



Encouraging the Return of Volunteers to Barwon Health

Acknowledgement

We Acknowledge the Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Owners of the Land, Waterways and Skies. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

We Acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are part of our Greater Geelong community.

We would not be able to be on this journey without support and would like to thank the following people who guided us throughout this project:

Barwon Health

- Our sponsor Anna Burgess (Chief Strategy & Planning Officer) made time to answer many questions along the way and provide us with encouragement and steer to ensure we were pointed in the right direction when responding to the project brief.
- Barwon Health team members, Emma Jones (Manager, Access & Resource Unit) and Kate Bibby (Director Public Affairs and Communications) provided information for our report.

Leaders for Geelong

- Catherine Bell (Leadership Portfolio Facilitator, Committee for Geelong) and Karen MacAdie (Leadership Portfolio Coordinator, Committee for Geelong) who gave us the tools to be successful.
- The Committee for Geelong board, executive, members and supporters attended many of our training and presentation days to give us feedback and help improve the quality of our content.
- Our Mentor Kathy McEwan (Director of Strategic Advice, National Disability Insurance Agency) provided valuable insights and recommendations to execute a smooth project.

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Contents

Acknowledgement	1
About Us	4
Our Project Team	5
Foreword by Barwon Health	7
Executive Summary	9
Background	12
Project Purpose	14
Stakeholder Engagement	14
Our Approach & Deliverables	15
Key Insights	18
Our Case Studies	26
Opportunities	33
Recommendations	35
Project Challenges and Limitations	41
Group Reflection	42
Conclusion	43
Appendices	45



About Us

We are a team of four clever and curious participants who are all keen to make a positive impact in our local communities.

Why we chose this project

Each member of our team was interested in this project as we are all current or former volunteers. We understand the importance volunteering plays in driving positive social and economic outcomes for society and our local Geelong community.

Our interest in volunteering has given each of us a sense of purpose and satisfaction above and beyond what we get from our day-to-day jobs and as such, we were keen to see if we could use our collective experience to help solve the challenge of encouraging the return of volunteers to Barwon Health.

Our Project Team



Jeremy McKenna

Manager, KPMG

Jeremy is an experienced, hard-working professional who works closely with a diverse group of clients in an advisory role. He has a strong base in tax and business advisory knowledge to assist clients. He enjoys building strong relationships with his clientele and is always open to learning and further developing his skills. Having previously worked in Melbourne, Jeremy is returning to his hometown to build a professional network within the Geelong community and assist with KPMG's move down to Geelong and establishment within the market.



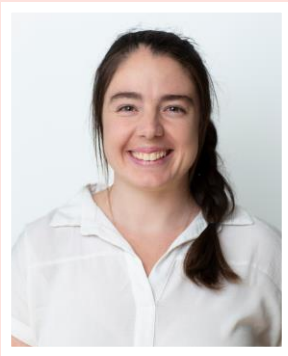
Esther Monks

Regional Finance Lead, Workday

A passionate change maker with over 18 years in finance, transformation and strategy, Esther now applies her experience supporting the Office of the CFO to embrace the shift to cloud including leveraging trustworthy artificial intelligence and machine learning. Esther's curiosity about how intrinsic motivations shape how people view and participate in both the workforce and community drew her to this project with Barwon Health as her experiences as a volunteer board member of the Amy Gillett Foundation (a cycling safety organisation), foster carer and local blood donor have reinforced the importance of volunteering for social, economic and wellbeing outcomes for the region.

“Volunteering is one of the best things that I have done”

- Project survey respondent



Nicole Radford

Project Manager - Supporting People with an Intellectual Disability to Access Health (SPIDAH), Western Victoria Primary Health Network

As an aspiring community health leader, Nicole recognises the vital role of health care services to support individual and community wellbeing. She wanted to seize this opportunity to support identifying approaches to attract a diverse volunteer workforce to align with her value for inclusion and eager interest in the health sector. Nicole has previously volunteered as a Community Partner in a health service and she wanted to draw on this experience to support this project and Barwon Health to continue delivering high-quality healthcare for the greater Geelong region.



Lana Rodrigues

Community Safety & Engagement Officer, CFA

A transformation consultant with over two decades of experience in delivering big, complex projects around the world. Lana was led by her enthusiasm for working in her local community to volunteer with the CFA and shortly thereafter was elected Community Safety & Engagement Officer. Her interest in this project is sparked by a drive to understand what motivates volunteers so that she can apply that knowledge within her local brigade.

Foreword by Barwon Health

Barwon Health was delighted to have one of the Leaders for Geelong teams take up our proposal to explore the topic of 'encouraging the return of volunteers to the healthcare setting'.

Volunteers have been an integral part of Barwon Health over many years, including playing a role in the foundation of the hospital. Volunteers benefit patients and their families through their kindness and compassion, and staff value their contributions.

Throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions volunteer programs were suspended at Barwon Health, and the recruitment of new volunteers was ceased. Now that restrictions have eased, and as we learn to live with COVID-19, Barwon Health has welcomed volunteers back.

Barwon Health is committed to reinvigorating this program and this report provides practical recommendations for us to consider. We are grateful for the fresh set of eyes that the Leaders for Geelong project team have brought to the problem. The use of survey data for under-represented health service volunteer demographics as well as case studies from other health service providers are very valuable as we consider how we best reflect the community we serve through our volunteers.

We currently have approximately 200 active volunteers in our program, and look forward to considering how the recommendations in this report can help us achieve our target of 400 active volunteers across our health service.



Frances Diver
Chief Executive
Barwon Health



“Volunteers have been an integral part of Barwon Health over many years, including playing a role in the foundation of the hospital”

– Chief Executive Officer, Barwon Health

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the Geelong community to many impacts including restrictions to the services volunteers could provide at Barwon Health. This resulted in an **85% decline** in their volunteer numbers.

The Volunteer landscape

Our project scope was to provide recommendations on how to encourage the return of volunteers to Barwon Health. To do this we explored the Healthcare and volunteering landscapes in order to understand both the challenges and the potential opportunities available to Barwon Health.

Our findings showed us that volunteers are motivated by different reasons.

Organisations that understand their volunteers' motivations are able to improve their attraction and retention of volunteers by better "matching" the volunteer experience to the services being provided.

In health services which are featured as case studies in this report, volunteers predominantly skew to older demographics, with over 60-year-olds of Caucasian descent being the most significant demographic represented. Some health services reported populations of university-aged students.

