

Philanthropy inquiry
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601
www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/philanthropy

12 June 2023

REF: Productivity Commission Philanthropy Inquiry

Dear Productivity Commission,

Thank-you for conducting the Philanthropy Inquiry, which is certainly important and timely. I want to especially thank you for the terms of the Inquiry which include the 'in kind' donation of volunteering.

I am the Executive Officer of Community Information & Support Victoria. CISVic is the peak body representing 55 local community information and support services across 64 sites in Victoria, that are highly dependent on a volunteer workforce. Before COVID, the ratio of volunteers to paid staff across member agencies was 11 to 1. Nearly a third of member agencies are entirely volunteer-run.

Member agencies provide vital support to vulnerable people needing help with a range of personal and financial matters. They are deeply embedded in their communities and are trusted and welcoming places where people can seek help. Importantly, our member agencies are often the 'first port of call' for people who don't know what is available. CISVic is also the lead agency in a consortium of 29 local centres delivering federally funded Emergency Relief. In the year 2021-2022, we distributed over \$3.2 million in emergency relief to community members from 34 sites.

In recent times, the demand for Community Information and Support services has escalated. This is due to a range of factors, but paramount is the rising cost of living. Too many people just don't have enough income to cover the basics like housing, food and utilities, and they go to our member agencies for help. More and more, these are people who have never accessed support services before. At the same time, the volunteer capacity of most agencies is decreasing, while the complexity of problems that people are presenting with is increasing e.g. family violence, homelessness and mental health issues. This places a huge burden on the remaining volunteers performing the role of Community Support Worker, even with the provision of certified training by CISVic (in association with the Salvation Army Eva Burrows College).

While CISVic agencies evidently provide an *essential* service for community members, most agencies receive no funding for the coordination of volunteers, including for recruitment, induction, support, ongoing training, mentoring, and debriefing. Thus, agencies are struggling to continue their vital support, and many staff and

volunteers are close to burning out. Our sector is certainly in crisis and badly in need of funding for the coordination and management of volunteers i.e. volunteer labour does not come 'free'.

This submission addresses all three Terms of Reference of the Philanthropy Inquiry, with a focus on *volunteering*:

1. analyse trends in philanthropic giving in Australia and the drivers of these trends
2. identify opportunities for, and obstacles to, increasing philanthropic giving in Australia
3. recommend ways to respond to these opportunities and obstacles.

In addressing these Terms of Reference, this submission draws heavily from three main sources:

- i. **Feedback from volunteers and Volunteer Coordinators at certain member agencies**, written for this Inquiry (attached in full). The agencies they are based at are:
 - Laverton Community Integrated Services
 - Make a difference Dingley Village Inc
 - Monash Oakleigh Community Support
 - Mornington Community Information & Support Centre Inc
 - South East Community Links
 - Southern Peninsula Community Support
 - Whittlesea Community Connections Inc
- ii. **Research conducted by CISVic for the evaluation of CISVic's 'Emerging Stronger' project.** (Emerging Stronger is an initiative of the Victorian Government, with \$1 million granted for projects to support local partnerships and innovation projects to re-engage volunteers, broaden the volunteer base, and strengthen volunteering in local communities). The research included a literature review and various forms of consultation with member agencies at different stages of the project. It was guided by a reference group with representatives from member agencies using an 'action-research' methodology. Our report is in its final stages of completion, and could be made available for the Commission in the future on request.
- iii. **CISVic's 2020 Volunteer Census** conducted through a member survey.

1. Trends in philanthropic giving (volunteering) in Australia and the drivers of these trends

General trends in volunteering identified in the *literature review* for CISVic's Emerging Stronger project included the following points:

- Volunteering has been declining for several years, and this trend was only amplified during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Volunteering has not returned to pre-COVID levels and is unlikely to do so without concerted efforts.
- Community service organisations are suffering from a decline in volunteering, with most requiring more volunteers. In particular, CISVic member agencies have reported losing many volunteers in a very short time frame due to the pandemic.
- Volunteers are more likely to be older and have a higher level of education, amongst other characteristics. In recent times there has been an increase in young people wanting to volunteer.
- COVID negatively affected the capacity of organisations to recruit, support and manage volunteers.

