these barriers requires a multifaceted approach that centres on inclusivity, flexibility, and recognition.

### 1. Personalise recruitment

Implementing personal recruitment methods can make a significant difference. By reaching out to individuals 65+ directly and personally, organisations can make them feel individually valued and provide information tailored to their interests and capabilities. This approach also allows for autonomy in selection, letting individuals 65+ choose volunteer roles that resonate with their passions and life experiences.

### 2. Provide flexibility

Flexibility in commitments is needed. Many individuals 65+ may be hesitant to volunteer because they fear over-commitment or rigid schedules. Offering diverse opportunities, including short-term activities and the option for volunteers to try different roles without obligation, can alleviate these concerns. An open day for trying out volunteering could demystify the process and reduce anxiety about fitting in.

### 3. Versatile Opportunities

Providing a range of opportunities is essential for catering to the diverse interests and skills of individuals 65+ volunteers. Workshops that focus on the administrative aspects of volunteering can offer insights into the behind-the-scenes work, making the environment more familiar and less daunting. Training opportunities not only equip individuals 65+ with the necessary skills for their roles but also foster a sense of growth and self-development.

### 4. Visibility of information

Visibility of information through clear communication channels can ensure that individuals 65+ are well-informed about the opportunities available to them and the impact of their work. Efforts to understand and address perceived barriers, such as physical accessibility, language challenges, or lack of transportation, are fundamental to creating an inclusive environment.

### 5. Empowering engagement

Social inclusivity, opportunities to learn new skills, and the chance for self-development cater to individuals 65 and over who desire personal growth and social interaction. Volunteering roles that are both challenging and varied can provide a stimulating environment that respects and utilises the vast experience individuals 65 and over bring to the table.



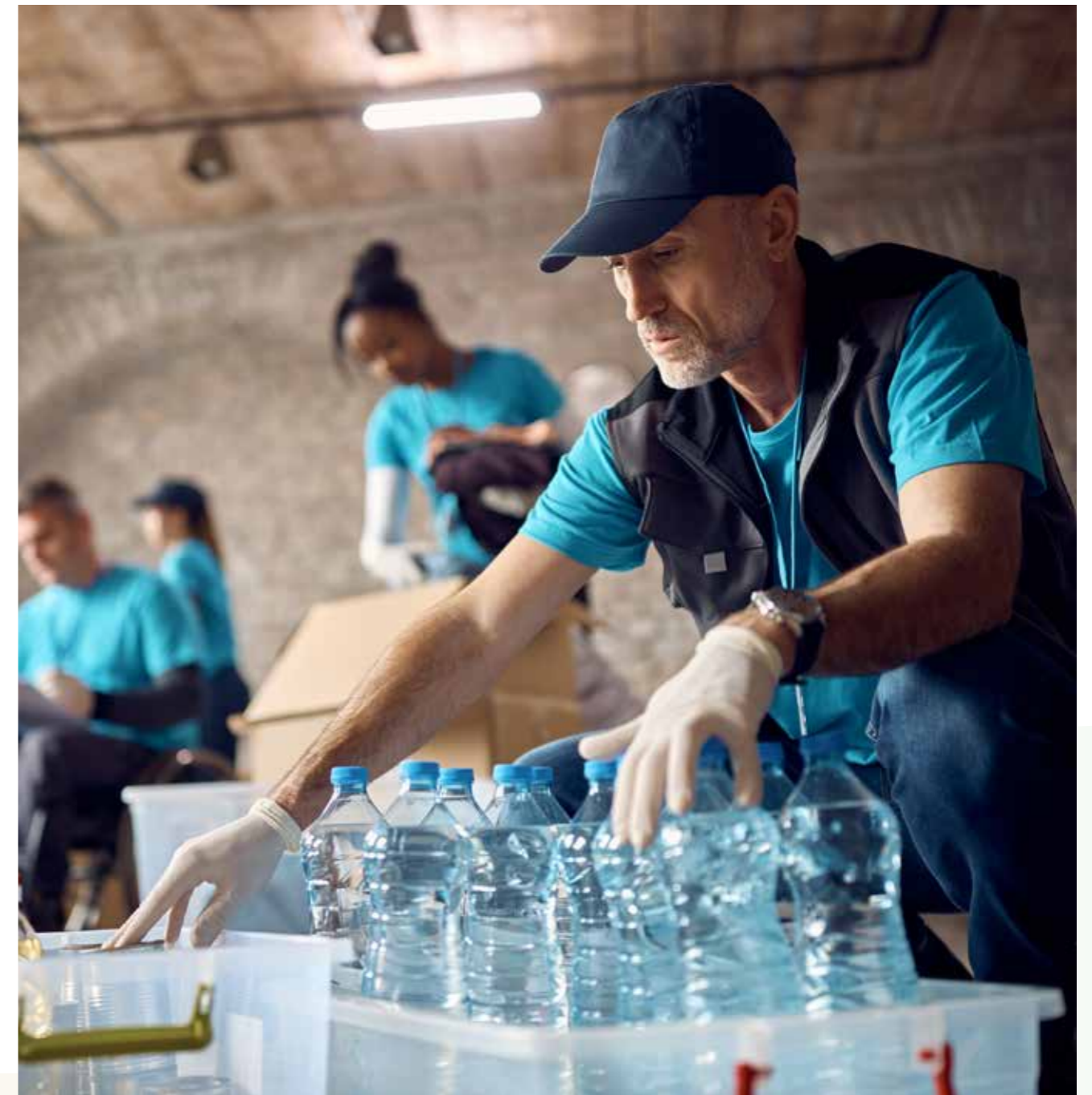
### 6. Inclusive engagement

Above all, creating a supportive and non-judgmental environment where individuals 65 and over feel valued and wanted is key.

Intergenerational opportunities can enrich the experience for all involved, fostering mutual respect and learning.

A culturally inclusive approach ensures that those 65+ from all backgrounds feel welcome, and making the impact of their volunteering visible enhances their sense of purpose and achievement.

In sum, what every individual volunteer 65+ seeks is a welcoming community that values their contributions, recognises their needs, and provides them with opportunities to make a meaningful difference while maintaining or growing their skills in the process.



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# STATE OF VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND | 2024

*Older volunteers* 65+

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