Volunteering during coronavirus (COVID-19)

Fact sheet for Victorian volunteers

Volunteers willingly dedicate their time for the common good, without financial gain. A strong volunteering culture improves outcomes for people, communities and the environment, supports the delivery of services and improves mental health and wellbeing for volunteers themselves.

While measures to help slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) have changed the way we live, it does not mean your volunteering needs to be put on hold. Volunteering can be done in person, or by phone and online. Some volunteers are part of an organisation, described as 'formal' volunteering, while others participate in 'informal' volunteering which is more community-based.

This factsheet provides prospective and current volunteers with information about opportunities to support the community, and advice on how to stay safe.

Should the organisation where I volunteer close during the pandemic?

As restrictions are gradually eased across Victoria, each organisation will make their own decisions on whether to re-open some or all of their programs during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic based on their activities, service users and local circumstances.

Organisations are still required to implement actions to slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) and modify their approach to services to comply with physical distancing requirements and maintain good hygiene and sanitation practices.

Detailed advice for community services organisations can be found at: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/information-community-services-coronavirus-disease-covid-19.

What else can my organisation do to help?

Community organisations can continue to play a vital role in contributing to individual wellbeing and maintaining social connections. Where practical, organisations can use alternative methods of delivering important services that support individual and community wellbeing.

For example, organisations could contact community members by phone rather than in person. Regular emails with local information and advice, and opportunities for community members to participate in supported video and social media forums, are encouraged.

Can I leave home to volunteer?

Yes, you can continue to volunteer while the organisation you are volunteering with is still operating. However, if you can do your volunteer work from home, you should.

You should maintain physical distancing at all times, by keeping at least 1.5 metres between yourself and other people. You should also practice good hygiene by regularly washing your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds and coughing or sneezing into an elbow or tissue.

For more information on protecting yourself and others from coronavirus (COVID-19) visit: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/staying-safe-covid-19.

If you are unwell, you must stay at home.

Can I enter another person's home?

Restrictions are being gradually eased across Victoria, however if you visit another person's home, there is still a risk of spreading coronavirus (COVID-19).

Before visiting, you should check whether anyone in the household has a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) or is unwell. If you are unwell, you should not visit another person's home.

Visits should be as brief as possible while fulfilling the purpose of the visit. You should maintain physical distancing by keeping at least 1.5 metres between yourself and other people as much as possible, limit the surfaces you touch and practice good hygiene before, during and after visits.

What if I am in a high-risk group?

If you are in a high-risk group, you should stay at home as much as you can. You can still contribute to your community by volunteering online or by phone.

High risk groups include people aged 70 years and over, people aged 65 years and over with chronic medical conditions, people with compromised immune systems and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the age of 50.

My volunteer role has been put on hold. What do I do now?

It can be disappointing if your volunteer role has been put on hold while some services are paused during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

You can support your wellbeing by maintaining social connections with your organisation and other volunteers. This could include:

• Regular phone calls or messages with your Volunteer Manager and fellow volunteers
• Keeping up to date with newsletters and emails from your organisation
• Joining an online network with other volunteers
• Considering online or phone volunteering options.

How else can I support others around me?

Think about elderly friends, neighbours and people with disabilities in your community and how you can support each other during a period of self-isolation.

If you are not currently in self-isolation but others around you are, think about what you could do to help them out, for example; gardening, dog walking, delivering food and necessities.

If you have not previously met your neighbours, think about the best way to approach them while maintaining physical distancing. For example, instead of going to the front door, you could leave a note in your neighbour's letterbox with your name, phone number and offer of assistance.

Do I have to join an organisation to be a volunteer?

Not necessarily. You can volunteer in your community or with a group on an informal basis.

Participating in formal volunteering through a not-for-profit organisation usually involves a defined role, and a strong emphasis on policies and procedures, with managers of volunteers supervising and checking outcomes. This can help provide protections for you and members of the community.

There may also be a structured recruitment process including getting police clearances and/or working with children checks, which can take some time.

How do I find a volunteer role?

Many organisations need the help of volunteers to deliver services to vulnerable groups such as food relief, social and wellbeing support. You can often find a volunteer role by contacting an organisation directly. If you want to get involved, please refer to the Resources section at the end of this fact sheet.

If you are in a high-risk group, you should consider volunteering by phone or online so you can stay at home.

Can I volunteer even though my time is limited?

Many volunteer roles are flexible, so you can volunteer at a time that suits you. Talk to the organisation, volunteer manager or your contact person, about the time you have available.

Even a one-off contribution can make a difference.

How do I protect others and stay healthy?

The best way to protect others is to follow the latest directions, practise physical distancing and maintain good personal hygiene.

Regularly updated advice can be found at: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/staying-safe-covid-19

Resources

Health information

– Coronavirus hotline: 1800 675 389

– About coronavirus: www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19

– Directions: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/state-emergency

Mental health and wellbeing

– Beyond Blue: www.beyondblue.org.au/personal-best

Finding a volunteer role

– Volunteering Victoria: www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/covid19-forvolunteers/

– Register with your local volunteering support service:
www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/for-volunteers/volunteer-support-in-your-region

– Contact your local council: https://knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au/

– Search GoVolunteer: https://govolunteer.com.au

Online volunteering

– Vollie: www.vollie.com.au

– Communiteer: https://communiteer.org

Relief agencies

– Red Cross: www.redcross.org.au/get-involved/connect/volunteer

– Foodbank: www.foodbank.org.au/support-us/volunteer-with-us/?state=vic

– St Vincent de Paul Society: www.vinnies.org.au/page/Get_Involved/Become_a_volunteer/VIC/

– Friends with Dignity: www.friendswithdignity.org.au/get-involved/become-a-volunteer/

– Community information and support: www.cisvic.org.au/how-can-you-help/volunteering

Isolation and loneliness

– Friends for Good: www.friendsforgood.org.au/volunteer.html

– Lifeline: https://www.lifeline.org.au/support-lifeline/volunteer

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