



Compensation and Rehabilitation for Veterans
Productivity Commission
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Compensation and Rehabilitation for Veterans

About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering. We work to advance volunteering in the Australian community.

Volunteering Australia's vision is to promote strong, connected communities through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, promote and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

We work collectively with the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies to deliver national, state/territory and local volunteering programs and initiatives in accordance with the Government's priorities.

As the primary link between the volunteering sector and federal government, Volunteering Australia provides feedback into key decision making. All feedback is informed by research, evidence and consultation with the volunteering sector.

Introduction

Volunteering Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry on *Compensation and Rehabilitation for Veterans*.

This inquiry will review the current system for veterans' compensation and rehabilitation reflects contemporary best-practice, and whether changes are required in the future. The Commission is also reviewing the effectiveness of the legislative framework which includes; *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986*, the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004* and the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988*.

Volunteering is at the centre of Australia's national identity, with 5.8 million Australians or 31 per cent of the population engaging in volunteering activities. Volunteering is an activity with the highest multiplier effect of any government spending. Research demonstrates that volunteering yields a 450% return for every dollar invested.ⁱ Nationally this is an estimated annual economic and social contribution of \$290 billion.ⁱⁱ

From the arts, education, emergency services, sports, defence, environment, health, aged care, disability, and community welfare; volunteering is woven across various government portfolios and programs.

Volunteering is also critical to the delivery of the Australian Government's priorities of building strong and resilient communities, by encouraging economic participation, mitigating isolation and loneliness, and increasing social inclusion, community resilience, participation and social cohesion.

Volunteers have an essential role in the rehabilitation of veterans by providing support, impartial advice, and building social capital. This submission outlines the critical role that volunteers play in veterans' affairs, and the need to support volunteering in the legislative framework in order to strengthen the system of compensation and rehabilitation.

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Volunteering Australia Response

Volunteer Engagement in Veterans Affairs

Volunteers are engaged in supporting ex-service officers in a variety of ways, and can play a critical role in their rehabilitation. Advocates play a crucial role in the compensation process, offering advice on what supports and services are available to veterans, and assisting with lodging claims and appeals.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) delivers training to advocates through the Departments of Veterans Affairs Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP). This is a partnership between DVA, ex-service organisations (ESOs), and the Department of Defence. The aim of the program is to train and develop selected practitioners to provide high quality advocacy services to current and former Australian Defence Force members, and their dependents, covering rehabilitation, compensation, appeals and welfare.ⁱⁱⁱ

Similarly, the Community Visitors Scheme is a volunteer-led arrangement, that provides socially isolated individuals friendship and companionship. Both advocates and community visitors are incredibly effective in providing supports and services for veterans. They offer impartial observation and advice on issues, that differs from paid employees, given they are engaged in their role "for the common good and without financial gain."^{iv}

A concern raised by the Committee is that the current veterans' compensation and rehabilitation system is "complex and difficult to navigate".^v Volunteering Australia stresses that while advocates may be able to access training; information and processes should be streamlined and easy to navigate for volunteers.

Advocates can also be engaged independently from the Department of Veterans Affairs, and may not have access to the same training, resources and expertise as ATDP advocates. By reducing barriers to volunteer engagement, Volunteering Australia is of the view that this will encourage more people to start volunteering.

Social Capital

The social capital derived from volunteer engagement is of immense benefit to ex-service personnel and volunteers. Volunteers play a unique role in assisting veterans by developing meaningful relationships and reducing social isolation.

Organisations who engaged volunteers in disability support stated there is a marked difference between the outcomes achieved by paid staff and volunteers. In fact, a *Survey of Victorian Disability Organisations* found that 83 per cent of respondents saw the role of volunteers as unique, with volunteers providing an extra social connection and community participation, genuine relationships, and the value of lived experiences.^{vi}

The situation is comparable with volunteer engagement in veterans' affairs. For example, organisation Mates4Mates facilitates social connection activities for ex-service personnel as they "continue the journey of rebuilding their lives."^{vii} Similarly, the Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL), was founded to provide "camaraderie, concern, and mateship"^{viii}, as well as "care, financial assistance and advocacy".^{ix} Volunteers play a key role in building social capital, and provide an integral link in cultivating social connections for many people.