These volunteers were often using volunteering to support the development of real-world skills whilst studying. We found that it was not typical to see other demographics represented, with few examples including broad multicultural representation, or encompassing people of varying abilities. Secondary school students were only represented where specific programs existed. None of the health services interviewed had current corporate volunteering programs.

Volunteers in health services typically provided support in a *non-skilled* context, with activities such as conducting patient surveys, wayfinding and 'making cups of tea and having a chat' being common. Support was generally provided by volunteers in a shift pattern with morning or afternoon shifts (typically 2-4 hours in duration) offered Monday to Friday.

With all of these in mind, we distilled our research and findings to a set of four key challenges, each with a number of corresponding recommendations.

Challenges and Recommendations for Barwon Health

In relaunching the volunteer program post covid, Barwon Health has the opportunity to engage with a much broader volunteer base in the Geelong Community, and also to ensure existing volunteers have a satisfying volunteer experience that aligns to their motivations when providing unpaid services.

We identified the following key focus areas for improvement (the 'challenges') and proposed a set of corresponding recommendations:

Challenge theme #1: Compassion fatigue

Recommendation: Connect and Celebrate Volunteers. This recommendation provides suggestions on how information might be presented to volunteers in a more personal and engaging way. It also explores the opportunity to raise the profile of volunteers at Barwon Health.

Challenge theme #2: Onboarding Gap for Volunteers and Staff

Recommendation: Enhance onboarding. This recommendation is supported by the research on motivations for volunteering which suggests Volunteers are matched to opportunities and Staff are supported to make the best use of volunteers and the skills they bring.

Challenge theme #3: Employment pathways unclear

Recommendation: Clarify pathways to employment. This recommendation is based on information about participants who are studying in a related discipline and how best to communicate with them through their learning institutions.

Challenge theme #4: Underutilised volunteer segments

Recommendation: Design targeted programs. This recommendation is based on the insight that volunteers are not from a single amorphous group and designing specific programs could be a way to encourage under-represented groups to participate.



“I benefit from volunteering by gaining knowledge and skills, working within the community, and being a part of a group of people with similar motivations and interests”

- Project survey respondent

Background

For more than 50 years, volunteers have supported the vital work of Barwon Health and have enhanced the health services provided by the public health service provider.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Barwon Health had over 1300 dedicated volunteers who donated more than 100,000 hours of their time each year. Volunteers provided companionship and support for patients and families, across all departments of the organisation, including mental health, aged care, rehabilitation, acute care and community health. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Barwon Health volunteer programs were suspended and recruitment of new volunteers ceased.

According to the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing data, 15.4% of the G21 Region population reported doing some form of voluntary work in 2021. This was a smaller proportion than Regional VIC (17.3%), and down from 22.0% in the 2016 census. Reasons cited ranged from lockdowns and COVID-19 distancing measures.

G21 Region - Persons aged 15+ (Usual residence)	2021			2016			Change
Volunteer status	Number	%	Regional VIC %	Number	%	Regional VIC %	2016 to 2021
Not a volunteer	231,803	78.7	75.5	175,971	70.1	66.1	+55,832
a Volunteer	45,387	15.4	17.3	55,127	22.0	24.3	-9,740
Volunteer work not stated	17,484	5.9	7.3	19,984	8.0	9.6	-2,500
Total persons aged 15+	294,674	100.0	100.0	251,082	100.0	100.0	+43,592

Figure 1: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2016 and 2021. Compiled and presented by .id (informed decisions)

In May 2023, it was estimated that the number of active volunteers was at 200 people, and Barwon Health had set a target to expand this to 400 or more. Barwon Health has also recently reopened its application process for potential new volunteers.

Barwon Health is looking to relaunch its volunteering program. In doing so, they would like to ensure that consideration is given to best practices in the design of how to attract volunteers. The organisation would also like the refreshed program to be grounded in the context the City of Greater Geelong brings in relation to “place”, community and diversity. Finally, they would like their volunteer demographic to better reflect the community they serve.

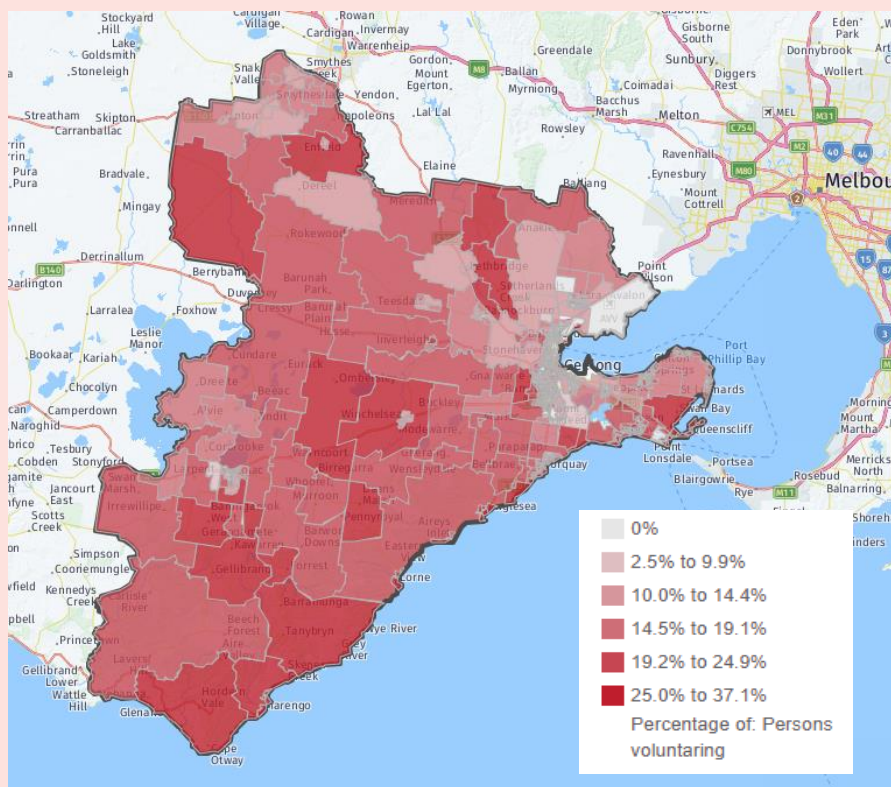


Figure 2: G21 Region, People who volunteer | Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Usual residence, Persons

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to provide Barwon Health insights into best practices and innovations that could inform its approach to attracting new volunteers and re-engaging former volunteers.

