



# THE **FIVE** FORCES THAT ARE CHANGING VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND

By **PAUL MULLER**

*for Volunteering Queensland*



# Foreword

**CRISIS** } *an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending*

**OPPORTUNITY** } *a good chance for advancement or progress*

~ Merriam Webster Dictionary 2024

The first State of Volunteering in Queensland research was undertaken in 2020, during a pandemic, and reported a participation rate of 75.7%. Three years later, the second report data collection was undertaken, which saw an over 10% decline in participation and reported a new rate of 64.3%. In three years, a decline of 240,000 volunteers occurred across the State.

Whilst many look at a volunteering rate of 64% and think that it is still excellent, the context of Queensland is pivotal to understanding what this drop means.

Queensland is a large state with the majority area comprised of small regional, rural and remote communities which are critically dependent on volunteers to provide essential community services, and a highly populated eastern coastline with significant natural disaster exposure where communities need to regularly pitch in to respond and recover. We are also a state with a relentlessly increasing need for volunteer services. Supply and demand are heading in opposite directions.

Volunteering Queensland has commissioned this discussion paper to analyse the external driving forces contributing to the decline in volunteering that is not only occurring in our State, but nationally and across the world.

The paper identifies the changes influencing this global decline in volunteering and considers what this could mean for our future. Furthermore, it presents a factual basis for key stakeholders to consider how we structure, resource and protect volunteers, volunteer programs, and

the volunteering ecosystem, and for volunteer involving organisations to examine how we design, recruit, reward, retain and report on volunteering within our services and communities.

Above all, in addressing these challenges we also need to deliver improved volunteer experiences for those who generously give of their time and effort.

The way people volunteer, can access volunteering, and are able to participate has changed, and the systems and supports around volunteers must also change to ensure volunteering remains as an integral part of the infrastructure serving our communities and vulnerable populations.

The cost of doing nothing is significant.

We are on the cusp of a crisis. Now is our opportunity to intervene.



**CEO**  
*Volunteering Queensland*

# Executive Summary

Five social and economic forces are changing the way Queensland residents volunteer and consume volunteer services.

**Demographic changes in Queensland** – including an ageing population, increased cultural diversity, urbanisation, shifting health and disability trends, evolving work patterns, and changing family structures – are significantly impacting volunteer services. There will be a greater need for volunteer services in areas like aged care, cultural integration, urban social support, health assistance, and community programs, while factors such as reduced volunteer availability due to health issues, time constraints, and decreased social connectedness will challenge the ability to meet these needs.

**Economic factors**, such as persistent inflation, low wage growth, and higher-than-usual interest rates in Queensland, are increasing the demand for volunteer services as more individuals struggle to afford to meet their basic needs. The same financial pressures are reducing the supply of volunteers and straining volunteer organisations due to higher operational costs.

**Sources of support** for the volunteering sector are also drying up. Australia's reduced export earnings and lower migration levels are diminishing government revenues, leading to budget constraints that affect funding for volunteer organisations. Concurrently, economic pressures on the private sector are limiting philanthropic contributions.

Declining **trust in institutions** – exacerbated by high-profile scandals and perceived mismanagement – is impacting both the supply and demand for volunteer services in Queensland. This erosion of trust foreseeably leads to reduced volunteer participation in formal organisations, increased reliance on informal support networks, and reluctance among individuals to accept institutional assistance.

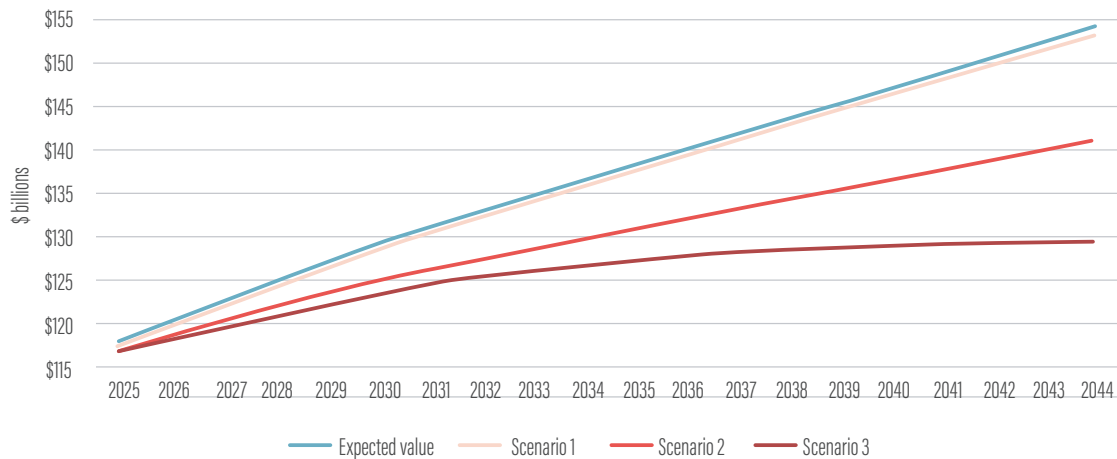
Finally, **environmental** change is projected to increase the frequency and severity of natural disasters in Queensland, increasing the demand for volunteer services in emergency response, public health, mental health support, and environmental conservation. The availability of volunteers will also be limited due to factors like related infrastructural damage, economic hardships, health risks, and volunteer fatigue. Collectively, therefore, these forces are conspiring to:

- **Reduce the pool of available volunteers**
- **Reduce the pool of resources available to support volunteering**
- **Reduce the quality of volunteer service delivery, and**
- **Increase the demand for volunteer-delivered services.**

In a best-case scenario, wherein the losses experienced by the sector are purely demographic, an average of \$211.6 million in social and economic value will be lost to Queensland each year over the next 20 years. In a worst-case (but nonetheless plausible) scenario, those losses increase to \$4.5 billion annually, or 18.1% of the future volunteer workforce.

Importantly, the worst-case scenario very conservatively assumes a rate of loss that is much less than what was observed between 2020 and 2023.

Figure 1: Future value of volunteering to Queensland in current dollar terms (\$ billions) (2025–2044)



This situation presents a daunting challenge: if nothing changes, the volunteer sector must choose between scaling back current services or leaving new and expanding needs under-resourced. Existing volunteers risk being stretched to the point of burnout, potentially withdrawing their services and exacerbating the cycle of diminishing capacity amid rising demand.

Without intervention, the volunteering sector in Queensland faces a radical shakeup. The traditional models of volunteerism may no longer suffice in addressing the complex and interrelated challenges of the contemporary landscape. While this paper does not propose specific interventions, it underscores the urgent need for stakeholders – government, volunteer organisations, communities, and individuals – to recognise these trends and collaborate on sustainable solutions. Adapting to these changes is crucial for preserving the vital role of volunteerism in supporting Queensland’s diverse and evolving communities.



**Without intervention, the volunteering sector in Queensland faces a radical shakeup.**

## Introduction

For the most part, volunteer-involving organisations in Queensland have a high degree of agency over their volunteer recruitment and engagement efforts. The organisational culture they develop and the strategies they implement can significantly enhance their capacity to deliver services and expand their reach.

At the population level, however, several environmental constraints exist that cap the pool of available volunteers and limit the resources individuals, organisations, and governments can allocate to volunteering. These constraints include reasonably foreseeable macroeconomic, demographic, and social factors that will inevitably shape the future of volunteering across the State.

This paper specifically examines several of these factors, predicting with justification their short- and medium-term impacts on the volunteer landscape in Queensland.



### 1. Demographic change

It is often said that ‘demography is destiny,’ and Queensland’s changing population has far-reaching implications for volunteer services. Here are six demographic trends most relevant to volunteering currently unfolding in the State.

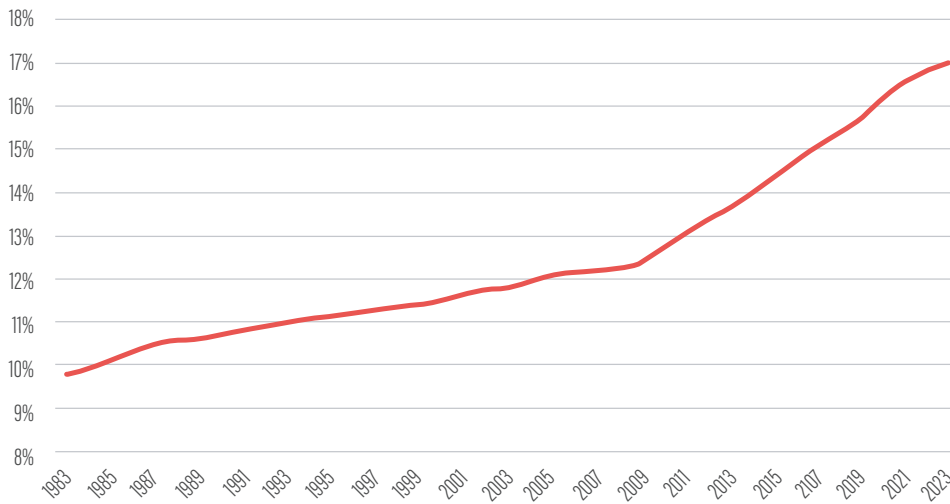
- The proportion of older adults in Queensland is increasing.
- Queensland is experiencing population growth due to interstate migration and international immigration. As a result, the population is becoming more culturally diverse.
- There is a trend towards urbanisation, with more people residing in metropolitan areas.
- Changes in population health status and disability prevalence are observable.
- Flexible work arrangements, the casualisation of labour, and the rise of the gig economy are altering how people allocate their time.
- Family structures are shifting as a result of female workforce participation, single-parent households or multi-generational living.

### Ageing population

#### *Impact on volunteer supply*

The ageing population in Queensland presents both opportunities and challenges for volunteer supply. Older adults often have more free time after retirement and possess valuable skills and experience. Figure 2 shows that the proportion of Queensland residents aged 65 and over nearly doubled from 9.8% in 1983 to 17.0% in 2023 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024a).

Figure 2: Percentage of Queensland residents aged 65 and over (1983–2003)



By one measure, this demographic shift can enlarge the volunteer supply as many older people seek meaningful engagement through volunteering. However, as it will be shown, older adults actually volunteer at lower rates than the rest of the population (Muller, 2023), suggesting the net effect will be a reduction in the total volunteer pool.

#### **Impact on demand for volunteer services**

Older people are also disproportionately high consumers of volunteer services, with many relying on everything from Meals on Wheels to companionship support in palliative care settings. Our health and aged care systems' critical welfare and well-being functions depend on volunteer contributions (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023). These contributions include assistance with daily living tasks, housekeeping support, transport to medical appointments, and social connection programs to address isolation. As our health and aged care systems struggle to keep up, the burden on volunteers to provide these vital welfare services will only increase.



