

# Volunteers: Critical contributors to Tasmania's economic and social future

**Budget priority statement 2023-24**

## Who we are

Volunteering Tasmania, as the peak body for volunteering throughout the state, aims to improve the support for and outcomes of volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations, the Tasmanian Government, and the greater Tasmanian public as we collaborate to create and maintain a resilient and robust volunteer sector across our state.

Through our 246 members we represent over 170,000 Tasmanians who give their time to volunteering and the betterment of Tasmania.

### *our purpose*

**We connect and build  
an inclusive community  
to make a difference  
through the impact of  
volunteering**

### *our values*

**be informed  
be inspired  
be connected  
make a difference**



## Acknowledgement of Country:

Volunteering Tasmania pay our respects to the palawa/pakana peoples as the traditional custodians of lutruwita and acknowledge their continuing connection to land, sea, sky, waterways and community.

# Executive summary:

Volunteering is a way of life in Tasmania, something which is reflected by data indicating that during COVID-affected 2020, 131,000 Tasmanians participated in formal volunteering, and 143,000 Tasmanians volunteered informally.<sup>1</sup> The contribution of these volunteers and volunteering to Tasmania is estimated at a value of over \$4 billion annually. \$3 billion of which is the dollar cost to replace the labour provided to Tasmania by volunteers<sup>2</sup>.

Despite this contribution, a downward trend in volunteer participation is evident, while the demand for volunteers continues to increase. Should this trend persist, there will be a 42% gap between the demand for, and supply of, volunteers and volunteer services by 2022. In fiscal terms, if this reduction is not addressed, it will cost the Tasmanian Government and/or community over \$1.2 billion annually to replace, the alternative being the loss of services provided by volunteers from our state altogether<sup>2</sup>.

In 2022, Volunteering Tasmania is seeking assistance to reduce barriers to volunteer participation, and support for the recruitment and maintenance of those who volunteer to provide essential services in times of emergency, disaster and need through:

- **The absorption of Working with Vulnerable People registration costs for volunteers** and the provision of renewals for these checks at Service Tasmania branches to reduce the financial and logistical burden placed on volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs).
- **Continued Management of the EV CREW** database for the recruitment and support of spontaneous volunteers in times of emergency, recognising the vital role these volunteers play in disaster management and community support.

Through these measures Volunteering Tasmania seeks to support Tasmanians to continue to volunteer at a time where we are all faced with the burden of a rising cost of living; reduce regulatory burden and improve access to volunteering; and enhance the services on which those most vulnerable in our community rely.

The beneficiaries of these measures are not only Volunteering Tasmania members, but the broader Tasmanian community, and will function as a means to address the volunteer-shortfall and assist all VIOs in appealing to and recruiting volunteers. This will in turn provide vital contributions to Tasmania's economic, cultural, and societal wellbeing, creating a safer, more connected, and more vital state for us all, and enabling us to adequately support the most vulnerable in our society.

Investment in volunteers and volunteering will demonstrate not only the Tasmanian Government's commitment to its volunteer workforce but also a reduction of the cost-of-living pressures associated with volunteering and support the adoption and ongoing commitment to Tasmania's Child and Youth Safe Organisations framework.

1. All references can be found on [page 16](#) of this document.



## Key Priority 1:

# Free Working with Vulnerable People registration for volunteers.

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### INVESTMENT

\$500,000 per annum (ongoing)

Strategic investment and intervention is urgently needed if we are to address the emerging chasm between the supply of and demand for volunteers in Tasmania, as costs of living rise, so too does the dependence on volunteers to fill critical systems gaps.

Volunteers and VIOs in Tasmania have consistently reported that the financial cost and administrative burden of volunteer screening is a significant barrier to volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention.