Though the terms of this inquiry are focused on the compensation and rehabilitation of veterans, Volunteering Australia is of the view that volunteering is of great benefit for veterans. In fact, recent studies

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have indicated that 96 per cent of volunteers say that engaging in volunteering “makes people happier”^x, while 95 per cent of volunteers say that volunteering is related to feelings of wellbeing.^{xi} Only a few hours of volunteer work has an impact on an individual’s happiness and mood, and sustained volunteering is associated with better mental health.^{xii} In addition, the experience of helping others provides meaning, a sense of self-worth, a social role and health enhancement.^{xiii}

Operational Costs

Volunteering Australia emphasises the critical role the volunteer workforce plays in the delivery of key programs, supports and services, and the need for the Government to adequately fund the volunteering workforce in order to ensure that these services can operate efficiently.

While volunteering is “time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain”, volunteering comes at a cost. The operational cost of delivering quality, innovative, and agile volunteering programs that are responsive to the needs of individuals and the community requires investment, however is often overlooked. Volunteering and volunteering issues must be clearly articulated in the legislative framework. Volunteers should not be viewed as free labour, but as a legitimate and meaningful part of the workforce.

Training in veteran’s affairs is specialist and can be resource-intensive. It is important for organisations to invest in the training and management of their volunteers. It is the view of Volunteering Australia that volunteers must be supported in their role, with adequate access to resources, services, and education, such as assistive technologies, to ensure the best possible service provision. Any increase in volunteer participation to support veterans must be met with an equivalent increase in funding for volunteer management, given the associated administrative costs. There also needs to be greater investment and consideration in the legislative frameworks, of the important role that volunteers play in supporting Australia’s veterans.

Summary of Recommendations

- Streamline information and processes to make things easier for volunteers
- Recognition of the social capital benefits of volunteer engagement in veterans’ affairs
- Consider the important role volunteers play in the rehabilitation of ex-service personnel, including clear articulation in legislative framework
- Ensure adequate funding to support volunteers such as advocates and community visitors, as well as so they can access training and other resources

Conclusion

Volunteering Australia thanks the Commission for the opportunity to provide a response on this Inquiry.

We reiterate calls for the Commission to consider the important role that volunteers play in the rehabilitation of ex-service personnel, as well as adequate funding for advocates and community visitors so they can continue providing vital programs, supports and services.

Volunteering Australia would welcome further opportunity to consult or expand on any of the issues raised in this submission.

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Authorisation

This submission has been authorised by the Chief Executive Officer of Volunteering Australia.

Ms Adrienne Picone

Chief Executive Officer

Endorsements

This submission has been endorsed by the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies.

Glossary

VA	Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering in Australia. It works collectively with the peaks to deliver national, state and local volunteering programs and initiatives.
VIOs	Volunteer-involving organisations are organisations that utilise volunteers as part of their workforce.
VSSs	Volunteer support services (also known as volunteer resource centres or volunteer support organisations) provide place-based volunteer support services to volunteers and VIOs in their locality.

ⁱ Volunteering Western Australia (2015), The Economic, Social and Cultural Value of Volunteering to Western Australia, https://volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa_report%20book_web.pdf

ⁱⁱ Flinders University (31 October 2014) 'Volunteering worth \$290 billion a year', <http://blogs.flinders.edu.au/flinders-news/2014/10/31/volunteering-worth-290-billion-a-year>

ⁱⁱⁱ Department of Veterans' Affairs (2018), Advocacy Training and Development Program, <https://www.dva.gov.au/consultation-and-grants/advocacy-training/advocacy-training-and-development-program>

^{iv} Volunteering Australia (2015) 'Definition of Volunteering', <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/policy-andbest-practise/definition-of-volunteering/>

^v Productivity Commission (2018), Compensation and Rehabilitation for Veterans, Productivity Commission Issues Paper, Background to the inquiry, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/veterans/issues/veterans-issues.pdf>

^{vi} Extended Families Australia, Inclusion Melbourne, Interchange Incorporated and People Outdoors (2015) 'Volunteering and the National Disability Insurance Scheme: A Survey of Victorian Disability Organisations'

^{vii} Mates4Mates (2018), Our Mates – Who We Support, <https://mates4mates.org/who-we-are/our-mates-who-we-support/>

^{viii} RSL National (2018), How We Help, <http://rslnational.org/how-we-help/>

^{ix} RSL National (2018), How We Help, <http://rslnational.org/how-we-help/>

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^x Post, S. G. 2011, 'It's good to be good: 2011 5th annual scientific report on health, happiness and helping others', The International Journal of Person Centred Medicine, vol. 1, no. 4, p814.

^{xi} Volunteering ACT, 2013, 'Selfless Service: The State of Volunteering Report in the ACT 2013', p6.

^{xii} Post, S. G. 2011, op. cit., p816.

^{xiii} Musick, M. A. and Wilson, J. 2003, 'Volunteering and depression: the role of psychological and social resources in different age groups', Social Science and Medicine, vol. 56, p267.