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Volunteering in Queensland: a statistical snapshot

Queensland has a long history of volunteering, with many Queenslanders taking part in activities such as church-based services, local sporting and youth clubs, emergency services and informal help to neighbours and local communities. Volunteering underpins strong and vibrant communities. In 2006, volunteering was worth about \$13.4 billion to the Queensland economy.

There are two main surveys undertaken that provide information about volunteering: the Voluntary Work Survey (VWS) and the Queensland Regional Household Survey (QRHS). The QRHS data complements the VWS, by providing additional information on informal volunteering activity in Queensland (i.e. support for unrelated persons not provided through organisations).

This snapshot is based on the results from those surveys.

Definition of a volunteer

There is no single definition of volunteering, and measuring volunteer activity is not a simple process.

In the VWS 2010, a volunteer was defined as someone who, in the previous 12 months, willingly gave unpaid help, in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group.

The QRHS also recognises volunteering which occurs outside an organisation for the benefit of others or the community. Helping a neighbour or a friend can be volunteering. This form of volunteering is

frequently referred to as “informal” volunteering.

Volunteering in Queensland

In Queensland, the VWS estimated that one out of three people participated in voluntary work in Queensland in 2010. This equates to about 1.2 million adults who volunteered in 2010 as compared with 1.1 million people in 2006.

According to the QRHS, approximately two out of three Queenslanders are engaged in some form of formal or informal volunteer activity each year¹:

- About two out of three people who volunteer undertake voluntary work through organisations and provide direct personal assistance to unrelated persons.
- In Queensland, more than 50 per cent of voluntary work for individuals and more than 33% of voluntary work in organisations is less than 10 days per annum.
- Queenslanders who volunteer both as individuals and for organisations usually spend less than four hours per day in this activity. In 2011, almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of Queenslanders who provided assistance to unrelated people and voluntary work in organisations, worked less than four hours/day.

¹ QRHS incorporated questions on volunteering in 2009, 2011 and 2012.

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Who volunteers?

Volunteering patterns vary with age, life stage and gender. Queenslanders of all ages are active in volunteering work however people aged 45–54 years were in the age group most likely to volunteer (47 per cent). The majority of these volunteers are married with children, and their volunteering activities reflect associated family commitments.

People are more likely to volunteer if they were exposed to volunteering as a child either through their parents or through volunteering themselves: in 2010, 66 per cent of volunteers reported that their parents had done some voluntary work compared to 44 per cent of non-volunteers. Over 43 per cent of adult volunteers had undertaken some voluntary work as a child compared to 27 per cent of adult non-volunteers.

Gender

Queensland women volunteer at a slightly higher rate (36 per cent) than Queensland men (35 per cent). This is consistent with previous survey results and other states in Australia.

Younger people

Volunteering among younger people in Queensland has increased significantly since the mid 1990s, to 27 per cent. There was a decline in volunteering in the 18-24 year age group between 2006 (39 per cent) and 2010 (25 per cent).

Older people

In Queensland in 2010, the volunteer rates for people in the 55–64 years age group and the 65 and over age group were 38 per cent and 33 per cent respectively.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) volunteers

Across Australia, the rate of volunteering amongst people born overseas (28 per cent) or those who speak a language other than English at home (25 per cent) is generally lower than those born in Australia (39 per cent) or those who speak English at home (39 per cent). This difference reflects some of the barriers to mainstream volunteering experienced by people from CALD backgrounds. These volunteers tend participate informally within their own ethnic group and their volunteering contributions are often not recorded.

What type of volunteering?

In Australia, sport and physical recreation organisations were the most common type that people volunteered for, followed by religious and community/welfare organisations. The age groups which most commonly volunteered with sport and recreation organisations were 35-44 years and 45-54 years. People aged 65 years and over most commonly volunteered for welfare and community organisations.



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Interesting facts about volunteers

- Volunteers are more satisfied with their lives: 82 per cent of volunteers reported that they were delighted, pleased or mostly satisfied with their lives, compared to 75 per cent of non-volunteers.
- Volunteers are more likely to trust others: Of people who volunteered, 62 per cent either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that most people could be trusted. In comparison less than half of non-volunteers (49 per cent) agreed with that statement.
- Volunteers participate more in community activities: Volunteers (82 per cent) were much more likely than non-volunteers (55 per cent) to have attended a community event in the last 6 months, and were almost three times more likely to have ever provided a service or activity in the local area (44 per cent compared to 15 per cent).

Sources

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Further information

Contact the Queensland Government on 13 QGOV (7468) or email volunteering@communities.qld.gov.au.