Our specific focus areas have included:

1. Understanding the motivation and benefits of volunteers.
2. Describing the benefits (for potential volunteers & for Barwon Health).
3. Exploring pathways from volunteering to employment opportunities at Barwon Health.
4. Illustrating the benefits for regional communities and local organisations (for example livability, equity and wellbeing).

Stakeholder Engagement

There are several key stakeholder groups who may be interested in the outcomes of this project, including :

- Committee for Geelong
- Barwon Health Stakeholders:
 - Executive team
 - Volunteer team and volunteer management
- External stakeholders:
 - Barwon Health consumers (patients, family/carers)
 - Barwon Health active and former volunteers
 - Organisations that may wish to partner with Barwon Health to augment their volunteer strategy

Our Approach & Deliverables

This project contained two distinct phases, outlined below.

Phase One – Conduct Research

In order to understand the volunteering landscape in the Health Services sector we conducted three different forms of research to provide different insights:

Desktop literature review

- We conducted a review of relevant content including academic research, industry and peak body strategies and other health services volunteering websites. A detailed list of sources referenced in this report can be found in the Appendix.
- Our literature review focused on the four areas outlined in our project purpose. Refer to the section “Key Findings” for a summary of our learnings.

Health Service Institution Interviews

- We conducted comprehensive interviews with volunteer coordinators representing three different Health Services.
- Through these interviews we endeavoured to understand any similarities or differences in their approach to attracting, retaining and supporting volunteers, and how this translated into their volunteer profile.
- Case studies corresponding with each of these interviews can be found in the “Key Findings” section.

We also conducted informal discussions with current Barwon Health volunteers at their National Volunteer Week function.

Volunteer Survey

- We surveyed 100 volunteers from a range of backgrounds and organisations to obtain an understanding of volunteer motives and preferences.
- Basic demographic data is shown on the chart below
- A summary of the key insights is highlighted throughout the Key Findings section of the report, detailed results can be found in the Appendix to this report.

Throughout our approach to exploring this challenge, we also sought to align with Regional Development Victoria's Barwon Regional Partnership's Priorities by focusing on the areas of:

- Liveability – Vibrant, liveable cities and towns
- Equity & Wellbeing – Supported, fair and nurturing Barwon communities
- Collaboration – between fellow volunteers and consumers

Phase Two – Develop Recommendations Report

The second phase included the development of hypotheses relating to the challenges, opportunities and finally recommendations Barwon Health may wish to consider. These have been documented in the "Opportunities" and "Recommendations" sections of this report, which form the main deliverable for Barwon Health.

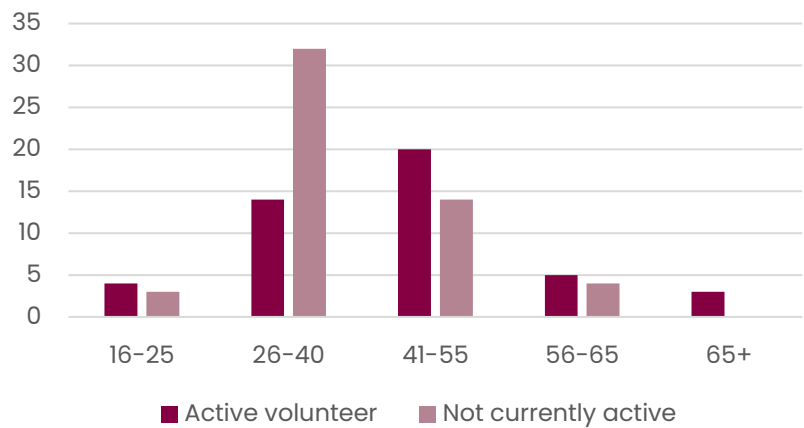


Figure 3: Survey respondents current volunteering status, by age



“Former volunteer roles have helped me to build confidence and skills in different areas”

- Project survey respondent



Key Insights

As noted in Our Approach, our investigations provided learning and insights into each of the four areas listed within our project purpose.

Four focus areas:

1. Understanding the motivation of volunteering
2. Describing the benefits of volunteering
3. Exploring the pathways to employment for volunteers, and
4. Illustrating the benefits for the local and regional communities

1. Understanding the motivation of volunteering

People consider volunteering for many different reasons. A volunteer's propensity to be both attracted to a position, and then remain an active volunteer relies on their experiences satisfying, or matching, their motivation.

Research by Dwyer et. al. "Sources of Volunteer Motivation Transformational Leadership and Personal Motives Influence Volunteer Outcomes" outlines research by Clary et al. (1998) which identified 6 broad "functions" that could categorise the motivation for volunteerism. These were:

1. Expressing humanitarian values;
2. Searching for understanding;
3. Obtaining career benefits;
4. Gaining protection from feelings of guilt about being more fortunate than others;
5. Enhancing feelings of self-esteem or self-worth; and
6. Fitting in with important social groups.

It is important for an organisation to understand the motivations of their volunteer cohort, to support both the attraction and retention of volunteers.

The Volunteering Research Paper "Understanding Motivations to Volunteer" found that "recruitment messages that appeal to an individual's primary motivations for volunteering are more effective and persuasive". Understanding and applying this to campaigns may enable attracting a more diverse volunteer pool and placing them in roles relevant to match their motivation. For example, a university student looking to expand their skills may be excited and motivated to work in different areas and with different people. However, a retiree wishing to express their values and find social connections may seek the stability and community of a consistent location and time to provide their services. Retiree-age volunteers may also wish to stay active and realise a sense of purpose in their normal week by giving back to the community post their professional working career. It also provides a setting for them to meet with like-minded individuals within the community and build relationships with patients and other volunteers.

Top 3 motivational reasons for volunteering

1. To provide support to those less fortunate
2. Expression of values
3. Development of new skills or gaining new knowledge.

Project survey respondents

“Volunteering for me isn’t just about the organisation/cause I’m giving my time to. I have to want to be there, around people I like to be around.”

- Project survey respondent

When considering volunteer retention, Dwyer’s research discussed the importance of both feelings of connection within the volunteering cohort, but also the role of transformational leadership. In particular, those leaders that “show concern about their development, involve them in decisions, and focus on the meaning of the work” supported volunteers to match the work they were doing to their motives for volunteering, improving retention. The findings of the survey data align with this research in both the expression of values and skills development opportunities.