- Barriers for people starting or continuing volunteering include: out-of-pocket expenses, lack of flexibility in roles, demanding life circumstances, and being put in traumatising situations without adequate support.
- Incentives to start or continue volunteering include: a wish to contribute to the community and help others, a sense of purpose, connecting with others and a feeling of belonging, access to training and professional development, a feeling of self-worth and confidence, being treated with respect, some autonomy in carrying out tasks, and experience to obtain paid employment.
- It is important to proactively take an interest in volunteer aspirations and motivations in recruitment, and in the allocation or creation of roles.
- Word-of-mouth and a personal approach are effective methods of recruitment often used by organisations, even while more organisations are using social media and their own website to recruit volunteers.

Trends in volunteering for CISVic member agencies identified through *consultations* for the Emerging Stronger project included the following points:

- Most agencies reported a dramatic drop in volunteer capacity since COVID, with only a couple of exceptions. Many volunteers who left during the lockdowns did not return. Many agencies are thus struggling to meet community needs with a drastically depleted workforce.
- Several agencies are recruiting a different cohort of volunteers, including younger people, people from different cultural backgrounds and students (i.e. not on placement, or prior to placement).
- Volunteers who returned were sometimes working more hours than before to make up for the shortfall in personnel, and/or they were being confronted by much more serious and complex presenting issues, often with no viable referral options due to the inadequacy of specialist services such as those for housing, mental health and family violence.
- Some volunteers who returned were not working the same number of shifts as before, thereby lowering the volunteer capacity of the agency.
- Agency capacity to support volunteers was an issue, particularly for mentoring. This was a particular issue with a younger cohort of volunteers who tend to volunteer for shorter stints of time. In these cases the increased turnover requires much more agency resources for training, induction and mentoring.

CISVic 2020 Volunteer Census – learnings from the time of COVID

Overall, volunteers continue to gain a sense of community, purpose and improved personal well-being from volunteering at a CISVic member agency. The make-up and composition of our volunteer workforce were also relatively like that of 2018 and typically consistent with the state-wide volunteer profile.

A rare occurrence in COVID-19 gave us a unique opportunity to consider our reliance on our volunteers. With predominantly older volunteer workforce and the health risk, COVID-19 posed for this cohort, limitations and disruptions in service delivery were felt. A move to increased diversity among our volunteer base may allow for a more agile and flexible response during unforeseeable events in the future.

In response to COVID-19, CISVic, like many other Community Services, accessed the State Governments Work For Victoria initiative to employ workers to fill the gap felt by the departure of our volunteers. This opportunity provided our sector with many benefits and increased capacity, including additional support and mentoring for our volunteers. CISVic and our members would welcome resources to allow this to continue.

Motivations (personal drivers) for volunteering in CISVic member agencies that were provided for this Philanthropy Inquiry (as attached) included the following points:

- Social connection and a feeling of belonging, with the chance to work together toward a common goal for the benefit of others.
- A sense of purpose and the opportunity to help people in need and give back to the community.
- Keeping busy and active; new opportunities for learning and keeping active both physically and mentally.
- Opportunity to share talents and skills.
- A sense of self-worth and well-being.

Volunteer quotes

I think the benefits of volunteering are the gains for everyone involved: satisfaction, social connection, assistance and support. When I retired recently, I wanted to continue to be involved in community in some way/s. I also wanted to contribute more to issues important to me, like climate change...

... I have worked all my life and wanted to give back to the community. I have been lucky in my life and I wanted to have the opportunity to assist others who are less fortunate in their lives. When I retired, volunteering is something I wanted to do.

I think the benefits are networking, making friends and a chance to improve my English. I can also learn about Australian culture.

Benefits for agencies, communities and people that were provided for this Inquiry (as attached) included the following points:

- Volunteers enable services to provide an essential and invaluable service for people in the community who are struggling with a range of issues, including the inability to cover basic costs of living.
- Volunteers report an elevated sense of empathy and compassion for people who are struggling, as well as the many benefits listed under 'motivations' above.

Volunteer Coordinator quote

Huge well-being benefits for volunteers and essential benefit for communities. At Mornington Community Information & Support Centre 130 volunteers contribute almost 15,000 hours of volunteer time per year – the equivalent of over \$600,000 in wages! Volunteers make our essential work providing emergency relief and support services possible.