Tasmania is one of only three Australian jurisdictions to charge for volunteer Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) registrations. It is also the most expensive. In addition to registration costs, the Tasmanian volunteer sector has also identified accessibility issues in the WWVP renewals process, which requires all renewals to be lodged online. This assumes a level of digital access and literacy that is inconsistent with the realities of the Tasmanian population, leading to additional reliance on under-resourced VIOs to aid volunteers in the renewal of their required statutory screening.

Care must be taken by the Tasmanian Government to consider the short, medium, and long term impacts of the notable decline in the unpaid workforce and allocate adequate long-term funding in this area to ensure the sustainability of volunteering.

#### This funding will ensure:

- WWVP registration is available to all volunteers as they do not have to meet up-front costs of statutory screening.
- Greater diversity of volunteers.
- A decrease in the barriers to volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention.
- Opportunities for VIOs to redirect resources currently required to support volunteers to renew the WWVP registrations online.

**For more detail, please see [page 10](#) of this document.**

# 2

## Key Priority 2: Keeping the EVCREW ready for action.

### INVESTMENT

\$50,000 per annum + indexation for five years

We can't predict or control disaster or emergency events, but what we can do is plan for and control the ability to quickly mobilise and respond. There are currently more than 2300 Tasmanians registered on the EVCREW database, standing ready to act if and when needed.

The value of this significant human resource is only fully understood when there is a need to activate people quickly as in all emergency situations it is only in the post-emergency period that there is opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the emergency response.

Volunteering Tasmania, the Tasmanian Government, and community partners in EVCREW have used the experiences of activation during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 as an opportunity for evaluation and review and as a result have been able to produce a range of new approaches to continue to strengthen and enhance the EVCREW model.

Consistency of funding for the EVCREW is vital to ensure that this essential service is accurate and up-to-date, to enable full confidence during times of activation.

#### This funding will ensure:

- The maintenance of the EVCREW database for disaster preparedness and response.
- Opportunities for training volunteers that are registered on the database.
- Capacity building in local councils and non-government organisations (NGOs) on the management of spontaneous volunteers.
- Linkages to emergency management volunteering organisations such as State Emergency Service, Tasmanian Fire Service, and Ambulance Tasmania.
- The development and provision of Volunteering Tasmania's Spontaneous Volunteering Strategy Guide to Tasmania's 29 local councils.

**For more detail, please see [page 14](#) of this document.**



## The challenges for volunteering:

Volunteering Tasmania acknowledges and appreciates the support of and investment in volunteering by the Tasmanian Government which has allowed us to provide peak body functions; develop community-based volunteering strategies; recognise, and encourage young people in volunteering; support the recovery of the volunteering sector through COVID-19; develop mental health training specifically for volunteer coordinators; and provide sector support and development to home and community care providers.

Tasmania's leadership in volunteering throughout Australia is reflected by the fact that in COVID-19 affected 2020, 24.3% of Tasmanians volunteered formally through organisations while 26.4% of Tasmanians participated in informal volunteering, this is in comparison to a national average of 19.6% and 25.3% respectively<sup>1</sup>.

These numbers represent not only the importance of volunteering in Tasmania, and our willingness to come together to support our community and one another during times of difficulty, they also illustrate the fragility of our vital volunteer workforce, with these numbers down from 34.2% and 36.3% in pre-pandemic times<sup>1</sup>. Recent volunteer-specific research from the University of Tasmania paints a starker picture suggesting that 61.9% of Tasmanians were volunteering either formally or informally in the year prior to the pandemic, with this number dropping to 43.5% by the second year of the pandemic<sup>3</sup>. This drop in volunteer numbers has occurred simultaneously with a decrease in the number of hours donated by volunteers in Tasmania<sup>3</sup>, and although the complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated this decline in volunteer participation in Tasmania and Australia more broadly, it is nonetheless consistent with a broader trend that has been an ongoing concern for several years.