Volunteering is an unpaid role and often volunteers have a purpose for devoting their time. In a post-pandemic environment, hospitals and health centres are sometimes still seen as places of danger for the public and places to be avoided, for fear of contracting the virus. Each volunteer comes with their own motivations to get involved within an organisation and it is important for Barwon Health and other organisations to understand their motivations and be able to cater for individuals at different stages of life.

Motivations to volunteer, by age:	16- 25	26- 40	41- 55	56- 65	65+	Total
To provide support to those less fortunate	4	9	13	2	-	28
Expression of values	2	5	12	1	1	21
Develop new skills or gain new knowledge	3	7	6	2	-	18
Support one’s own feelings of self-esteem or self-worth	-	6	6	3	-	15
Expanding social network	-	4	6	-	1	11
Supports career benefits (e.g. new network)	1	6	2	1	-	10
Supporting my community/community service	-	2	1	1	-	4
Other	-	-	3	1	1	5
Total	10	39	49	11	3	112

Figure 4: Survey respondents motivations to volunteer, by age:

2. Describing the benefits for potential volunteers & for Barwon Health

On reviewing our case studies and the research on the benefits of volunteering (Thoreson, 2023), it is clear that there is a reason that the demographic of current volunteers skews older.

Volunteers indicate that being a volunteer provides them with the satisfaction of doing something positive for their community. It certainly seems that this enjoyment has the mutual benefit of giving them a longer, happier life as seniors! The Red Cross (Lemme, 2020) has found that “loneliness is twice as likely to cause an early death as obesity, and that isolation has the same impact on health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day”. The connections that are found and nurtured in volunteers are helpful in combating the challenge of social isolation. In more general terms, research shows that volunteering has a positive impact on both physical and mental health, linking time spent volunteering to reduced levels of stress and an increase in positive, relaxed feelings (Rix, 2023).

For students, volunteering offers them opportunities to make new friends and learn new skills whilst benefiting their local community (Volunteers Victoria website, 2023). Again it is noted to be an important contributor to improved physical and mental health.

Many organisations now also have a clear Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) policy that encourages staff to ‘give back’ to their communities by engaging in activities such as local volunteering (sometimes this may even be the time that the company pays the volunteers). The benefit to the company comes in the form of increased happiness which in turn leads to increased employee engagement (Rix, 2023). As such tapping into the corporate volunteering pool would benefit employees, companies and Barwon Health simultaneously and is definitely an area to explore.

By gaining a greater understanding of the importance and wider benefits of conducting volunteering programs for the organisation and the greater Geelong community, Barwon Health can further position the value and build this into volunteering messaging.

3. Exploring pathways from volunteering to employment

Through our interviews, we understand that in the pre-pandemic economy, Barwon Health used the volunteer program as a pathway for students studying in the health service fields to gain permanent employment within the organisation.

This may have been by way of a professional reference through the student's experience in the capacity of a volunteer or through the opportunity of an interview for a vacant role within the organisation after agreed volunteering commitments (for example 12 months of service) had been delivered.

Giving local students an entry point into the organisation not only shows Barwon Health's ability to support local jobs but financially saves recruitment costs when the next generation of staff are beginning their professional careers within the industry.

Barwon Health is Geelong's largest employer, employing over 7,000 people. Despite this, it is widely reported that workforce shortages are one of the biggest challenges for healthcare providers. We believe that reinstating employment pathways through volunteering should be highly considered given these current market challenges.

“Former volunteer roles have helped me to build confidence and skills in different areas... Support and training volunteers during on boarding and 'on the job' is really important.”

- Project survey respondent

4. Illustrating the benefits for local organisations and regional communities

The role of volunteers meaningfully contributes to benefits at the organisational and community levels. Although some aspects of volunteering can be quantified, such as hours or monetary value, this approach is unable to truly encompass the full range of far-reaching societal benefits and outcomes influenced by volunteers.

In their 2022 Annual Report, Barwon Health referenced volunteer contributions, however, we noted that volunteering was not included in the organisation's Strategic Plan. Australia's National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033 has a key focus on community and social impact. This pillar provides recognition of the essential role of volunteers in fostering resilience at individual and community levels, facilitating social connectedness and supporting health and well-being through the recognition of value to support positive community outcomes.

Successful organisations identify the reciprocal relationship and benefits of involving volunteers to add value to their organisation and support for working towards achieving their mission and vision. By attracting and retaining a diverse volunteer workforce, organisations benefit from a diverse range of skills, experience and knowledge. These attributes contribute to fresh and innovative perspectives and provide an opportunity to cultivate and strengthen connections within the organisation and the local community.

“I feel like I’m contributing and making a positive impact on society”

- Project survey respondent

“The flow on benefits of volunteering are a stronger, more inclusive and well-supported community”.

Health and hospital settings

In the health system, volunteers are integral and can meaningfully enhance the consumer experience through continual engagement, support and social connection. Volunteers can support quality improvement initiatives, such as gathering authentic consumer and family feedback, thereby allowing health professionals and hospital staff to continually deliver high-quality clinical care.

Health volunteering research in Australia is currently limited. Opportunities to create high-quality volunteer programs in hospital settings saw recommendations such as comprehensive orientation processes, further training opportunities, supervision and recognition (Prabhu et al., 2008). The dynamic nature of healthcare environments, for example, exposure to excessive deaths or adverse security events may expose volunteers to a range of experiences that have the potential to induce trauma. Barwon Health currently provides vicarious trauma training to staff and could consider extending this training to health volunteers within their orientation process. This may better equip volunteers with confidence and resilience in these settings. Volunteers who are involved in significant incidents are included in current Barwon Health standard operating debriefing practices, which speaks to their positive commitment to the health

and well-being of volunteers. Further practical enhancements for health volunteers include but are not limited to support networks for volunteers and reducing out-of-pocket costs or financial burdens (Polson et al., 2023). Practical examples to reduce personal costs to volunteers may include providing complimentary coffee, meals, parking or uniforms.

Community benefits

The liveability of regions incorporates reflections on the long-term health and well-being of individuals and communities. The reflection of volunteers who represent the diversity of local communities is essential to fostering a community culture of liveability, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. The health benefits of volunteering support wellbeing outcomes and the representation of diversity in volunteering workforces creates local leadership and visibility of all groups within the population.

Volunteering provides positive influences at individual, organisation and community levels, long-term health and wellbeing benefits, and contributes to the resilience and liveability of local communities. In the Barwon Health setting, the role of volunteers is providing far-reaching value that extends beyond the regional health service towards embedding a stronger, more resilient and more unified Geelong community.