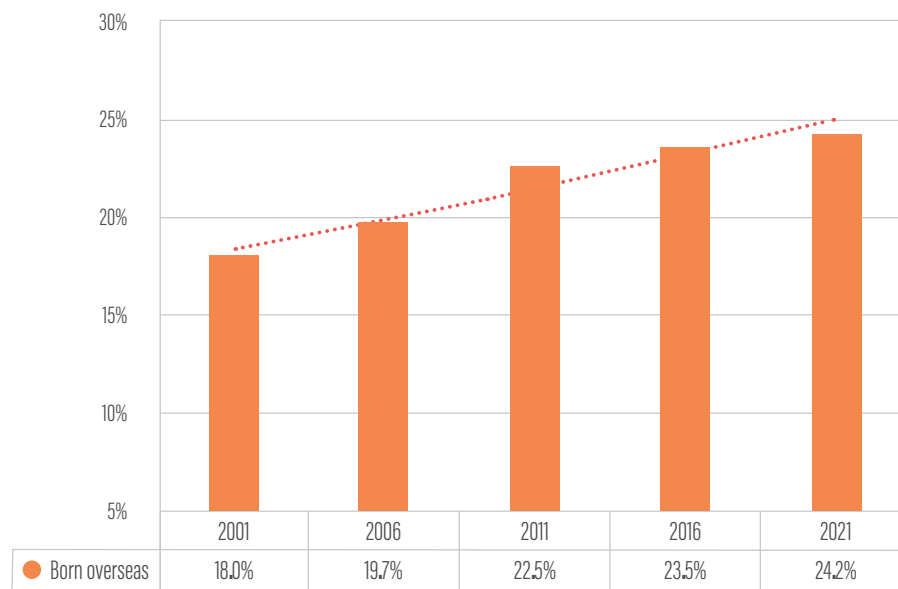
**As our health and aged care systems struggle to keep up, the burden on volunteers to provide these vital welfare services will only increase.**

## Population growth and cultural diversity

### Impact on volunteer supply

Queensland's population growth, driven by interstate migration and international immigration, has led to greater cultural diversity (Queensland Government Statistician's Office, 2024). Between June 2001 and June 2021, Queensland's population grew by approximately 150%, reaching nearly 5.2 million people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024a). As Figure 3 shows, this has been partly driven by growth in international migration over the same period, with the proportion of Queensland residents being born overseas rising from 18.0% to 24.2% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024b).

Figure 3: Estimated resident population of Queensland born overseas (2001-2021)



This diversity enriches the volunteer pool with a variety of skills, languages, and cultural perspectives. However, barriers such as language difficulties, unfamiliarity with local volunteering concepts, and lack of awareness about opportunities can limit participation among culturally and linguistically diverse communities (Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia, 2016). Targeted outreach and inclusive practices are necessary to engage these potential volunteers.

### Impact on demand for volunteer services

Cultural diversity increases demand for services that support integration and multicultural engagement, including language classes, settlement assistance, and cultural orientation programs. Volunteers are often essential in delivering these services, helping new residents navigate their new environment and develop community cohesion.

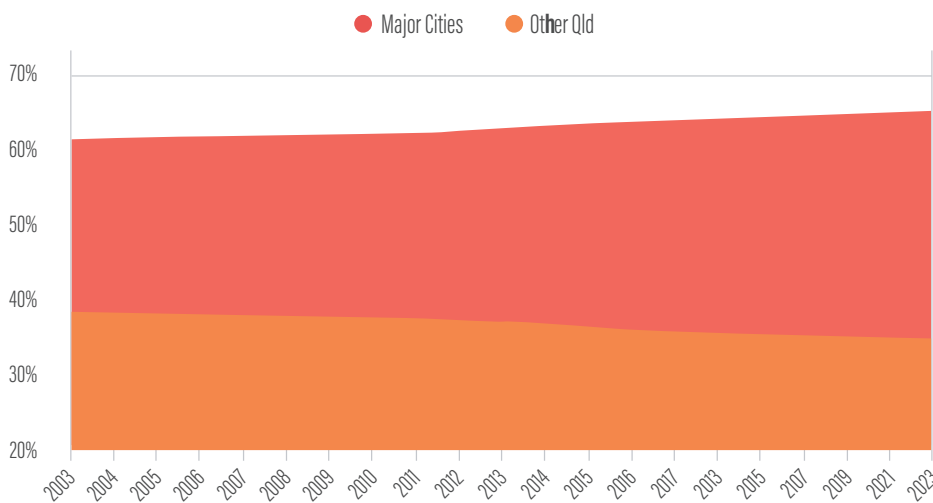
Additionally, there is increased demand for multicultural community programs, educational support for children and youth from immigrant backgrounds, culturally sensitive health and well-being services, and legal and advocacy assistance (Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia, 2016). Volunteer organisations must expand and adapt their services to meet these evolving needs, ensuring that programs are culturally appropriate and accessible to diverse populations.

## Urbanisation

### Impact on volunteer supply

Urbanisation has led to a significant concentration of populations in metropolitan areas like Brisbane. As Figure 4 shows, 64.9% of Queensland's residents now live in major cities, up from 61.4% 20 years ago (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024c). While urban areas offer more volunteer opportunities due to the presence of numerous organisations and events, urbanisation also presents challenges to the supply of volunteers.

Figure 4: Queensland population by remoteness area (2003-2023)



Kragt and Holtrop (2019) found that urban areas often have a weaker sense of community compared to smaller towns, leading to less social connectedness. This reduced sense of community may translate to decreased motivation for volunteering, as individuals feel less invested in their local area. Additionally, densely populated urban areas often result in longer commutes for residents, leaving less time and energy for other activities, including volunteering. Cities also offer a wider range of social and entertainment options that might compete with volunteering commitments for an individual's free time.

Urbanisation has a compounding negative impact on volunteering in remote and regional communities experiencing depopulation due to declining birth rates and migration to cities. The "brain drain" phenomenon (NeuroLaunch, 2024), where young, educated, and skilled individuals leave for better opportunities in urban areas, significantly affects volunteering in these regions. Rural communities rely heavily on volunteer support to maintain essential services like sports participation, community events and festivals, emergency services, programs for the elderly, and the upkeep of local amenities. The loss of volunteers in these areas exacerbates the challenge of sustaining these vital services (Muller, 2024a).

### Impact on demand for volunteer services

Urbanisation increases the demand for volunteer services in cities to address issues prevalent in urban environments, such as homelessness, mental health support, and family violence. However, the reduced supply of volunteers due to factors like time constraints, weaker community ties, and competing leisure activities can make it challenging to meet this increased demand.



The Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal's (2021) report on rural and remote Australia found that, despite population decreases, the diversity of needs within these communities remains high, placing greater strain on existing services. This pressure often leads to significant scaling back or even closure of important gathering spaces such as sports clubs, agricultural shows, and special interest groups. With fewer volunteers available, rural communities struggle to support emergency services, organise community events, and offer programs for vulnerable populations, leading to decreased access to services and a diminished quality of life for residents.

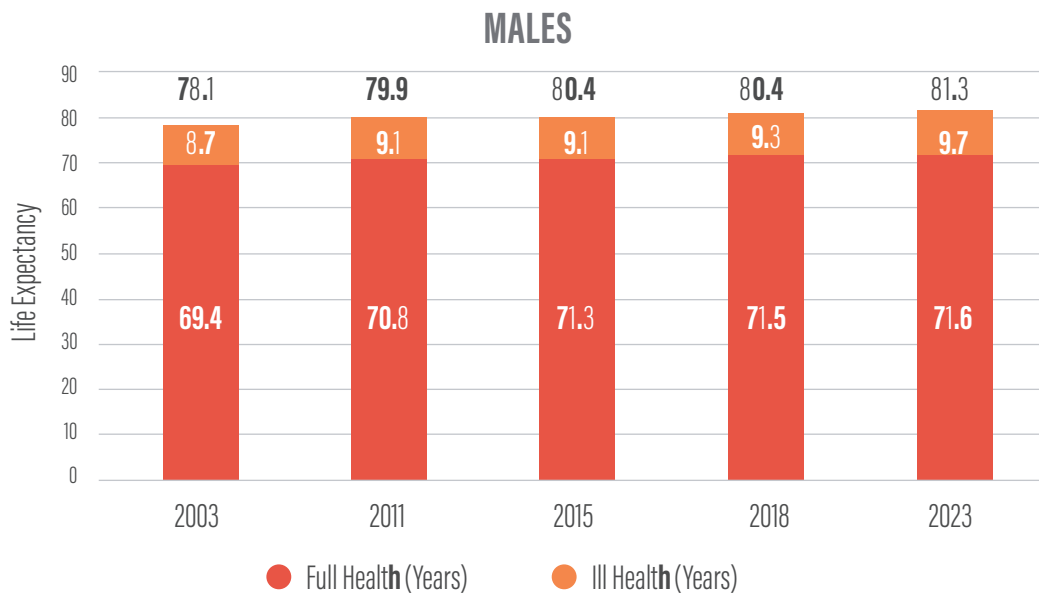
## Health and disability

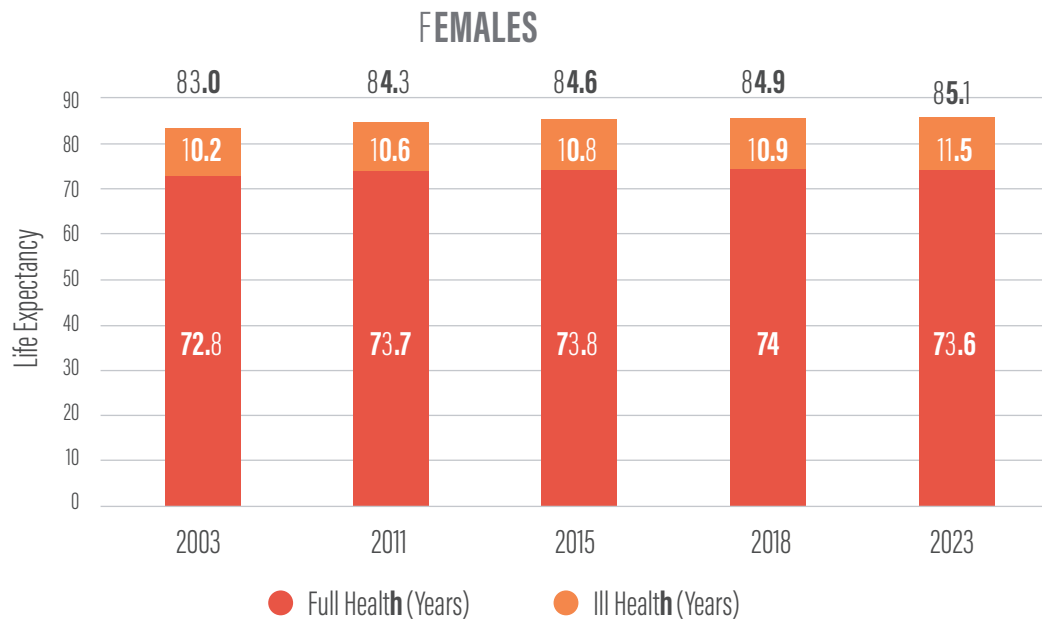
### Impact on volunteer supply

Changes in health status and rising disability prevalence within Queensland have significant implications for the supply of volunteers. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) reports that chronic conditions are increasing nationwide, with over half of Australians (61%) having at least one chronic illness, such as cardiovascular disease, arthritis, mental health disorders, or diabetes. In Queensland, similar trends are observed, as approximately 1.7 million residents (32.9%) reported having at least one or more long-term health conditions. This figure rose to 69.6% for those over 75, contributing to a substantial burden of illness (Queensland Government, 2024b).