Throughout Tasmania the tasks of building strong and resilient communities; mitigating social isolation and loneliness; and increasing social cohesion and inclusion has increasingly fallen to volunteers. Core societal elements including emergency services, education, health, aged care, disability support, environmental management, sport, community welfare, the arts, and tourism have become wholly or partially dependent on volunteer-reliant activities. Public services and programs continue to be outsourced to not-for-profit and community organisations and ever-increasing expectations of the under-resourced volunteer sector have resulted in significant systemic issues. Concerns relating to these trends are exacerbated considerably when viewed through a lens encompassing the Tasmanian context and the issues facing our population more broadly.

*“The costs of providing WWVP [registrations] and NPCs [National Police Checks] is currently absorbed by the Organisation. This is done in appreciation and acknowledgement of the volunteer’s contributions to the Community. Those funds can be put towards further volunteer acknowledgement, fuel vouchers and training. Especially with the costs of living increases.”*

— VT member

## Cost of Living Pressures:

Rising inflation, increased interest rates, and general increase in the prices of everyday essentials have led to cost of living being one of the biggest stress inducers for people in Tasmania and across Australia. In a practical sense, this means that whilst individuals are increasingly working in multiple insecure jobs and facing increased cost of living, they are less likely to have the time or resources required to participate in volunteering, while the demand for volunteers is driven increasingly upward as a direct result of these same pressures.

Tasmanians who wish to volunteer for their communities or the causes that matter to them are finding an additional financial burden in the shape of the investment required to take on many formal volunteering roles, whilst simultaneously grappling with other pressures including changes to paid work and life circumstances. VIOs are similarly expected to navigate increasingly complex regulatory and policy environments, and the changing expectations of volunteers, service users, and the Australian public. This is exacerbated by insufficient resourcing and the expectation that VIOs, through a presumably stable volunteer workforce, will do more with less. The direct and indirect costs of volunteering have become prohibitive to many volunteers as they seek to meet the requirements associated with their roles. In considering the viability for volunteers and the increasing costs of operations, many VIOs have had to apply for emergency funds to ease the financial burden of volunteering.

This pervasive lack of government recognition about the economic, social, cultural, and environmental value, and the true cost of volunteering has led to many VIOs being unable to strategically invest in their own volunteering programs. The cyclical nature of this problem means that without investment in volunteering to address these issues, Tasmania will not be able to adequately address the challenges faced by the rising number of people in our population experiencing increased levels of disadvantage.

## Regulatory and Administrative Challenges:

The governance of volunteering groups and management of volunteers require extensive skills and expertise. VIOs and volunteers themselves must meet a multitude of regulatory and administrative tasks, set to grow further with the introduction of the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework.

Volunteers and VIOs are generally supportive of methods to mitigate risk and have an overarching willingness to meet their obligations, however increasing expectations and requirements have not been accompanied by a commensurate increase in funding or support. Volunteers and VIOs must meet recruitment, onboarding, work health and safety, and training requirements, including police checks, WWVP registrations, COVID-19 vaccination requirements, induction, probation period assessments, among their many other tasks while still seeking to achieve the goals of the volunteering itself. Without adequate support for volunteers and resourcing of VIOs, the investment required to engage in formal volunteering quickly becomes both onerous and discriminatory, reinforcing barriers which exclude those experiencing vulnerability and social inequity from accessing and participating in volunteering. This has been exacerbated by the need for volunteers to pivot towards the use of digital tools in their organisations and roles, while digital literacy and access in Tasmania remain well below the national average<sup>4</sup>. This has highlighted further issues as VIOs attempt to assist with volunteers experiencing varying levels of digital exclusion.

*“The systems around making the WWVP renewal and applications need to be more inclusive and accessible to all members of our communities.”*

— VT member

## Learnings from COVID-19:

The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated how the complexity of hazards, and in particular unforeseen hazards, in the changing global landscape can affect lives, livelihoods, social connection and health. It also served to highlight both the fragility of our response systems and the willingness of the community to respond to challenges and assist others within their communities.