2. Opportunities for, and obstacles to, increasing philanthropic giving (volunteering) in Australia.

Obstacles

Obstacles for CISVic member agencies identified through a survey for the Emerging Stronger project are listed below. Specifically, Volunteer Coordinators most frequently nominated as *challenging* or *very challenging* these factors (in order):

- Meeting higher community demand for support with less volunteers.
- Not having enough volunteers.
- Difficulty attracting and recruiting new volunteers.
- Lack of resources for ongoing support and training for existing volunteers.
- Existing volunteers working longer hours, with risk of burnout.
- Volunteers leaving since the pandemic and not returning.
- Lack of resources to recruit and screen new volunteers.

Also nominated as *challenging* or *very challenging* by a majority of respondents (nine out of 16) were:

- Lack of resources to induct and train new volunteers.
- Older volunteers are uncomfortable with using technology.
- Having enough time to create a positive experience for volunteers.

Obstacles identified by volunteers and Volunteer Coordinators for this Philanthropy Inquiry (as attached) included the following:

Obstacle for member agencies:

1. Difficulty in recruiting new volunteers for most member agencies, and the very high level of resourcing required for recruitment, induction, training, mentoring, support, debriefing, and fostering a volunteer community at the agency.

Obstacles for volunteers:

2. Complex needs of people seeking help, which can be challenging. This is especially the case in the absence of adequate funding in areas such as housing, education costs, and mental health, in that people seeking help may not be able to get the assistance they need. This can be especially stressful in agencies without paid staff to provide debriefing.
3. Requirement to undertake the nationally accredited 7-day Community Support Worker course.
4. Requirements for digital literacy, a particular barrier for many older people.
5. Onerous paperwork entailed in becoming a volunteer.
6. Out-of-pocket expenses such as petrol.

Opportunities

Opportunities relating to volunteering for CISVic member agencies identified through *consultations* for the Emerging Stronger project are outlined below. Specifically, these are successful strategies that were used by some agencies to address the volunteering crisis.

Successful strategies used by member agencies.

- Foster a good experience so that volunteers feel supported and a part of the organisation's community.

- Have conversations with volunteers about their interests and aspirations and try to accommodate these in the design and allocation of roles.
- Implement staffing changes with more paid staff, engagement of new volunteer cohorts, and with trainees, students and unemployed people.
- Make operational changes such as remote support, booking systems, with the support of technology for assessments and bookings.
- Proactively market the agency and the volunteer opportunities it offers in the local community. Use personal, face-to-face avenues to do this.

These strategies will be included with others in the Final Report for the Emerging Stronger project.

3. Ways to respond to these opportunities and obstacles

The Emerging Stronger research has reinforced the first-hand experience and knowledge of CISVic and member agencies that funding for volunteer coordination is urgently needed. Information about our campaign for this is contained in the attached proposal and flyer.

As stated in the introduction to this submission, our member agencies are providing a vital and essential service to people in the community who often present in a state of crisis. CISVic believes that government needs to actively support and resource philanthropic giving, particularly in relation to volunteering. The federal government-funded Emergency Relief program (circa \$20 million p.a.) is reliant on volunteers for delivery yet provides little scope to resource this workforce. CISVic has recently actively advocated for resourcing – paid staff and professional development opportunities for volunteers. The demand is huge and growing, while agency capacity to meet the demand is depleting. Many agencies are ‘on their knees’ and quite a few volunteers have left due to ‘burnout’. Many members are telling us they lack the capacity to keep providing unfunded recruitment and management of volunteers and that the situation is unsustainable (also remembering that about 30 per cent of our agencies are entirely volunteer-run).

While CISVic has long-held experience and expertise in supporting agencies that deliver services by volunteers, enhanced by our research (Volunteer Census surveys, as well as current Emerging Stronger research), much of our ‘intelligence’ cannot be implemented without funding for paid coordinators. Without such funding many of our member agencies are in crisis, reflecting the state of crisis of the community members they are trying to assist. As we are providing an essential service in the context of the well-known cost-of-living crisis for many people, we believe that it is incumbent on the government to provide this much-needed funding.

Thank you for your attention to this submission. If you have any questions or wish to discuss any of the points raised, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Your sincerely,

Kate Wheller
Executive Officer

Attachments:

1. Proposal for a Paid Coordinator in CISVic Agencies
2. Coordination Funding Required for Every CISVic Member Agency – Mar 2023
3. Federal Election Ask: Funding for Workers - 2022
4. Volunteer Census 2020 Full Report
5. Volunteer Census 2020