Figure 5 shows that even though life expectancy is increasing, the prevalence of ill health is growing at a slightly faster rate (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023).

Figure 5: Life expectancy at birth as years lived in full health versus ill health, Australia (2003–2023)





Individuals with health challenges often encounter limitations that restrict their ability to volunteer, particularly in roles requiring physical activity, consistent time commitments, or high levels of social interaction. For example, those with mobility impairments might find it difficult to participate in events that are not accessibility-friendly, while individuals with chronic pain or fatigue may struggle with extended volunteer shifts (Mehdi et al., 2012).

Moreover, mental health conditions can impact a person’s capacity to engage in volunteering. Anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues may hinder individuals from taking on volunteer roles or cause withdrawal, especially those involving public engagement or high stress (Kragt & Holtrop, 2019). This reduction in volunteer participation due to health constraints can shrink the overall volunteer pool, posing challenges for organisations reliant on a steady supply of volunteers.

However, it’s important to recognise that people with disabilities and chronic illnesses also represent a valuable, albeit underutilised, segment of potential volunteers. With appropriate accommodations and flexible arrangements, many are eager and able to contribute meaningfully (Queenslanders with Disability Network, 2023). Inclusive volunteering practices, such as offering remote opportunities or adjusting tasks to suit different abilities, can help tap into this group and mitigate the impact on volunteer supply (Enhanced Lifestyles, 2024).

#### **Impact on demand for volunteer services**

An increase in health and disability issues elevates the demand for a wide range of volunteer services. As more individuals experience chronic illness, there is a growing need for support in healthcare assistance, daily living activities, and social inclusion programs. The ageing population further intensifies this demand, as older adults are more likely to develop health conditions requiring assistance (Queensland Government, 2024b).

This increased prevalence of health issues necessitates more volunteers specifically trained to support people with diverse needs. Organisations may need to invest in specialised training to equip volunteers with skills in first aid, disability awareness, patient handling, and communication techniques suitable for various conditions (Venema et al., 2018). Additional support and services may also be needed for multicultural communities.

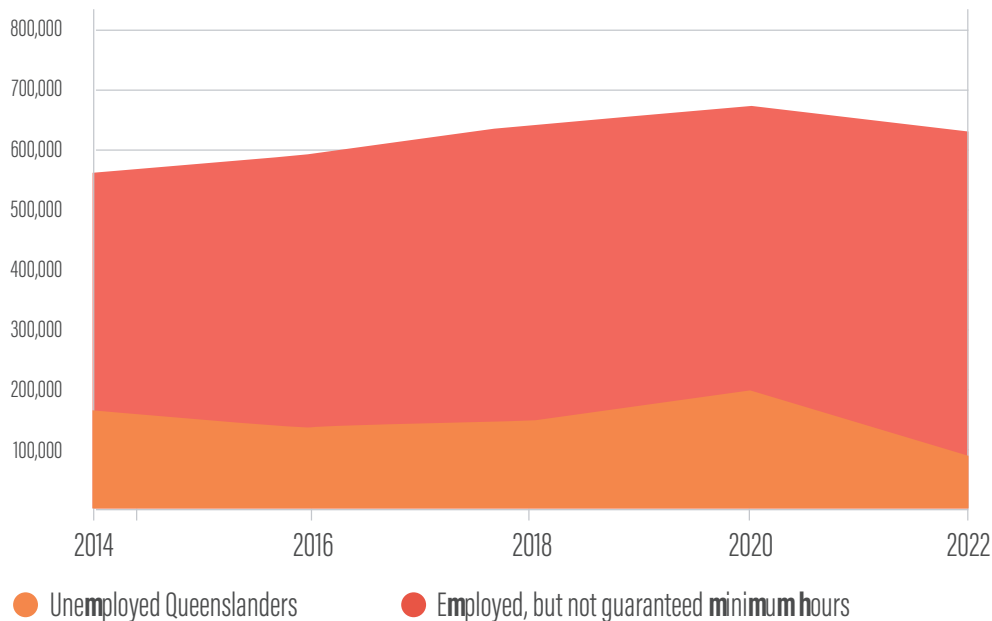
Additionally, there's a heightened demand for accessible community activities that promote social inclusion and prevent isolation (Muller, 2024b). Programs such as adaptive sports, arts and crafts workshops, and social clubs require volunteer facilitators who can accommodate participants' specific needs. Volunteers are needed in these roles to drive community engagement and improve overall well-being among individuals facing health challenges.

## How we work

### Impact on volunteer supply

The rise of flexible work arrangements, the casualisation of labour, and the gig economy is significantly reshaping how people allocate their time in Queensland. Figure 6 shows that even though the topline unemployment rate has fallen over the last eight years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024d), job insecurity has returned to pre-COVID levels as many more Queenslanders in employment are not guaranteed minimum hours (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023a).

Figure 6: Job insecurity in Queensland (2014-2022)



Flexible schedules can, in theory, enable individuals to volunteer during traditional work hours, offering opportunities for those who may not be available outside of standard business hours. For example, individuals with flexible hours might volunteer in schools or community centres or participate in daytime events that were previously inaccessible to those in full-time, fixed-schedule employment.

However, the gig economy and casualisation present equivalent (if not greater) challenges to the supply of volunteers. Freudenstein and Duane (2020) emphasise that job insecurity and irregular income associated with gig work may lead people to prioritise paid employment over volunteering to ensure financial stability. Furthermore, workers in the gig economy often experience unpredictable work hours and income variability, making it difficult to commit to regular volunteer schedules. The need to accept work whenever it is available can limit the time and energy individuals have for volunteering, as they may need to remain on-call or work irregular hours to maintain their livelihood.

Furthermore, the stress associated with precarious employment can impact individuals' capacity to volunteer. Financial pressures and the necessity to work multiple jobs or extended hours reduce the availability of potential volunteers (Hall et al., 2003). This situation particularly affects younger workers

and those in lower-income brackets, who constitute a significant portion of the gig economy workforce.

Additionally, the blurred line between work and personal time in flexible and gig work arrangements can lead to challenges in maintaining a healthy work-life balance (Wood et al., 2019). Without clear boundaries, individuals may find it difficult to allocate time for volunteering, even if their schedules are technically flexible.

### ***Impact on demand for volunteer services***

Economic uncertainty and employment instability associated with the gig economy can increase the demand for volunteer services in several areas. As individuals face precarious employment, they may experience financial hardship, leading to greater reliance on community support services (Mawhinney et al., 2023). These include:

- An increased need for financial literacy programs and budgeting assistance, where volunteers provide guidance to help individuals manage irregular incomes.
- Demand rises for services that help individuals find more stable employment, including résumé writing workshops, interview preparation, and job placement programs facilitated by volunteers.
- More people may require access to food banks, emergency housing, and other basic necessities, services often staffed or supported by volunteers.
- Employment instability and exploitation can lead to stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues, increasing the need for volunteer-run helplines and support groups.
- Volunteers may be needed to assist individuals in navigating employment rights, contracts, and disputes common in gig work scenarios.

The increased demand for these services places additional pressure on volunteer organisations, which may already be experiencing a reduced supply of volunteers due to the factors mentioned earlier. This creates a challenging dynamic where, once again, the need for volunteer services grows while the availability of volunteers may be declining.



**Economic uncertainty and employment instability associated with the gig economy can increase the demand for volunteer services in several areas**

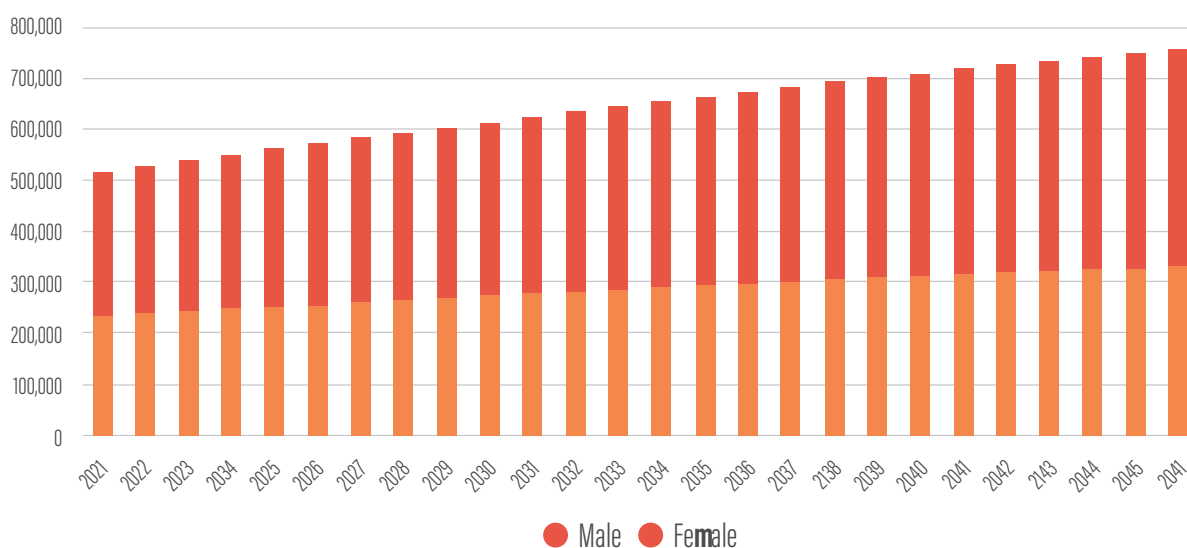
## Changing family structures

### Impact on volunteer supply

Shifting family structures have significant implications for the supply of volunteers in Queensland. One notable trend is the increase in smaller and one-person households. Households are projected to grow by 1.5% per year on average in Australia between 2021 and 2031, but the average household size will fall over the same period by 0.8% from 2.57 to 2.55 persons.

Figure 7 explains this by showing that, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024e) median projections, 28.1% of all Queensland households will be single-person by 2046, up from 25.4% in 2021.