COVID-19 revealed a new frontline in the volunteer-led delivery of community services, through the provision of emergency food, mental health support, information-sharing, transport, and in-home care. This revealed a significant dependence on volunteers amongst aged, community, and hospice care service providers and raised questions for volunteers about the appropriateness of delivering these services in the place of paid workers. Tasmania's reliance on volunteers to fill these service gaps have required volunteers to take on risks and adapt to complex and changing regulations and procedures. This systemic reliance on volunteers is particularly concerning in regional and remote emergency and community services, as community members fill gaps without anyone to replace them if required. If we continue to have a progressive reliance on fewer available volunteers the only possible outcomes are decreased availability of essential services, or an overburdened and unappreciated volunteer workforce.

Volunteering is a unique and comprehensive indicator of individual and collective wellbeing. It is a measure of social capital and represents levels of social connection, physical and mental health, a sense of purpose, and a connection to community. Compared with national rates Tasmania has a higher unemployment rate, a lower labour force participation rate, lower average weekly earnings, and a lower proportion of people with higher education qualifications<sup>5</sup>. In Tasmania, 39.4% of people live in areas of social disadvantage<sup>6</sup> and 84% of Tasmanian households receive government payments<sup>7</sup>, 23.6% of our population lives in poverty, meaning that approximately 120,000 Tasmanians live on less than \$457 a week<sup>8</sup>.

The OECD Better Life Index indicates that social connection is the single most important determinant of life satisfaction and is affected by whether people have someone to count on in times of need<sup>9</sup>. While many Tasmanians require the support provided by volunteers, they also benefit from the act of volunteering which provides a pathway to social connection and community participation, with the Productivity Commission finding in 2021 that volunteering assists in creating purpose and social connection and that "Volunteers – with and without mental illness - are also likely to benefit from the process of volunteering. Volunteering is an important part of social capital; it can provide opportunities for diverse and genuine social relationships, whilst serving as a possible pathway for employment. The act of volunteering itself may also have mental health benefits."<sup>10</sup> This is of particular significance given that 2018 data shows that 1 in 5 Tasmanians was living with a mental health condition and the Australia-wide upward trend in mental health problems during and following the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>11</sup>.

*"We ask volunteers to fill more and more community service roles. Especially as funding cutbacks increase and then many organisations relying on the support of volunteers."*

*— VT member*





# The solutions:



## Key Priority 1:

### **Free Working with Vulnerable People registration for volunteers and the provision of renewal services at Service Tasmania Branches.**

#### INVESTMENT

\$500,000 per annum (ongoing)

Volunteers contribute to the fundamental functioning of society, with governments, not-for-profit organisations, and communities dependent on the social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits of volunteering<sup>13</sup>.

At a national level, volunteering rates are used to measure trust and civic engagement and are linked to higher levels of economic growth, and government performance<sup>14</sup>. Volunteering has gained some level of consideration in public policy and yet the contributions of volunteers and the volunteer sector are often under-acknowledged by government. The low profile of volunteering and its lack of visibility means that its resourcing profile is constrained, resulting in limited investment in capability and capacity building<sup>15</sup>. In offering skills, commitment, local knowledge, and expertise volunteers assist governments to deliver better outcomes<sup>16</sup>. As a result, policy makers must consider the implications of state-based regulatory costs upon volunteers and VIOs, as well as the broader impacts of declining volunteer rates across all aspects of community life<sup>17</sup>.

Despite their essential contributions, volunteers and VIOs in Tasmania consistently report that statutory volunteer screening is excessive, and that the associated financial cost and administrative burden of compliance create significant barriers to