"If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself."

- Henry Ford



Our Case Studies

The following three case studies summarise interviews with volunteer coordinators at a variety of Health Services across Australia.

Case Study 1 – Large multi-location metropolitan health service (“HS”), providing acute and rehabilitation services

How has covid impacted volunteer numbers at your health service?

We are operating at 25%-30% of our previous volunteer numbers. Most volunteers on our books are actively serving, however, some are waiting to come back for specific roles that haven't resumed post covid, for example, “driver” roles.

What services do volunteers provide?

Volunteers typically provide:

- concierge services – we consistently receive positive feedback on this
- conduct patient experience surveys – we've found patients are more honest in providing answers to people removed from their care.
- In our rehabilitation facility, we don't have many volunteers doing the host role, mostly patient experience surveys

What's working well?

Having volunteers working consistently on the same wards, the staff are able to get to know them.

We also offer training, the key to this is to ensure we're not “overtraining” volunteers, and then not allowing them to use their skills.

What's challenging?

Pressure on the wards isn't helping progress the program – there's a shortage of staff, meaning staff have limited capacity to provide direction to volunteers on where to support.

Additionally, some of the priorities of the hospital have shifted post covid. For example, volunteer drivers haven't been reinstated as vehicles are being used to provide “Hospital in the home” care and the transit lounge would need to be reinstated.

Do they see benefits to the local community?

The concierge service helps local community members who come in and are escorted to places. It makes visiting a more positive experience.

How diverse is your volunteer demographic?

60:40 identifying as females: males (no other genders represented). We also have a mix of cultures – Hindu, Japanese and Chinese. Whilst they don't volunteer for their language it can be helpful if they happen to be rostered at a time when this is required. We don't have any First Nations volunteers, and this is something we would like to address.

Case study 1 continued

Ability-wise, we have 2 volunteers in wheelchairs and 3 with an acquired brain injury.

Age-wise:

- 70% are greater than retirement age,
- 30% younger people (we're fortunate to have a number of universities in close proximity to our health services. We get a lot of medical students volunteering, and for these volunteers, we ask for at least a year commitment. We find they give us this and are reliable).
- We have very limited representation in the 30-50 age bracket – this is because we find many people in this demographic have working or caring commitments.

How do you attract volunteers?

We're currently not actively marketing externally. Will need to advertise soon – we won't be positioning career pathways, but rather the opportunity to give back to a community hospital.

Volunteers have 3-4 "in-service training" sessions each year. For example, we held a "compassion fatigue" session, which 20-25 people attended.

We also celebrate National Volunteers Week with service awards and hold a Christmas event annually.

How are volunteers assigned to roles?

Volunteers are assigned to a ward to support the staff and the patients. There are morning and afternoon shifts. This works well as the ward staff get to know and rely on them. Volunteers also identify

their team as being their volunteer "shift" group. We had tried to have "roving volunteers" prior to covid, however logistically this was difficult.

It's important to match volunteer interest to vacancies, or their lived experience. For example, they may have had a family member have an illness, and this creates a lot of empathy for patients. We work hard to get the fit right.

Our volunteer coordinator has an open-door policy for volunteers to air grievances. We also hold a series of meet-ups with ward managers and Nurse Unit Managers to review how things are going and make improvements.

“We're fortunate to have a number of universities in close proximity to our health services. We get a lot of medical students volunteering”

Case Study 2 – Large regional HS, providing acute and rehabilitation services

Promotion of volunteer opportunities

The health service is fortunate to have a backlog of applications so haven't been required to actively recruit for some time. The regional Volunteer Resource Centre is used to source volunteers, particularly for events, for a small membership fee. Specific roles are also advertised on the health service's social media.

Onboarding processes

During interviews, volunteers can choose where they would like to volunteer and they have set days and times. Some volunteers are happy to do extra shifts during the week when others are on holiday or are sick.

All volunteers are on-boarded - inclusive of criminal history check, vaccination clearance for MMR, Pertussis, Varicella and Covid, WWCC and TB questionnaire.

Mandatory training organised through the hospital education team inclusive of:

Hand hygiene, Code of Conduct, Bullying and harassment, Person-centred care, Fire and emergency, introduction to occupational violence and introduction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practice

Benefits for volunteers

Free volunteer polo shirt and lanyard, free parking at the hospital while on duty, a celebration of National Volunteer Week (luncheon) and service recognition acknowledgements inclusive of Volunteering Australia - Volunteer year badge and Health service - Badge and certificate acknowledging service of 5, 10, 15, 20 etc. years

Community benefits

The volunteering program has a big impact on the community and across the region. Every day volunteers assist many local people who come to the hospital for appointments. A large number of patients are sent to this location from rural and remote areas and volunteers are a huge help to them with way-finding and being a friendly face. In the last financial year (up until the end of March) volunteers gave 13,906.25 hours of their time.

Impact of COVID on volunteer numbers at the health service

All volunteers 70 years and over (most volunteers) were stood down for two months as well as any that had a medical condition. A skeleton crew remained to operate courtesy buggies, the front information desk and the gift shop, many doing multiple shifts per week.

When timing permitted volunteers to safely return, volunteers were given the choice to return straight away or when they felt comfortable with the situation. All required Covid vaccinations and to abide by rules regarding mask-wearing, hygiene, social distancing etc.

"Volunteers can choose where they would like to volunteer"

Case Study 3 – Large regional HS, providing acute and rehabilitation services

How has covid impacted volunteer numbers at your health service?

In a post-pandemic environment, volunteer numbers have dropped by 75% to approximately 120 volunteers. The flow-on effect on the organisation has impacted the overall service offering to patients and their support networks. It has also impacted volunteers who have lost physical mobility, mentally their memory capacity has reduced and emotionally they were not experiencing the fulfilment that volunteering provides and connecting with like-minded individuals.

Re-build process

We are currently working with corporate affairs and marketing teams to share stories about the impact of volunteers within the organisation through publishing an article in the monthly staff newsletter and asking for new volunteers.

There is a focus on targeting young people through the School Holiday program targeted at students in Year 9 (15+). The program is based on 3 days within the student's term break where they are buddied up with a volunteer (holding a working with children check). They are given the opportunity to tour the various sections of the hospital. The volunteer provides support and explains certain situations. There are daily de-briefs and homework such as celebrating the 'feel good' component of volunteering and practising self-care measures. The School Holiday program is targeted at the younger generation as 80% of the current volunteers are over the age of 60.