Figure 7: Projected persons by living arrangement, Queensland (2021- 2046)



Individuals in one-person households shoulder all the responsibilities alone, which likely leaves less available time for volunteering commitments. Without family members or housemates to assist with daily tasks and responsibilities, these individuals may have limited capacity to engage in volunteer activities.

Additionally, the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2023) predict that the traditional model where multiple siblings could share caring duties for aging parents is changing due to smaller family sizes. With fewer children available to share these responsibilities, the caregiving burden falls on fewer individuals. This increased demand on their time inevitably reduces their availability for volunteering.

Female workforce participation has also significantly increased in recent decades. In Queensland, the female labour force participation rate has risen from 43.5% in 1984 to 64.7% in 2024 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024d). This trend is unlikely to abate, especially given the increasing pressures on household finances. Women joining the workforce in larger numbers can lead to expanded skills, experience, and diverse perspectives within the potential volunteer pool. However, increased female workforce participation also creates challenges due to the 'double burden,' where women balance work and family responsibilities (International Women's Development Agency, 2016). This balancing act often leaves limited time for volunteer commitments, potentially reducing the supply of volunteers, especially in roles traditionally filled by women.

### Impact on demand for volunteer services

The changes in family structures also impact the demand for volunteer services. Smaller households and the rise of single- and sole-person households can lead to individuals having less of a support network, with reduced mental and physical health potentially increasing their need for services provided by volunteers, such as community support programs, social activities to reduce isolation, and assistance with daily tasks (Relationships Australia, 2018).

With fewer family members available to provide informal care, there is an increased demand for aged care services in an already disproportionately ageing population. Volunteers are often essential in delivering these services, including companionship programs, transportation, and assistance with household chores for the elderly.

The increased participation of women in the workforce taken together with the decreases in family size may also increase the demand for volunteer-provided childcare services and after-school programs. As parents balance work and family responsibilities, they may rely more on community programs to support their children's development and supervision during working hours.

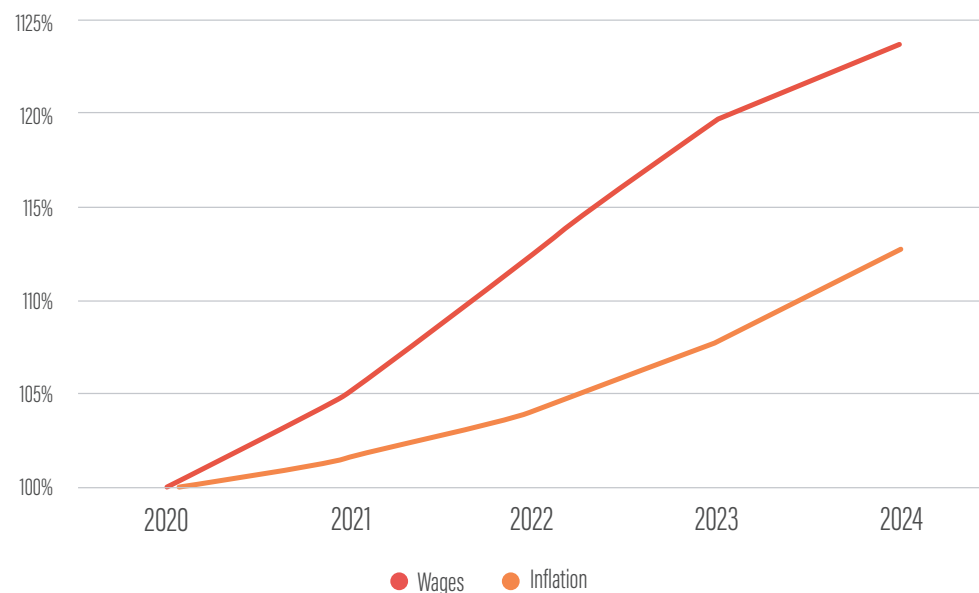
Moreover, the 'double burden' experienced by working women may lead to heightened stress and a need for support services, such as mental health programs and community counselling, which often involve volunteer participation.



## 2. Economic change

Recent economic change, particularly in the form of persistent inflation (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004f), low wage growth (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004g), and higher-than-usual interest rates, has profound implications for both the demand for volunteer services and the supply of volunteers in Queensland.

Figure 8: Wage growth Queensland versus consumer price index (inflation) Brisbane (2000-2024)



## Impact on demand for volunteer services

Figure 8 shows that the consumer price index has aggressively outstripped wage growth since COVID. As the cost of living rises, more individuals and families struggle to afford basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. In their biennial survey of low-income households, the Queensland Council of Social Services (2024) noted that only two of the five modelled household types were able to meet a basic standard of living, with all five modelled households highly vulnerable to financial shocks and indebtedness, forcing them to make detrimental tradeoffs. Foodbank Queensland (2023), for example, reported their demand increased to 26 million meals in 2023, which could not have been delivered without the support of 12,350 volunteer hours. Economic hardship can also negatively impact children's education, as families facing financial stress may lack resources for school supplies, extracurricular activities, or tutoring (Lamb, et al., 2020).

Many people were also experiencing higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression due to financial stress, while simultaneously facing significant barriers to accessing psychological care (Queensland Council of Social Services, 2024). This is consistent with broader research that has found that economic recession and unemployment significantly impact mental health, leading to increased stress, anxiety, and changes in population suicide rates (Sinyor et al., 2024). Because governments may offer limited or delayed responses during economic hardship, leaving gaps in support services (Volunteering Australia, 2020), this has meant that those in need increasingly rely on volunteers trained in counselling or peer support services. Lifeline (2024) and Beyond Blue (2024), for example, both reported increases in service use in their most recent annual reports.

## Impact on volunteer supply

When faced with financial pressures, people often have to work longer hours or take on extra jobs, leaving less time for volunteering. This need to prioritise paid employment over volunteer work leads to an inevitable reduction in the volunteer workforce.

Volunteering itself, despite being unpaid, also comes with personal costs like transportation, uniforms, training, and materials. Successive State of Volunteering in Queensland Reports (Muller, 2020, 2023) have revealed explosive growth in the out-of-pocket expenses tied to volunteering. The average cost for a Queenslanders to volunteer in 2024 was estimated to be \$15.57 per hour, almost three times the estimated \$4.76 per hour in 2020. When income is under stress, people cannot cut essential expenses like rent or utilities; instead, they often eliminate discretionary activities, like their volunteering.

It is also estimated that the cost to organisations in Queensland utilising volunteers is, on average, \$5.09 per volunteer hour (Muller, 2023). These organisations are not immune to the inflationary pressures and other economic forces that impact individuals' purchasing power. This situation is exacerbated when their sources of revenue (see below) fail to keep pace with rising costs. This financial strain can limit their ability to purchase necessary supplies, maintain facilities, and support volunteer efforts.

Steffen et al. (2019) highlight a specific example of this: climate change and the increasing frequency of natural disasters place a significant burden on insurers. As insurance premiums rise, volunteer organisations may face higher operational costs, limiting their ability to recruit and support volunteers. In some cases, areas heavily affected by climate change become uninsurable, increasing reliance on volunteer services while simultaneously making it more expensive and challenging to provide support. As a result, these organisations may need to make difficult decisions, not limited to reducing services, limiting outreach efforts, or scaling back critical community programs.

So, what are the economic prospects for increased government or philanthropic investment in volunteering?



### 3. Sources of support

For many years, Australia's economic prosperity has been underpinned by two major factors: a booming minerals export trade and a steady influx of migrants. The country's vast mineral reserves have positioned it as a leading global supplier, particularly to China (Department of Industry, Science and Resources, 2024). For example, during the early 2000s, a surge in global demand for steel – driven largely by China's rapid industrialisation – led to skyrocketing iron ore prices. This commodity boom yielded significant benefits for Australia, including increased export earnings, substantial investment in the mining sector, widespread job creation, and enhanced government revenue. This additional revenue facilitated investments in infrastructure, education, and social programs, contributing to overall national development.

In addition to its strong mineral export sector, migration is a vital driver of Australia's economic growth. A report by the OECD and the Australian Government's Centre for Population (2024) highlighted the economic benefits of migration, noting that migrants bring valuable skills and experience to fill critical workforce gaps and ensure businesses have access to the talent necessary for expansion and success. They also contribute to the tax base, increase labour participation, bolster government funds, and bring a diversity of ideas and backgrounds that fuel innovation and entrepreneurship (Productivity Commission, 2006). As they settle in Australia, migrants also volunteer.

However, recent developments threaten the stability of these economic pillars. A recent report by the Reserve Bank of Australia (2023) outlines some of the geopolitical changes that are affecting our economy. In particular, China's economic slowdown has already led to reduced demand for our raw materials and a subsequent price drop, negatively impacting Australia's export earnings and government revenue. Additionally, China is seeking to diversify its input sources to reduce reliance on Australia, potentially weakening Australia's dominant position in the market.

Ahead of the December 2024 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO), Federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers has also indicated that reduced company tax receipts and a softer labour market will necessitate a downgrade of the revenue forecasts outlined in the current budget (Wang, 2024).

On the migration front, the political climate in Australia has shifted from a long-standing bipartisan consensus on the benefits of migration. Historically, migration policies were underpinned by a shared recognition of their importance in mitigating population ageing and addressing skilled labour shortages (Independent Economics, 2015). However, recent debates, particularly ahead of the 2025 Federal election, have seen migration levels become a contentious issue.

Both major political parties now appear committed to capping or reducing migration numbers, despite evidence suggesting that such measures will have minimal impact on housing pressures (McDonald, 2024). Nevertheless, election-year pressures have driven reactionary policies targeting lower net overseas migration, especially among international students, ignoring the broader economic and social benefits of a stable migration program.

Taken together, these issues create a ripple effect on government spending. Decreased iron ore revenue and a smaller consumption and tax base from reduced migration will significantly lower government income. This leads to budget shortfalls and forces difficult decisions about spending priorities.

Even in favourable economic conditions, governments must prioritise essential services such as healthcare, education, and social security. During downturns, these needs become more urgent, leaving less room for discretionary spending. Consequently, governments will need to allocate their investments in volunteering more carefully. While volunteer organisations are important to Australian communities, funding will likely be directed to priority areas.

Organisations leading health and welfare initiatives are likely to continue receiving support because they address urgent social issues. However, volunteer-supported activities like



community sports, heritage preservation, and arts programs may face reduced government funding and increased competition for resources. To adapt to reduced government support, these organisations may need to seek alternative funding sources, such as private donations, corporate partnerships, or grants from philanthropic foundations (Centre for Corporate Public Affairs, 2009).

That said, Australia's current harsh economic conditions also pose a significant challenge to private sector support for volunteer organisations. As already mentioned, persistent inflation has significantly eroded the purchasing power of individuals and businesses alike, translating to less disposable income available for charitable giving. Rising interest rates further exacerbate this by increasing the cost of living and eating into household savings while also increasing business operating costs. These factors combine to put a serious squeeze on potential funds that can be dedicated to donations and sponsorships.