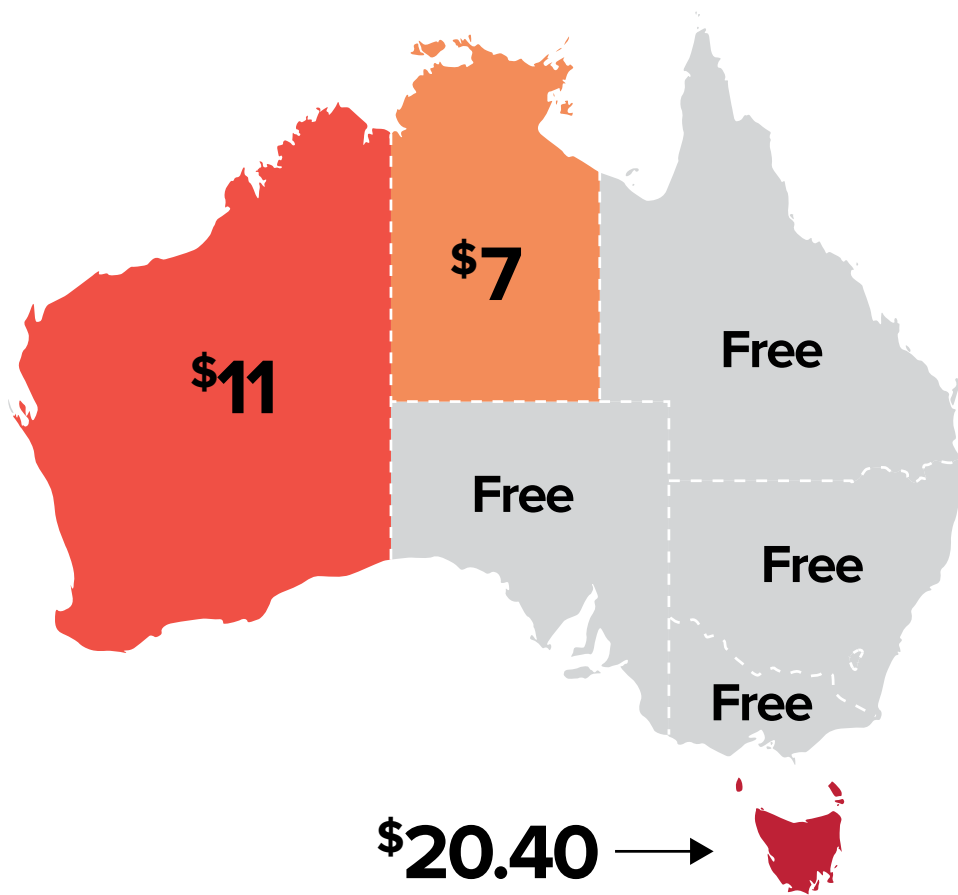
In 2021 just over \$5 million revenue (\$5,019,000) was received from the Department of Justice from Working with Vulnerable People Checks, this was up from \$4,478,000 in 2020.

Of the 141,000 people who held Working with Vulnerable People Registrations 55,000 or 39% were registered as volunteers.

In 2020-21 there were 67,000 applications or renewals of Working with Vulnerable People registrations.

The above figure of 39% would approximate that just over 26,000 (26,130) of these were volunteer registrations.

At a current cost to the consumer of \$20.40 for a volunteer Working with Vulnerable People registration this equates to total revenue from volunteer registrations of \$533,052<sup>12</sup>.



**Diagram: Working with Vulnerable People Equivalent costs for Volunteers in Australian Jurisdictions<sup>18,19</sup>.**

volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention across the state. Tasmania is the most expensive place in Australia for volunteers to acquire a WWVP registration or its equivalent, and one of only three jurisdictions in the country that requires volunteers to pay for this mandatory registration.

In recognising the regulatory burden upon the volunteer sector and supporting the need for statutory screening, Volunteering Tasmania urges the Tasmanian Government to absorb the costs of delivering free WWVP registration for volunteers and to allow volunteers to renew their WWVP registrations in person at Service Tasmania branches.

Tasmanians are motivated to provide support for and respond to the needs of their communities in moments of crisis, compassion, and connection however volunteering, or undertaking work-related activities without receiving benefit (i.e., a salary) is a daunting concept for people facing financial stress<sup>20</sup>. Up-front costs, and a lack of reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses are significant barriers for community members who wish to volunteer<sup>21</sup>, with out-of-pocket expenses identified as the largest barrier (27%) to volunteering by those experiencing financial stress<sup>22</sup>.