In May this year, the organisation organised cardboard cut-outs of past volunteers to be placed in various locations around the hospital to remind viewers about the importance of volunteers within an organisation. When volunteers started returning to the hospital post-pandemic the permanent workforce welcomed the volunteers back with open arms, as they remembered the significant value they brought to the workplace. The executive team has committed to celebrating volunteers' success within the monthly newsletter and acknowledging their efforts and services provided.

It was identified that at the Executive and Board level of the organisation, individuals were out of touch with the positive impact volunteers have within the organisation and the greater community. A way of re-engaging with volunteers post-pandemic was to remind and educate at the stakeholder level on the contributions that volunteers make at the granular level. The support that they provide to both the patient within their time in the hospital as well as easing the burden on the permanent workforce in completing unskilled labour roles.

Motivations for volunteers

Each volunteer has their own motivations and rarely are they the same as another's. The older generation often sees volunteering as a time to socialise and meet others. Their spouse may have passed away and they are looking to get out of the house and meet other people. Retirees look for activities to fill their day rather than lounging at home watching television or eating out. Some volunteers are purely altruistic. The middle-aged/younger generation may have recently moved into the area and are looking to assimilate with others, understand what local citizens do and build relationships. Others are currently unemployed and use volunteering as a short-term activity until they gain full-time employment.

Suggested improvements for volunteering

When an individual chooses to volunteer for the first time the onboarding process is onerous and there are various checks that need to take place to ensure the candidate is the right fit for the role (working with children check, police check, NDIS check). There is no "volunteer passport" as an overarching check. This has been pitched to the government previously however no further action has been undertaken. All volunteering roles no matter the environment are in the same position, with a lack thereof a database for candidates, whether an organisation is in demand how many volunteers are required and in what roles/capacity. This year there will be a pilot program for volunteers in the health service which may support the need for a more formalised platform moving forward.

“The permanent workforce ... remembered the significant value [volunteers] brought to the workplace”



“It would be good to be able to search for opportunities that may match your skills, interests and your values”

- Project survey respondent

Opportunities

Reinvigorating the approach to attract volunteers has been identified as playing a fundamental role in enhancing the current dedicated volunteer workforce at Barwon Health.

In order to support a contemporary approach to attracting health volunteers in a post-COVID pandemic environment the following three themes emerged as potential areas of opportunity.

1. Create a marketing strategy that embraces diversity
2. Bring volunteer roles to life by enhancing the website
3. Provide clear communication of volunteer benefits

Create a marketing strategy that embraces diversity

Barwon Health has a clear intention to support the diversity of the volunteer workforce, which is representative of the Geelong community, and inclusive of people of all ages, abilities, beliefs and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We explored the opportunity to focus on motivations:

Evidence identified through this project indicates the motivation of volunteers can vary depending on these factors, thus providing the opportunity to create targeted communications and marketing strategies to attract the desired diversity.

Bring volunteer roles to life by enhancing the website

The roles of volunteers at Barwon Health are vast and varied; however, this project was to focus on attracting volunteers for value-adding support in the acute hospital setting and rehabilitation settings. As such there were two opportunity areas we explored:

There are opportunities to enhance the webpage to highlight the roles of volunteers. Findings indicated most volunteers have specific preferences for

how they provide volunteer support, including preferences for the role and type of volunteering.

The volunteer enrolment form could also seek to capture volunteer motivations. An example of a high-quality enrolment form is [Austin Health](#), as this outlines the organisation's values, current roles and responsibilities, benefits and captures motivations.

Provide clear communication of volunteer benefits

Barwon Health identified that the focus of volunteer roles is to support consumer-facing activities and to add value to the consumer experience. We explored the opportunity to provide clearer communication:

Volunteers experience a range of benefits through their roles and there is an opportunity to provide a clear value proposition on the benefits for the volunteer, the consumer and Barwon Health.



Recommendations

Based on the research we conducted and key insights gathered from the healthcare providers we interviewed, we identified several key challenges which we used to propose a set of actionable recommendations.

We know that Barwon Health already manages a large number of competing priorities with finite resources and a team of dedicated staff. As such, we have focused on recommendations that represent incremental improvements that we hope are pragmatic and achievable within the current landscape.

Challenge theme #1: Compassion fatigue

Some volunteers are fatigued and disengaged post-COVID and need to understand the human impact of their contribution to feel inspired again.

Recommendations: Connect and Celebrate

Create content on the website that clearly defines the volunteer role at Barwon Health

- Provide information on the website with people and imagery, examples and testimonials to bring to life all the essential information about the positive impact of volunteering.
- Regularly share volunteer success stories, both where volunteers have had a positive impact on patient (“consumer”) experiences and where volunteers themselves have experienced benefits from their participation.

Raise the visibility of the impact of volunteers:

- Include the Volunteer Strategy in the overarching corporate strategy & annual report
- Explore the possibility of volunteers supporting Barwon Health’s strategic goals (e.g. Closing the Gap)
- Continue celebrating volunteer milestones as part of National Volunteer week (e.g. certificates or badges for 1yr / 5yr / 10yr of volunteering)
- Communicate opportunities for volunteers to get together on a social level (e.g. volunteers week events)

“Volunteering improves my mental wellbeing as it alleviates stress”

- Project survey respondent

Challenge theme #2: Onboarding Gap for Volunteers and Staff

There were two sides of the coin that created challenges during onboarding:

1. Some volunteers expressed a clear preference for being able to choose a fixed shift pattern and work location in advance and stick with this to build relationships both in the volunteer and ward. Other volunteers were happy with the variety.
2. Some staff - who are already busy - may not have time to adequately utilise volunteer skills. As a result, volunteers assigned to wards may feel lost or not know how best to be helpful without clear guidance and support from leadership and staff.

Recommendations: Enhance Onboarding

Barwon Health already provides an onboarding process and these suggestions are proposed as minor adjustments to the existing processes.

- Allow time for onboarding nursing unit managers so that they understand how the volunteering/ward relationship should work, and can troubleshoot any challenges.
- Allow time to cover these key aspects for volunteers during onboarding:
 - Provide information on available support for volunteer wellbeing
 - Discuss and match volunteers based on skills/preferences
 - Introduce volunteers to key staff (e.g. ward managers) so that they know who to talk to when they arrive on a ward or at the concierge desk.
 - Provide volunteers with bright t-shirts (so that they are easy to identify, for both staff, other volunteers and patients)

Support and training volunteers during onboarding and 'on the job' is really important.”