Similarly, businesses facing reduced profits and uncertain economic outlooks are likely to cut back on corporate philanthropy programs. They may prioritise maintaining their operations and staff over supporting volunteer organisations, or redirect their support to some of the more urgent needs highlighted above. This is particularly devastating for smaller charities, who often rely on as much as 40% of their income from donations and grants (Deloitte Access Economics, 2017).

Overall, the current and foreseeable harsh economic conditions in Australia forbode a challenging landscape for volunteer organisations that rely on government and philanthropic support. This means they face the possibility of decreased donations, reduced corporate sponsorships, and potentially fewer financial support mechanisms provided by the government. Consequently, volunteers and volunteer-based programs might have to bear an even greater burden to address the increased needs likely to arise as more people face social and economic hardship.



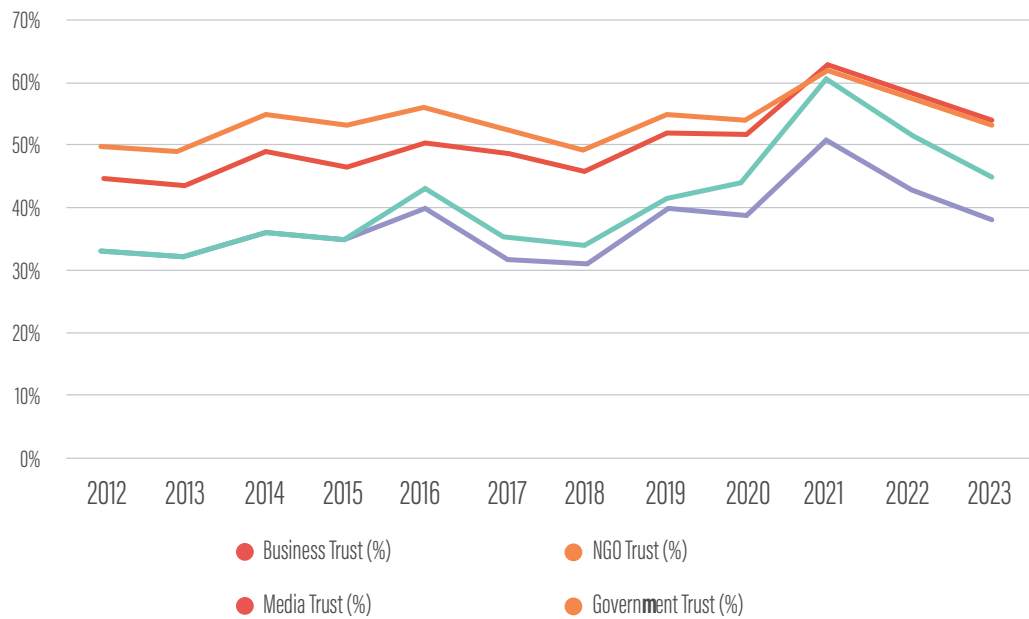
**Australia's current harsh economic conditions also pose a significant challenge to private sector support for volunteer organisations.**



## 4. Trust in institutions

Declining trust in institutions has become a significant concern in contemporary society, impacting various sectors, including volunteerism. Evidence of this erosion of trust is reflected in numerous studies and surveys. Figure 9 shows that, after peaking during COVID, Australia has experienced a decline in trust across its significant institutions – government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), business, and media (Edelman, 2023).

Figure 9: Trust in Institutions, Australia (2012-2023)



High-profile scandals, such as the revelations from the Royal Commissions into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017), Aged Care Quality and Safety (2021), Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (2023), and even the Robodebt Scheme (2023) have further damaged public perception of institutions traditionally associated with moral guidance and community support. These incidents, coupled with concerns over transparency, accountability, and effectiveness, contribute to pervasive scepticism. This declining trust has profound implications for volunteer organisations, as it affects both the willingness of individuals to offer their services and the readiness of those in need to accept institutional assistance.

### Impact on volunteer supply

Declining trust in institutions has significant implications for the supply side of volunteering in Queensland and Australia more broadly. A study by the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission (2017) found that trust is essential for individuals to engage with volunteer organisations, especially those that are formal and institution-led. However, recent high-profile scandals have not only shaken confidence in the specific organisations involved but have also cast a shadow over similar institutions, affecting perceptions of safety, reputation, and financial stability (Chapman et al., 2023).

#### Reduced participation and commitment

Formal volunteering often requires individuals to work within established organisations with structured roles, protocols, and hierarchies. When trust in these institutions diminishes due to scandals or perceived mismanagement, people may become less inclined to participate. Concerns about inefficiency, unethical practices, or a lack of meaningful impact can lead to scepticism. This scepticism manifests as a decline in volunteer numbers or reduced long-term

commitment, as individuals hesitate to associate themselves with organisations whose integrity they question (Brewster, 2019). It may also reduce the willingness of individuals and businesses to donate money to these organisations (Chapman et al., 2021).

### ***Increased risk perception***

Trust in institutions helps mitigate perceived risks associated with formal volunteering, such as misuse of time, lack of recognition, or ineffective use of resources. High-profile scandals, particularly those involving abuse of power and vulnerable populations, heighten these risks in the public eye (Sefora et al., 2024). Individuals may fear that their association with certain organisations could inadvertently support unethical practices or expose them to legal liabilities. This heightened risk perception makes people more selective about where, how, and when they volunteer.

This can also extend to specific volunteer roles. For example, Cameron (2006) discusses how men in early childhood education face societal suspicion and gender stereotypes, discouraging their participation. The study highlights that men often feel scrutinised and unwelcome in childcare settings due to fears of being misperceived, which acts as a barrier to their involvement. These biases not only reduce the pool of willing volunteers but also limit the diversity and effectiveness of volunteer efforts within communities.

### ***Lower compliance with organisational rules***

Declining trust can lead volunteers to question organisational policies and procedures (Gaskin, 1999). In the context of sex abuse scandals, volunteers may doubt the efficacy of safeguarding measures or the commitment of leadership to ethical standards. As a result, they may be less willing to comply with organisational rules, potentially leading to friction within volunteer-led initiatives and challenges to authority within institutions. This behaviour undermines the cohesion and effectiveness of volunteer programs (Hornsey et al., 2021).

### ***Shift towards short-term volunteering***

Trust in the stability and goals of institutions encourages sustained volunteer involvement, fulfilment and alignment with values. With declining trust, younger individuals, especially, may gravitate towards short-term or episodic volunteering (Almog-Bar et al., 2022). These roles may offer immediate and visible impact without requiring prolonged commitment or dependence on potentially unreliable institutions. This trend can lead to challenges in maintaining consistent volunteer support for long-term projects and initiatives.

### ***Preference for informal or direct volunteering***

Traditional norms of volunteering involve adherence to organisational rules and acceptance of roles assigned by institutional authorities. With declining trust, individuals may shift towards informal or grassroots volunteering efforts. They might bypass traditional structures to engage in activities they perceive as more transparent, flexible, and directly impactful. For instance, community-led initiatives, peer-to-peer support groups, and ad hoc volunteering opportunities become more attractive as they offer a sense of personal control and immediate feedback. Grassroots movements, local initiatives, and peer-led projects become preferred avenues for volunteering, as they are perceived to be more trustworthy and aligned with personal values.

## **Impact on demand for volunteer services**

Declining trust in institutions not only affects the supply side of volunteering but also significantly influences the behaviour and willingness of individuals who rely on volunteer services – the demand side. This erosion of trust can alter how recipients perceive and engage with volunteer organisations, leading to several noteworthy shifts.

### ***Increased reluctance to accept support***

Individuals dependent on volunteer services may hesitate to engage with formally structured organisations if they perceive them as untrustworthy, ineffective, or poorly managed (Mitnaul, 2023). Due to higher expectations of morality from nonprofits, they are often held to higher

standards than commercial organisations. This increased expectancy of morality means they suffer more significant losses in trust and consumer support in the event of a scandal. Fear of inefficiency, mismanagement, or potential breaches of confidentiality can result in decreased uptake of services, even when they are genuinely needed. Recipients may worry about stigma, inadequate service quality, or exploitation, leading them to reduce contact or avoid institutional support altogether.

Declining trust may also lead service recipients to question the motives of volunteers and the effectiveness of the services being offered. They may be wary of accepting help due to concerns about whether volunteers genuinely care, have adequate training, or are participating for self-serving reasons, such as fulfilling requirements or enhancing their reputation. This scepticism can diminish their willingness to engage with offered services, as they doubt the potential for meaningful or positive outcomes.

### ***Impact on feedback and engagement***

Trust issues can also cause individuals to worry about being stigmatised or misrepresented when accepting services. This concern is particularly relevant if they feel that institutions might mishandle sensitive issues, fail to respect their dignity or expose them to judgment from their community. Perceived complexities in application procedures, eligibility criteria, or service delivery can also discourage engagement. Such barriers can lead to avoidance of institutional support, even when assistance is crucial.

Recipients may also become less willing to provide feedback or engage in processes designed to improve volunteer services if they believe their input will be ignored or have no impact. Conversely, they may be more vocal and critical when they do engage, reflecting a need to see tangible responses to their concerns (Ebrahim, 2016).

### ***Preference for informal support networks***

In a climate of declining institutional trust, individuals may turn away from formal volunteer services in favour of informal or community-based networks. These alternatives are often seen as more personal, flexible, and trustworthy. Informal support networks provide a sense of safety, dignity, and direct connection that some feel is lacking in formal organisations.

However, a preference for informal support poses significant risks to individuals relying on such networks. Informal systems may lack the structure, consistency, and safeguards found within formal volunteer services. This can result in uneven levels of care or support, as informal networks often depend on the availability, resources, and willingness of individuals within the community, which can be inconsistent or unreliable (Whittaker et al., 2015).

Moreover, informal support networks are typically less equipped to handle complex needs or crises compared to established organisations that have trained professionals and protocols in place. Rejecting formal services can leave individuals vulnerable to inadequate support, limited access to necessary resources, or even exploitation.

Like individuals, informal networks may also be susceptible to burnout, as friends, family, and community members providing support may lack the training and resilience needed to sustain long-term care efforts (Morse et al., 2022). This reliance could ultimately reduce the effectiveness and stability of the support individuals receive, especially for those with higher or more specialised needs.

### ***A dystopian future?***

We're not there yet, but recent hurricane events in the US have highlighted how ideologically motivated trust chasms can exacerbate vulnerabilities and harm. The erosion of trust in institutions, often driven by divisive rhetoric or misinformation, has been exploited by bad actors to sow confusion, delay critical interventions, or disseminate false information.