Other barriers such as a lack of flexibility and onerous administrative requirements<sup>22</sup> in conjunction with the hidden costs of volunteering including childcare, transport, parking, and other expenses often prohibit or restrict people from volunteering.

*“The systems around making the WWVPC renewal and applications need to be more inclusive and accessible to all members of our communities.”*

— VT member

While some VIOs have implemented rigorous reimbursement policies and practices, others have developed organisational cultures which do not actively encourage volunteers to make expense claims. Volunteers can therefore become expected to contribute both their time and their personal finances to their roles<sup>23</sup>, a burden that can be underestimated by organisations<sup>24</sup> with fewer than 50% of Tasmanian VIOs reimbursing their volunteers.



As costs of living rise, so too does the reliance upon volunteers to meet the rising pressures of system gaps and vulnerability in their communities, yet their capacity to volunteer becomes compromised by the need to exchange time for financial remuneration and limits volunteer participation to those who can afford it. This same pressure has also been felt by VIOs experiencing the financial strain of organisations operational costs rising alongside those of cost of living.

Tasmanian volunteers are currently required to renew their WWVP registration online. While volunteers can visit a branch of Service Tasmania to pay for their renewal, they are prohibited from making the application for renewal in person. Registered volunteers will receive their renewal notice by email or SMS before the expiry date and have up to 30 days after the expiry date to renew. If a renewal application is not made within 30 days, the volunteer will need to complete a new application and will not be able to work or volunteer with vulnerable people until they have re-registered<sup>25</sup>.

The Tasmanian WWVP registration renewal system assumes a level of digital inclusion across the state which the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) measures as the worst in the nation<sup>26</sup>. While the ADII indicates that digital inclusion has slowly improved, Tasmania trails behind the rest of Australia and the gap is widening<sup>26</sup>.

The Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Council's (PESRAC) Final Report identified digital infrastructure (recommendation 10)<sup>27</sup> and digital inclusion (recommendations 24 and 25)<sup>28</sup> as priority areas for action. The Final Report found that "[m]any Tasmanians cannot participate in the digital world because of poor digital literacy or affordability, appropriate equipment or online access"<sup>29</sup>. Requiring volunteers to renew their registration online presents a significant barrier to volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention.

Volunteering brings both tangible and intangible benefits to the individual volunteers, the people they help, and to society more broadly, and VIOs often acknowledge the significant benefits gained from involving volunteers with diverse backgrounds yet identify challenges in integrating lived experience within existing organisational and volunteer management frameworks. Organisational response to structural issues of regulatory cost and under resourcing result in an inability to meet the inclusion and diverse needs of clients and volunteers. Discouraging people from diverse backgrounds in accessing the opportunities and benefits provided to others through engagement in volunteering.

Care must be taken by the Tasmanian Government to consider the short, medium, and long-term impacts of the notable decline in the unpaid workforce and allocate adequate long-term funding to ensure the sustainability of volunteering.

“As costs of living rise, so too does the reliance upon volunteers to meet the rising pressures of system gaps and vulnerability in their communities, yet their capacity to volunteer becomes compromised by the need to exchange time for financial remuneration and limits volunteer participation to those who can afford it.”



# The solutions:

## 2

### Key Priority 2:

## Keeping the EVCREW ready for action.

#### INVESTMENT

\$50,000 per annum + indexation for five years

Through floods, fires, and storms, volunteers have mobilised to help Tasmania prepare for, respond to, and recover from extreme and unpredictable events. As the realities of climate change become increasingly prevalent, so too do the risks to people, property, communities, businesses, and the economy<sup>30</sup>.

Severe, concurrent, and consecutive hazard events can increase the pressure on exposed and vulnerable communities, with widespread and prolonged impacts for recovery as each disaster event adds to the scale of damage caused by the previous<sup>31</sup>.