- Project survey respondent

Challenge theme #3: Unclear employment pathways

Resourcing in health services is a continued challenge. For some participants, the idea of volunteering is a stepping stone to a potential career but the pathway is unclear.

Based on interviews with other healthcare providers, the recommendation is to be clear that volunteering and employment are different paths. However, students in health professions may be encouraged to practise their skills through volunteering and this can be facilitated through specific coordination with Education providers, resulting in a volunteer pipeline that may create a connected pool of students who then become prime candidates for employment once they graduate.

Recommendations: Clarify pathways to employment

- Create an approach that targets university students, such as through Orientation Week at the university to encourage their engagement and contribution. Setting a designated minimum requirement for volunteering could be considered to ensure the dedication and genuine commitment of university-student volunteers in the hospital.
- Work with feeder institutions leveraging existing relationships (Deakin University, Melbourne University, Monash University, the Gordon and a number of other educational centres). This will support students to give back to the community whilst developing relevant skills.

“I learnt more than I first thought and helps with life skills that never go astray!”

- Project survey respondent

Challenge theme #4: Underutilised volunteer segments

Several demographics have limited engagement, for example younger volunteers, corporates, and different multicultural groups

Recommendation: Design targeted programs

- Design targeted engagement programs to reach underrepresented volunteers, considering various community groups and organisational partnerships that align with Barwon Health's volunteering values.
- Student programs could be designed to target students of all ages with specific programs for primary and secondary school students.
- Corporate programs could be focussed on areas where a contribution could be made in an impactful way on a one-off basis (rather than the usual 'ongoing' style of engagement which is more suitable for other types of volunteers).
- Multicultural programs could harness language or other specialist skills available in under-represented parts of the community.

Volunteering location and time preferences	16-25	26-40	41-55	56-65	Total
Dedicated time and day (eg. I would prefer a set time each week or fortnight)	2	21	10	3	36
Dedicated location (eg. I would prefer to be based in the same location)	2	16	4	2	24
Dedicated role (eg. I would prefer key set tasks with a specific role)	1	14	7	2	24
Varying role (eg. I would prefer doing different types of tasks with various roles)	1	12	2	0	15
Varying time and day (eg. I would prefer being responsive based on needs)	0	7	3	1	11
Varying location (eg. I would prefer to be flexible across multiple locations)	1	8	1	0	10
Total	7	78	27	8	120

Figure 5: Volunteering location and time preferences



“There is not a lot of awareness of volunteer opportunities...I would not go out of my way to look for volunteer work but would consider and be more likely if seeing advertisements and promotion.”

-Project survey respondent

Project Challenges and Limitations

Any project no matter small or large will encounter challenges, and this particular project is no different. Our experience in working with Geelong's largest employer has been positive.

Our project champion Anna Burgess has been vital in pointing the team in the right direction in relation to the content and relevant contacts within the organisation to communicate with.

The main challenge for our team has been the short time frame for turning around the project. We ourselves are working in roles on a full-time basis and being actively involved in this project has involved each of the team members in finding additional time within their busy schedules to stay on top of the work required and continue to make progress. We maintain to meet on a weekly basis and keep in contact with our project champion and mentor.

As part of our research, we reached out to our professional and personal networks within the health services volunteering space across metropolitan and large regional geographies. This required team members to branch out and build relationships with previously unknown individuals to gain further knowledge and insights in this area

We also ran a survey to understand volunteer preferences. This was collected from a random pool of volunteers across a large range of organisations and tasks. This means responses may not match a health services setting, but may also provide an opportunity for insights beyond the current profile of health services volunteers.

The above limitations and challenges provide opportunities for Barwon Health to continue to investigate areas of interest. Two examples of further work could include:

- Surveying existing Barwon Health volunteers to understand the profile/motives of Barwon Health volunteers, and
- Partnering with other health services to complete a more detailed analysis of the motivations of volunteers in health services settings.

Our diversity of backgrounds within the team was enhanced through the genuine respect and value towards the skills, knowledge and experience each member brought to the table

Group Reflection

Whilst all team members experienced challenges throughout the project we collaborated as a team effectively to deliver a high-quality report and presentation.

Each team member has come from a different working and professional background, some work in a solo environment whereas for others, team-based work is an everyday occurrence. The time commitment required not only to the project itself but in addition to the full-day workshops as part of the broader Leaders for Geelong program proved difficult at times. However, the team was consistent in meeting with one another on a regular basis virtually or face-to-face.

Virtual sessions worked well to connect regularly, considering some team members travelled interstate and overseas throughout the project period.

Despite working on the project individually, each team member contributed equally and made themselves available to complete the required work.

The diversity of skills and knowledge enhanced the background research and conversations to build a thorough well thought report.

Our collaboration provided the opportunity to both lean into our realised strengths as well as nurture unrealised strengths in a professional environment. This process has supported our individual and collective lifelong leadership skills, transferable to our workplaces, volunteer roles and beyond.

While this was an insightful learning journey for our team, we are hopeful the information provided in this report provides a pathway for Barwon Health to continue to attract and recruit a diverse range of volunteers reflective of the Greater Geelong community.

Conclusion

Volunteering is a vital service offering at Barwon Health.

This service contributes to:

- Enhancing social, health and well-being outcomes for volunteers, and sometimes contributing to the development of new skills or networks.
- Delivering direct economic value for Barwon Health whilst supporting the organisation to deliver on its purpose of providing the best care, to every person, every day, so that everyone feels better.
- Supporting many Barwon Health consumers and visitors, in their time of need.

Whilst volunteering in the region has declined according to the latest census data, Barwon Health is Geelong region's largest employer and provides health services to the large majority of residents across the region. Through this, Barwon Health has a strong foundation to re-attract and relaunch their volunteering program by:

- Addressing compassion fatigue by connecting and celebrating volunteers,
- Adjusting onboarding processes to enhance stakeholders' experiences,
- Clarifying employment pathways and partnering with educational providers in the region, and
- Developing targeted engagement programs to attract underutilised volunteer segments.

We look forward to following Barwon Health's volunteer journey.



If you, or someone you know, wish to volunteer with Barwon Health, please visit their [website](#) for current opportunities

Appendices

The following demographic information was used to inform our projects findings. All data has been sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2016 and 2021, and was compiled and presented by .id (informed decisions).