For example, during Hurricane Helene, false claims about government-engineered disasters and resource misallocation proliferated on social media platforms, undermining confidence in official responses and complicating relief efforts (Helger, 2024). In some cases, extremist groups have capitalised on this distrust. White supremacist organisations like Patriot Front engaged in relief activities following Hurricane Helene, using these efforts as propaganda to portray themselves as more reliable than government agencies. Such actions distort public perception and pose significant risks to community safety and cohesion (Hobbs et al., 2024).

Additionally, foreign entities have amplified disinformation to deepen ideological divides. Russian state media and affiliated accounts were found to have spread false narratives during hurricanes Helene and Milton, aiming to aggravate political tensions and further erode trust in US institutions (Klepper, 2024).

These dynamics highlight the risks of relying solely on informal networks in disaster scenarios, where coordinated, expert-led responses are essential. The exploitation of ideological divides during crises highlights the urgent need for rebuilding trust in institutions, not only by improving services but also by anticipating and countering the deliberate manipulation of trust gaps for personal, political, or malicious gain.



## 5. The changing environment

In the coming decades, Queensland's environment is expected to undergo several changes, including:

- Changes in air temperatures, with an increase in higher temperatures and fewer cold extremes.
- Projected decline in rainfall, however some regions may experience more intense short-duration heavy rainfall events even in regions where the average rainfall decreases or stays the same.
- Continued increase in the number of dangerous fire weather days and a longer fire season for much of southern and eastern Australia.
- Sea levels continue to rise, along with increasing warming and acidification of the oceans surrounding Australia.
- Increased and prolonged marine heatwaves that are expected to impact marine environments, such as kelp forests, and increase the likelihood of more frequent and severe coral bleaching events across Australia, including the Great Barrier Reef.
- Fewer tropical cyclones, but with higher intensity on average, and greater impacts when they occur due to heavy precipitation and rising sea levels (Bureau of Meteorology 2024).

### Impact on demand for volunteer services

One of the primary impacts of environmental change is the increased frequency and severity of natural disasters such as heatwaves, cyclones, floods, and bushfires. This escalation will heighten the need for volunteers in emergency response roles, including evacuation assistance, first aid, and management of emergency shelters. Damage to infrastructure due to extreme weather events will also disrupt homes, roads, and public facilities (Infrastructure Australia 2021). Other impacts include the loss of life, financial hardship, disruption to the provision of services and impacts on community wellbeing and connection, including psychological distress. Post-disaster recovery efforts will also rely on volunteers to help in the recovery and response processes, such as debris removal, infrastructure rebuilding, and providing support services to those affected.

Public health challenges are another area where the induced demand for volunteer services is expected to rise. The Australian Medical Association (2015) highlights numerous health risks associated with environmental change, including heat-related illnesses, respiratory problems due to poor air quality, and the spread of vector-borne diseases. Consequently, there will be a greater need for

volunteers in healthcare settings to assist with primary response and patient care during extreme events.

More broadly, there has been an increasing awareness over the last decade of the impact environmental, political and social events have on mental health and well-being, both directly and indirectly. As the complexity of change-related events increases, so will the need for volunteers trained in psychological first aid to support affected individuals and strengthen community resilience (Lawrance et al., 2022).

Environmental conservation efforts will also see an increased demand for volunteers. Climate change threatens Queensland's ecosystems, notably the Great Barrier Reef and native wildlife habitats (CSIRO, 2024). Volunteers will be essential in conservation projects such as tree planting, habitat restoration, and wildlife monitoring. Additionally, citizen science initiatives will rely on volunteers for data collection and research to track environmental changes (Livingstone & Oliver, 2018).

The agricultural sector, particularly in rural areas, will face similar stresses with environmental variability affecting crop yields and livestock, impacting rural economies and food security (Clegg, et al., 2024). This situation will increase the demand for volunteers in rural assistance programs, helping with flood and drought relief efforts, supporting farming communities, and distributing essential supplies.

Finally, raising public awareness about environmental change and promoting sustainable practices is essential. Climate Action Australia (2024) emphasises the power of community engagement in environmental action. Volunteers are needed to start conversations, lead educational programs, run workshops and initiate community events focused on environmental solutions. They can also participate in advocacy groups that promote environmental policies and actions.

### **Impact on volunteer supply**

While environmental change significantly increases the demand for volunteer services in Queensland, it also constrains the availability of volunteers to meet these needs.

Climate change is already impacting the supply of volunteers through both direct and indirect effects. Damage to infrastructure and accessibility issues resulting from extreme weather events can hinder volunteers' ability to reach or serve in affected areas. As Infrastructure Australia (2021) point out, infrastructural damage can also limit the capacity of organisations to support and manage communities and volunteers, further straining the supply side of volunteer services.

A report commissioned by the Commonwealth Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience (2022) also highlights the potential for volunteer fatigue and burnout, driven by the rising frequency of natural disasters and the psychological toll of witnessing severe emotional distress during recovery efforts. If not properly managed, this burnout can lead to a decrease in volunteer participation over time.

Steffen et al. (2019) demonstrate that economic challenges induced by environmental change can also affect the supply of volunteers. Financial constraints resulting from impacts on sectors like agriculture and tourism may limit individuals' ability to volunteer as they prioritise paid employment to secure their livelihoods. Furthermore, damage to property, infrastructure and commodity price hikes caused by changes in the environment can negatively impact local economies, leading to job losses or the need for additional working hours, which reduces individuals' available time for volunteering. Consequently, people who previously had the capacity to volunteer may find themselves unable to do so.

Beyond disaster response, health and safety concerns may deter people from volunteering, particularly in outdoor or high-risk activities (Hughes et al., 2016). Increased temperatures

and extreme weather events pose health risks such as heatstroke or injury (Australian Medical Association, 2015). As a consequence, any outdoor activity enabled by volunteers in Queensland, such as sports, festivals and events, and even community gardening, is vulnerable to the impacts of environmental change.

Indeed, induced population mobility may lead to demographic shifts that disrupt community networks (Kaczan & Orgill-Meyer, 2020). Displacement or migration due to environmental impacts may lead to fluctuations in volunteer numbers, with some areas experiencing shortages. Such shifts can also weaken the community bonds that often underpin volunteer engagement.

On a positive note, increased awareness and engagement with environmental issues may motivate more people to volunteer for environmental causes and community initiatives aimed at mitigation and adaptation. Younger generations, in particular, may be more inclined to participate in volunteer activities, such as the Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC), potentially boosting the overall volunteer supply (Hohenhaus et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the extent to which this draws people away from other forms of volunteering needs to be considered and allowed for at the macro level.

Ultimately, the increasing frequency and intensity of environment-related emergencies will significantly strain Queensland's emergency services and social safety net. Building a resilient volunteer community will be essential in mitigating the impact of these events and helping communities recover from and adapt to a changing environment.



**... increased awareness and engagement with environmental issues may motivate more people to volunteer for environmental causes and community initiatives aimed at mitigation and adaptation**

## The impact on Queensland

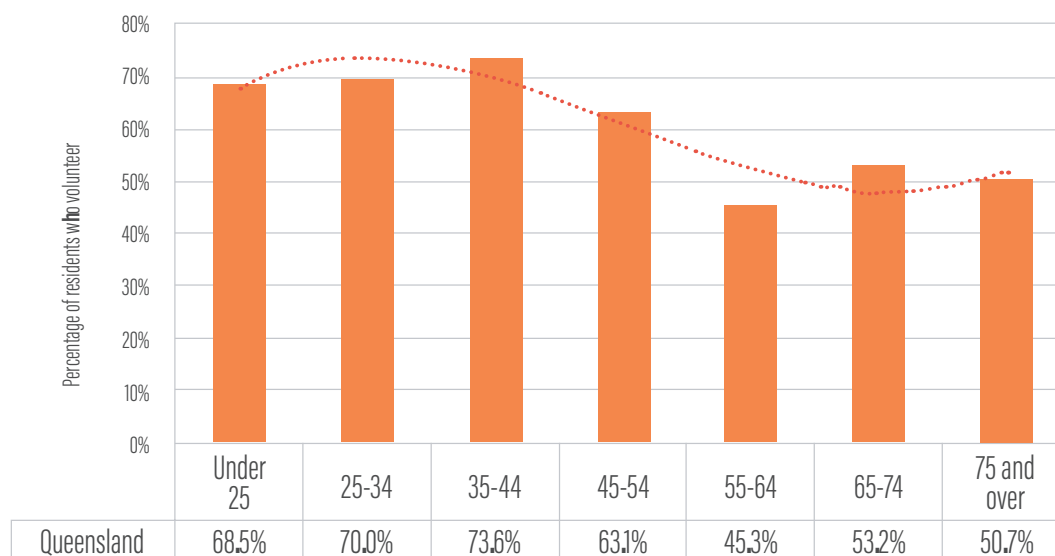
An important question that follows from all of this is: What should the stakeholders in volunteering, particularly those directly involved in or dependent on service delivery, plan for? In other words, to what extent will the confluence of forces described herein – climate and demographic change, micro- and macro-economic volatility, and diminishing trust in institutions – conspire to alter the supply of volunteers and reciprocal demand for their services?

To that end, we model three scenarios using Volunteering Queensland’s (2023) valuation methodology to predict and quantify the impact of changing socioeconomic forces on volunteering. Notably, this method calculates the impacts of losses to supply without considering the financial or economic effects of demand shocks. Despite this limitation, this approach allows us to account for the unpredictable variability in these supply-side forces, capturing a range of potential outcomes.

### SCENARIO 1: Organic decline

Recent data from Volunteering Queensland (2023) indicate that 64.3% of Queensland residents aged 15 and over volunteer, with a lower propensity among people aged 45 and older.

Figure 11: Volunteering participation in Queensland by age cohort (2023)



The ABS projects that Queensland’s population will grow by 38.1% by 2045. However, this growth is accompanied by an ageing demographic shift, with the proportion of residents over 45 expected to increase from 41.3% to 44.7% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023b).

These demographic changes have significant implications for the future of volunteering in Queensland. If current age-specific volunteering rates remain constant, the State will face a relative loss of just over 50,000 volunteers by 2045, or 0.8% of the future volunteer labour force.

It is important to note that these ABS projections are not predictions or forecasts. They illustrate what would happen to Queensland’s population if current levels of the components of population change (births, deaths and migration) were to continue (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023b). In this best-case scenario, losses in volunteer numbers are assumed to be limited to those anticipated from demographic changes alone. Any additional supply-side losses would need to be offset by government intervention and alternative forms of community goodwill.



Given the established context that volunteering participation is expected to decline by 0.8% over the next 20 years, we make four assumptions about how this reduction will proportionately diminish the value created by volunteering.