One measure of the strength of a community's response and recovery system in its attentiveness to its most vulnerable citizens, recognising that some individuals and groups are highly and permanently vulnerable to disaster events, while others are vulnerable to consequence. Not everyone has the same level of exposure to disaster events or the same ability to recover from them.

Pervasive social inequalities and rising costs of living leave some population groups more vulnerable than others to disasters as they do not have access to the same resources as others to prepare for, respond to and recover from disaster events<sup>32</sup>.

The provision of disaster resilience volunteer support, such as EV CREW offers crucial assistance to citizens at a time when government services have reached capacity.

In the 2021-22 financial year the EV Crew now has 27 Volunteer Groups included on the database and 2355 Individual Volunteers registered on the database, 986 of whom indicated they held a WWVP registration and 736 of whom indicated they held a valid Police Check.

EVCREW have worked with four local councils (Hobart, Huon, Kingborough and Sorell) to provide support and increase understanding of the support council required during times of emergency refuge and spontaneous volunteering. This work has been effective in strengthening and enhancing the EVCREW model. If organisations and local government are not prepared for the involvement of spontaneous volunteers before disaster strikes, they will likely be required to develop responses amid a crisis. In relying on post rather than pre disaster funding, the Tasmanian Government risk the diversion of funds from other public programs such as those focussed on health and well-being, those that support resilience, and impact investment and economic growth<sup>33</sup>.

“Severe, concurrent, and consecutive hazard events can increase the pressure on exposed and vulnerable communities, with widespread and prolonged impacts for recovery as each disaster event adds to the scale of damage caused by the previous<sup>31</sup>.”



Disaster resilience requires cross-sector and whole of society responses, to effectively “[work] together, using the best available evidence, to understand, reduce risks and prepare for disasters. It is about acting beforehand to reduce the impacts of disasters on communities and the environment”<sup>34</sup>.

The Tasmanian Disaster Resilience Strategy 2020-2025, states that being prepared for disasters requires strategies such as the “[pursuit] of measures to ensure emergency management personnel (paid and volunteer) are valued, supported and developed” to ensure that “Tasmania’s emergency management sector can capably respond to disasters and enable relief and recovery”<sup>35</sup>. It further notes that, “disaster resilient communities can better cope with other stresses, such as industry closures and household level crises”, “helps reduce poverty and inequality” and “contributes to the stability of Tasmania’s economy”<sup>36</sup>. Through the power of the EVCREW, Volunteering Tasmania has been able to support Councils and non-government organisations in their role of ensuring the safety and well-being of the most vulnerable in our communities.

While state and territory governments vary in their utilisation of volunteerism in recovery, the Draft Propositions from the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements note that “state and territory governments should improve arrangements for the coordination of spontaneous volunteers in relief and recovery from natural disasters, for example by adopting the Emergency Volunteering CREW model used in Queensland [the ACT and Tasmania]”<sup>37,38</sup>.

Volunteers are a key resource for surge capacity during emergencies. Tasmania is well-positioned to ensure volunteers are engaged safely, effectively and at times of need due to VT’s delivery of the EV CREW. The EV CREW program exists during peacetime as an emergency management planning and preparatory tool, with a key focus on communications and relationship management. However, in the event of disaster, EV CREW shift into a role of response and recovery with the live deployment of volunteers to registered organisations.

“Following a natural disaster significant numbers of volunteers offer their time and effort to support the recovery of affected communities. This often includes individual volunteers, emergent organisations, and established volunteer organisations”<sup>39</sup>. EV CREW provides an essential piece of volunteer assistance during times of disaster, providing a centralised platform for registration, identification and safe, coordinated mobilisation of volunteers. The value of this significant human resource is only fully understood when there is a need to activate people quickly. And as with all emergency situations, it is the period post-emergency that provides an opportunity to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the systems and models used.

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