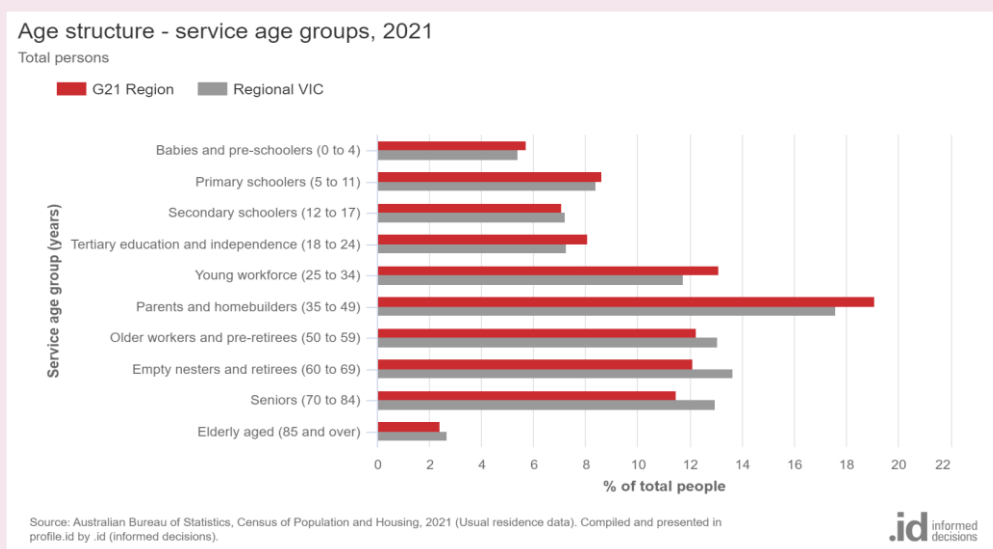


Figure 6: Age Structure – service age groups | Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2016 and 2021

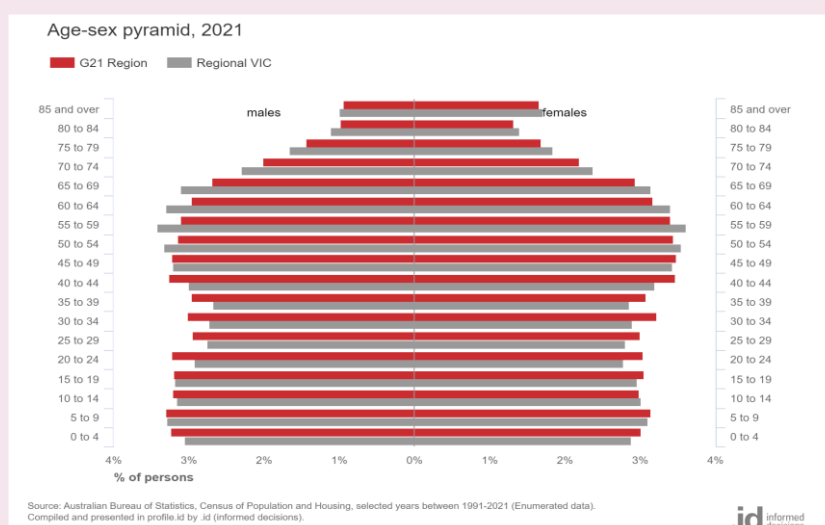


Figure 7: Age Sex Pyramid | Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2016 and 2021

References

Topic	Source
<i>"Helping people, changing lives: 3 health benefits of volunteering,"</i> Angela Thoreson, August 2023	https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/3-health-benefits-of-volunteering
<i>"The benefits of corporate volunteering,"</i> Toby Rix, January 2023	https://www.esgmark.co.uk/blog/corporate-volunteering
<i>"Benefits of volunteering,"</i> Benefits of volunteering for students, Volunteering Victoria, 2023	https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/volunteer-benefits-and-stories/
<i>"More grateful and less lonely, despite COVID-19,"</i> Angela Lemme, Redcross, December 2020	https://www.redcross.org.au/media/releases/2020/new-survey-more-grateful-and-less-lonely-despite-covid-19/
<i>"Sources of Volunteer Motivation: Transformational Leadership and Personal Motives Influence Volunteer Outcomes,"</i> Patrick C. Dwyer, Joyce E. Bono, Mark Snyder, Oded Nov, Yair Berson, August 2013	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/nml.21084
<i>"Understanding Motivations to Volunteer,"</i> Dr Arthur Stukas and Sarah Wilson, September 2022	https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VRP_Understanding-Motivations-to-Volunteer.pdf

Topic	Source
<p><i>"National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033",</i> Funded by the Department of Social Services and led by Volunteering Australia</p>	<p>https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/National-Strategy-for-Volunteering-2023-2033.pdf</p>
<p><i>"Victorian Volunteer Strategy 2022-2027",</i> Author: Department of Families, Fairness and Housing Date: May 2022</p>	<p>https://www.vic.gov.au/victorian-volunteer-strategy-2022-2027/</p>
<p><i>"National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards",</i> Action 6.03, "Partnering with Consumers" 2023</p>	<p>https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/standards/nsqhs-standards/communicating-safety-standard/clinical-governance-and-quality-improvement-support-effective-communication/action-603</p>
<p><i>"Evaluation of a hospital volunteer program in rural Australia",</i> V Radha Prabhu, Armita Hanley and Sue Kearney, 2008</p>	<p>https://www.publish.csiro.au/ah/AH080265</p>
<p><i>"If you want something to happen, you have to do it yourself: Understanding rural Australians perspectives of health volunteering",</i> Bianca Polson, Alyson J. Crozier, Jim Dollman, Kate M. Gunn, May 2023</p>	<p>https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/hpja.752</p>
<p><i>"G21 Region /Service age groups",</i> .idcommunity demographic resources</p>	<p>https://profile.id.com.au/g21-region/service-age-groups?WebID=150</p>

Topic	Source
"G21 Region/ Volunteer work", .idcommunity demographic resources	https://profile.id.com.au/g21-region/volunteering
"About Us", Barwon Health website	https://www.barwonhealth.org.au/about-us
Barwon Health Strategic Plan 2020-25	https://www.barwonhealth.org.au/images/documents/11295_StrategicPlan2020-25_vFINAL_-_Copy.pdf
Barwon Health Annual Report 2021-22	https://www.barwonhealth.org.au/images/documents/12508_AnnualReport2021-22_vF.pdf
Austin Health Volunteer website	https://www.austin.org.au/volunteer/

Project Timeline





Thank you

<https://www.barwonhealth.org.au/careers-volunteers/volunteers>