1. The resources previously allocated to volunteering by individuals and organisations will be redirected elsewhere. This means there is no net economic impact, as their funds are spent in other sectors of the economy (substituted) rather than on volunteering.
2. Employers will lose the productivity gains that stemmed from their employees' volunteering. These benefits include enhanced skills, improved teamwork, and increased morale, all of which positively impact workplace efficiency and effectiveness. With fewer employees engaging in volunteering, these indirect productivity boosts are assumed to diminish proportionately.
3. The volunteer labour lost can readily be replaced by paid workers at current market rates, ensuring no loss to Queenslanders' quality of life. The state would bear this expense. A concurrent assumption is that there is no increase in demand for volunteer services over the period.
4. The personal well-being benefits that volunteers gain from their participation, such as improved mental health, increased life satisfaction, and a stronger sense of community, will be lost. We assume that as volunteering decreases, these positive personal outcomes will also decline proportionately.

Applying a discount rate of 7.0% (Office of Best Practice Regulation, 2020), the net present value of losses under this scenario would be \$4.2 billion over 20 years, or an average of \$211.6 million each year.

Optimistically assuming that the services lost can be replaced by market labour – which would be necessary to maintain Queenslanders' current quality of life

## **SCENARIO 2: Steady decline**

This scenario models a moderate decline, with volunteers lost at a constant rate of 0.5% per year, over and above the organic demographic decline of 0.8%. This would result in a net loss, after 20 years, of 670,000 volunteers in Queensland, or 10.8% of the future volunteer workforce.

This scenario also assumes the following:

1. Only 75% of the resources previously allocated to volunteering by individuals and organisations will be redirected elsewhere. The other 25% would be retained by investors as savings or lost to the Queensland economy as expenditure outside the State.
2. As in Scenario 1, employers will lose the productivity gains that stemmed from their employees' volunteering. These benefits include enhanced skills, improved teamwork, and increased morale, all of which positively impact workplace efficiency and effectiveness. With fewer employees engaging in volunteering, these indirect productivity boosts are assumed to diminish proportionately.
3. As in Scenario 1, the volunteer labour lost can readily be replaced by paid workers at current market rates, ensuring no loss to Queenslanders' quality of life. The state would bear this expense. A concurrent assumption is that the demand for volunteer services increases by 0.2% per year.
4. As in Scenario 1, the personal well-being benefits that volunteers gain from their participation, such as improved mental health, increased life satisfaction, and a stronger sense of community, will be lost. We assume that as volunteering decreases, these positive personal outcomes will also decline proportionately.

Applying the discount rate of 7.0%, the net present value of losses under this scenario would be \$58.0 billion over 20 years, or an average of \$2.9 billion each year.

### SCENARIO 3: Cascading loss

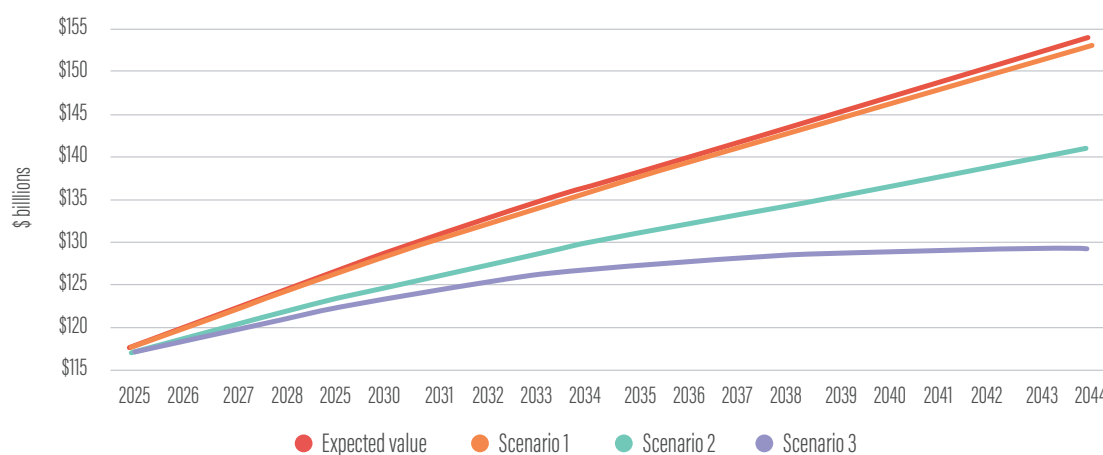
This scenario models a catastrophic decline, with volunteers lost at a rate of 0.5% per year over 20 years, compounding by a further 5.0% per year. This is over and above the organic demographic decline of 0.8% per year. This would result in a net loss, after 20 years, of 1.1 million volunteers in Queensland, or 18.1% of the future volunteer workforce.

This scenario fundamentally assumes the remnant volunteer base faces greater demands, leading to burnout, loss of job and life satisfaction, and – in extreme cases – flipping from producers to consumers of volunteer services.

1. As in Scenario 2, only 25% of the resources previously allocated to volunteering by individuals and organisations will be redirected elsewhere. The other 75% would be retained by investors as savings or lost to the Queensland economy as expenditure outside the State<sup>1</sup>.
2. Employers will not only lose the productivity gains that stemmed from their employees' volunteering but also reduce the productivity premium enjoyed by their existing volunteer workforce by 25%.
3. As in Scenario 1, the volunteer labour lost can readily be replaced by paid workers at current market rates, ensuring no loss to Queenslanders' quality of life. The state would bear this expense. A concurrent assumption is that the demand for volunteer services increases by 0.2% per year, compounding at an annual rate 2.0%.
4. The personal well-being benefits that the remaining volunteers gain from their participation are also reduced by 25%.

Applying the discount rate of 7.0%, the net present value of losses under this scenario would be \$90.3 billion over 20 years, or an average of \$4.5 billion each year.

Figure 12: Future value of volunteering to Queensland in current dollar terms (\$ billions) (2025-2044)



It is important to note that our baseline rate of volunteering participation of 64.3% is much lower than an equivalent measure taken during the pandemic year of 2020, which revealed that 75.7% of Queensland residents aged 15 and over volunteered. Even accepting that two data points don't make a trend, on that basis, the State lost 240,000 volunteers over the three years between measures. This suggests that the losses forecast in all these scenarios are conservative and understate the true loss to the community that will result from the changing volunteer landscape.

<sup>1</sup> In simple terms, this is saying that when volunteers and organisations reduce their involvement, only 75% of the resources they used to purchase will be spent on other things within Queensland. The remaining 25% won't be used elsewhere in the state's economy – it will either be saved by individuals or spent outside of Queensland. So, a quarter of what was previously invested in volunteering won't benefit the local economy anymore.

## Conclusion

Queensland's volunteer sector stands at a critical juncture, confronted by a convergence of demographic trends and socio-economic challenges that collectively strain both the supply of volunteers and the demand for volunteer services. The ageing population, increasing cultural diversity, urbanisation, emerging health issues, shifting family structures, economic changes, declining trust in institutions, and the impacts of environmental change each exert unique pressures on volunteerism within the State.

Collectively, these factors create a self-perpetuating squeeze on the volunteer workforce:

- **Fewer volunteers:** Demographic shifts and economic pressures reduce the number of individuals able or willing to volunteer.
- **Less volunteer resources:** Financial constraints limit funding for volunteer organisations, affecting recruitment, training, and retention.
- **Lower quality service delivery:** Constrained resources and overburdened volunteers lead to diminished service quality and effectiveness.
- **Greater demand for services:** Ageing populations, economic hardship, and social challenges increase the need for volunteer-provided support.

This situation presents a daunting challenge: if nothing changes, the volunteer sector must choose between scaling back current services or leaving new and expanding needs under-resourced. Existing volunteers risk being stretched to the point of burnout, potentially withdrawing their services and exacerbating the cycle of diminishing capacity amid rising demand.

Without intervention, the volunteering sector in Queensland faces a radical shakeup. The traditional models of volunteerism may no longer suffice in addressing the complex and interrelated challenges of the contemporary landscape. While this paper does not propose specific interventions, it underscores the urgent need for stakeholders – government, volunteer organisations, communities, and individuals – to recognise these trends and collaborate on sustainable solutions. Adapting to these changes is crucial for preserving the vital role of volunteerism in supporting Queensland's diverse and evolving communities.



**Without intervention, the volunteering sector in Queensland faces a radical shakeup**

## References

- Almog-Bar, M., Ashkenazi-Anor, M., Hersberger-Langloh, S. E., Compion, S., & Butcher, J. (2022). Age Is But a Number? An Exploration of Age Differences in Episodic Volunteering. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 33, 483–496.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023a). *6336.0 Working Arrangements, August 2023*. Australian Government.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023b). *3222.0 Population Projections, Australia, Table A3: Population Projections, By Age And Sex, Queensland*. Australian Government.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024a). *3101.0 National, state and territory population, Table 4. Estimated Resident Population, States and Territories (Number)*. Australian Government.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024b). *Migrant settlement outcomes*. Australian Government.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024c). *Population Estimates By LGA, Significant Urban Area, Remoteness Area, Commonwealth Electoral Division And State Electoral Division, 2001 to 2023*. Australian Government.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024d). *6202.0 Labour Force, Australia, Table 6: Labour force status by Sex, Queensland*. Australian Government.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024e). *Household and family projections*. Australian Government.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2004f). *6401.0 Consumer Price Index, Australia, Table 5: CPI: Groups, Index Numbers by Capital City*. Australian Government.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2004g). *6345.0 Wage Price Index, Australia, Table 8a: Ordinary Hourly Rates of Pay Excluding Bonuses: All Sectors by State, Original (Financial Year Index Numbers for year ended June quarter)*. Australian Government.
- Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission (2017). *Economic contribution of the Australian charity sector*. Australian Government.
- Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2023). *Families and Family Composition*. Australian Government.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Australian Burden Of Disease Study 2023*. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Volunteers*. Australian Government.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). *Australia's Health 2024: In Brief*. Australian Government.
- Australian Medical Association. (2015). *Climate Change and Human Health - 2004. Revised 2008. Revised 2015*. Australian Medical Association.
- Beyond Blue. (2024). *Annual Highlights 2023–24*. Beyond Blue.
- Brewster, K. N. (2019). *The Effect of Interpersonal and Institutional Trust on Organizational Commitment in Voluntary Settings*. University of Northern Colorado.
- Bureau of Meteorology. (2024). *State of the Climate 2024*. Australian Government.
- Cameron, C. (2006). Men in the nursery revisited: Issues of male workers and professionalism. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 7(1), 68–79.
- Centre for Corporate Public Affairs. (2009). *Impact of the Economic Downturn on Not-For-Profit Organisation Management*. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.
- Centre for Population. (2024). *OECD: Findings on the Effects of Migration on Australia's Economy*. Australian Government.

- Chapman, C. M., Hornsey, M. J., & Gillespie, N. (2021). To what extent is trust a prerequisite for charitable giving? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 50(6), 1274-1303.
- Chapman, C. M., Hornsey, M. J., Lockett, S., & Gillespie, N. (2023). Nonprofit scandals: A systematic review and conceptual framework. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 52, 278S-312S.
- Clegg, P., Deverell, J., Kuen, M., McMahon, K., Morgan, Y., Poonyth, R., & Wynn, K. (2024). *Ag2050 Scenarios Report*. CSIRO.
- Climate Action Australia. (2024). What can my community do? Retrieved November 23, 2024, from <https://environmentactionaustralia.net.au/what-can-i-do/my-community/>
- CSIRO. (2024). *Ecosystems And Biodiversity: Managing Ecosystems And Biodiversity – Land And Sea*. Australian Government.
- Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia. (2016). *Giving and volunteering in culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous communities*. Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia.
- Deloitte Access Economics. (2017). *Economic Contribution of the Australian Charity Sector*. Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.
- Department of Industry, Science and Resources. (2024). *Commonwealth Of Australia Resources And Energy Quarterly September 2024*. Australian Government.
- Ebrahim, A. (2016). The many faces of nonprofit accountability. In D. O. Renz, & R. D. Herman (Eds.), *The Jossey-Bass Handbook of Nonprofit Leadership and Management, Fourth Edition* (pp. 102-123). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Edelman. (2023). *2023 Edelman Trust Barometer Australia Report*. Edelman.
- Enhanced Lifestyles. (2024). The benefits of volunteering for people living with disability. Retrieved 11 2024, from <https://enhancedlifestyles.com.au/2024/09/25/the-benefits-of-volunteering-for-people-living-with-a-disability/>
- Foodbank Queensland. (2023). *Foodbank Queensland Impact Report*. Foodbank Queensland.
- Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal. (2021). *Heartbeat Of Rural Australia Research Study. How Are Community Groups And Not For Profit Faring?* Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal.
- Freudenstein, D., & Duane, B. (2020). *The Rise Of The Gig Economy And Its Impact On The Australian Workforce*. Actuaries Institute of Australia.
- Gaskin, K. (1999). Blurred vision: Public trust in charities. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 4(2), 163-178.
- Hall, M. H., Brock, K., Embuldeniya, D., & Lasby, D. (2003). *A Qualitative Study of the Challenges Facing Canada's Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations*. Toronto: Canadian Centre for Philanthropy.
- Helgar, M. A. (2024). *What Are Hurricane Conspiracy Theories and Why Are They Spreading?* Teen Vogue. Retrieved 23 November, 2024, from <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/hurricane-conspiracy-theories-spreading>
- Hobbs, T.D, Levitz, J. & Barrett, J. (2024). When the Hurricane-Relief Worker Turns Out To Be a Neo-Nazi. *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved 23 November, 2024, from <https://www.wsj.com/us-news/hurricane-relief-misinformation-white-supremacists-85f3df64>
- Hohenhaus, M., Rutherford, S., Boddy, J., & Borkoles, E. (2023). Climate warriors down under: Contextualising Australia's youth environment justice movement. *npj Climate Action*, 2(45)
- Hornsey, M. J., Chapman, C., Mangan, H., La Macchia, S., & Gillespie, N. (2021). The moral disillusionment model of organizational transgressions. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 172(2).
- Hughes, L., Hanna, E., & Fenwick, J. (2016). *The Silent Killer: Climate Change And The Health Impacts Of Extreme Heat*. Climate Council.

## References

- Independent Economics. (2015). *The Economic Impact of Migration*. Migration Council Australia.
- Infrastructure Australia. (2021). *A Pathway To Infrastructure Resilience, Advisory Paper 1: Opportunities For Systemic Change*. Australian Government.
- International Women's Development Agency. (2016). *The Double Burden: The Impact Of Economic Empowerment Initiatives On Women's Workload*. International Women's Development Agency.
- Kaczan, D. J., & Orgill-Meyer, J. (2020). The impact of environment change on migration: A synthesis of recent empirical insights. *Climate Change*, 158, 281–300.
- Klepper, D. (2024). *Russia amplified hurricane disinformation to drive Americans apart, researchers find*, Associated Press. Retrieved 23 November, 2024, from <https://apnews.com/article/russia-hurricane-disinformation-fema-9e37c73ab8ffa2a2d338797a1a827e57>
- Kragt, D., & Holtrop, D. (2019). Volunteering research in Australia: A narrative review. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 71(4), 342–360.
- Lamb, S., Huo, S., Walstab, A., Wade, A., Maire, Q., Doecke, E., . . . Endekov, Z. (2020). *Educational Opportunity In Australia 2020: Who Succeeds And Who Misses Out*. Melbourne: Victoria University, for the Mitchell Institute.
- Lawrance, E. L., Thompson, R., Newberry Le Vay, J., Page, L., & Jennings, N. (2022). The impact of environment change on mental health and emotional wellbeing: A narrative review of current evidence, and its implications. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 34(5), 443–498.
- Lifeline. (2024). *FY2023–24 Annual Report: The Destination For Help*. Lifeline.
- Livingstone, E., & Oliver, J. (2018). *Citizen Science In Queensland: A Review Of The Current Landscape*. Queensland Government.
- Mawhinney, S., Reinhard, J., & Lefebvre, M. (2023). *Tough Gig: Worker Perspectives On The Gig Economy*. McKell Institute Queensland.
- McDonald, P. (2024). *Understanding Australian Migration 2024*. Australian National University.
- Mehdi, T., D'Souza, C., & Polonsky, M. (2012). A study of older Australians' volunteering and quality of life: Empirical evidence and policy implications. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 24(2), 101–122.
- Mitnaul, I. (2023). *How can nonprofits reaffirm stakeholder trust in the wake of scandal?* Retrieved November 2024, from <https://lodestar.asu.edu/blog/2023/02/how-can-nonprofits-reaffirm-stakeholder-trust-wake-scandal>
- Morse, J. L., Dik, B. J., Shimizu, A. B., & Reed, K. A. (2022). Volunteerism and burnout: Does satisfaction of motives for volunteering protect against symptoms? *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 33, 229–241.
- Muller, P. C. (2020). *The State of Volunteering in Queensland, 2020*. Volunteering Queensland.
- Muller, P. C. (2023). *The State Of Volunteering In Queensland, 2023*. Volunteering Queensland.
- Muller, P. C. (2024a). *Rural and Regional Volunteering*. The Centre for Volunteering.
- Muller, P. C. (2024b). *The State Of Volunteering Queensland 2024: Older People*. Volunteering Queensland.
- NeuroLaunch. (2024). *Rural brain drain: Causes, consequences, and solutions for struggling communities*. Retrieved 24 November, 2024, from <https://neurolaunch.com/rural-brain-drain/>
- Office of Best Practice Regulation. (2020). *Cost-Benefit Analysis: Guidance Note*. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australian Government.
- Productivity Commission. (2006). *Economic Impacts Of Migration And Population Growth*. Australian Government.
- Queensland Council of Social Services. (2024). *QCOSS Living Affordability in Queensland 2024*. Queensland Council of Social Services.

- Queensland Government. (2024a). *Queensland future environment, regional explorer dashboard - CMIP6*. Retrieved 23 November, 2024, from <https://www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/qld-future-environment/regions-cmip6/#responseTab2>
- Queensland Government. (2024b). *The health of Queenslanders: Chronic diseases*. Queensland Government.
- Queensland Government Statistician's Office. (2016). *Population change in Queensland to Census 2016*. Queensland Government.
- Queenslanders with Disability Network. (2023). *Successfully Engaging Volunteers With Disability*. Queensland: Volunteering Queensland.
- Relationships Australia. (2018). *Is Australia Experiencing An Epidemic Of Loneliness?* Relationships Australia.
- Reserve Bank of Australia. (2023). *Statement on Monetary Policy – November 2023*. Reserve Bank of Australia.
- Royal Commission Into Aged Care Quality And Safety. (2021). *Final Report: Care, Dignity and Respect*. Australian Government.
- Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. (2017). *Final Report*. Australian Government.
- Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme. (2023). *Report*. Australian Government.
- Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. (2023). *Final Report*. Australian Government.
- Sefora, N. M., & Teodora, T. (2024). Volunteers trust in organizational mission, leadership and activities efficiency. *The Annals of the University of Oradea Economic Sciences*, 25(1), 995-1001.
- Sinyor, M., Silverman, M., Pirkis, J., & Hawton, K. (2024). The effect of economic downturn, financial hardship, unemployment, and relevant government responses on suicide. *The Lancet Public Health*, 9(10), 802-806.
- Steffen, W., Mallon, K., Kompas, T., Dean, A., & Rice, M. (2019). *Compound Costs: How Climate Change Is Damaging Australia's Economy*. Climate Council of Australia.
- The Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience. (2022). *Select Committee On Australia's Disaster Resilience Boots On The Ground: Raising Resilience*. Parliament of Australia.
- Venema, E., Vlaskamp, C., & Otten, S. (2018). The role of volunteers in the social integration of people with intellectual disabilities. *Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 5(2), 154-197.
- Volunteering Australia. (2020). *Volunteering sidelined in Federal Budget*. Volunteering Australia.
- Wang, J. (2024). *Treasurer Jim Chalmers casts grim forecast on revenue figures due to softening labour market, falling iron ore prices*. Retrieved November 20, 2024, from <https://www.news.com.au/finance/economy/australian-economy/treasurer-jim-chalmers-casts-grim-forecast-on-revenue-figures-due-to-softening-labour-market-falling-iron-ore-prices/news-story/5970c11ad3dcff724ede364521749d1>
- Whittaker, J., McLennan, B., & Handmer, J. (2015). A review of informal volunteerism in emergencies and disasters: Definition, opportunities and challenges. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 13, 358-368.
- Wood, A. J., Graham, M., Lehdonvirta, V., & Hjorth, I. (2019). Good gig, bad gig: Autonomy and algorithmic control in the global gig economy. *Work, Employment and Society*, 33(1), 56-75.

# THE **FIVE** FORCES THAT ARE CHANGING VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND

By **PAUL MULLER**

*for Volunteering Queensland*

Prior to founding the Center for Project Innovation, Paul enjoyed 15 years of senior management experience across Australia, Asia and Europe in a wide range of project-driven businesses. He currently advises a diverse community of public, private and not-for-profit organisations on management issues relating to strategy, risk, projects, operations, marketing and people.

In the early 2000's, Paul was engaged at the Australian Innovation Research Centre as a PhD scholar. A widely published author, he has pioneered new approaches to research in volunteering, sport and the creative industries, and has presented his unique perspective on value as a keynote speaker at international conferences and events. Paul has a particular interest in challenging institutional assumptions and improving the quality of executive decision-making and is excited to now be mentoring and inspiring the next generation of creative and critical thinkers. Paul authored the 2024 State of Volunteering in Queensland report.



**VOLUNTEERING  
QUEENSLAND**

[reception@volunteeringqld.org.au](mailto:reception@volunteeringqld.org.au)

07 3002 7600

Level 12, 127 Creek St,  
Brisbane QLD 4000



**volunteering**  
queensland