

Volunteering Tasmania

Submission: Refreshing Tasmania's Population Strategy Consultation Paper

February 2023

Overview

In 2015, the Tasmanian Government released its first Population Growth Strategy. Since this time, Tasmania has experienced unprecedented population growth, achieving the 2030 population milestone eight years ahead of schedule. This expansion has been accompanied by key challenges and has required the Government to further consider how to achieve population growth in a sustainable way, while ensuring that everyone benefits.¹ As such, the Refreshing Tasmania's Population Strategy Consultation Paper (the Paper) poses the primary question - 'How can we better plan for and manage future population trends and issues?'² The consultation paper will identify the following objectives and challenges:

Objectives:

- Enable planning arrangements that improve liveability.
- Reduce unnecessary barriers to those wishing to have and raise children.
- Align emerging employment opportunities, changing workforce needs and migration.
- Manage a structurally ageing population.

Challenges:

- Increasing pressures on government services [increased pressures on communities].
- Uneven growth and decline in different areas causing some services to be unsustainable.
- Social cohesion.

¹ Tasmanian Government, Refreshing Tasmania's Population Strategy – consultation Paper January 2023, pp. 2, https://www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/414550/Consultation_Paper_-_Refreshing_Tasmanias_Population_Strategy_2023.pdf.

² Tasmanian Government, Refreshing Tasmania's Population Strategy – consultation Paper January 2023, pp. 2, https://www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/414550/Consultation_Paper_-_Refreshing_Tasmanias_Population_Strategy_2023.pdf.

Volunteering Tasmania's response

Key considerations

- Tasmania's reliance on volunteers to fill systems and service gaps will increase as its population increases. Without strategic intervention, volunteers will not be available in the areas that governments depend on them to be.
- Volunteers are essential to the well-being and liveability of communities.
- Effective, strategic workforce planning must consider and include volunteers.
 - When considering the Tasmanian workforce, the Strategy should use the language of 'worker' as per the Tasmanian *Work Health and Safety Act 2012*³ which distinguishes between volunteers, employees and other contractual workers but considers them all a part of the workforce.
- Volunteers are an essential component of the aged care workforce. They provide care and support that is essential to the well-being of older Tasmanians.
- Volunteering supports gender equitable employment outcomes.
- Volunteering provides young people with opportunities to deepen their connections with their geographic and broader communities, and offers pathways to employment.
- Volunteering can strengthen the attraction and retention of working age and family formation age groups in our communities by increasing their sense of belonging and well-being.
- Page 10 of the Paper states, "The Population Strategy will consider policies which permit and encourage women to stay in the labour force when they have children..." The use of the word 'permit' in this context and in the development of the strategy should be avoided.

Volunteering and the revision of Tasmania's Population Strategy?

Volunteering is a powerful driver of well-being in Tasmania. For many Tasmanians, it is a way of life. More than two-thirds of our population, about 300,000 individuals aged 16 years and over, lend a hand across our communities in a myriad of ways.^{4,5}

- The contribution of these volunteers to Tasmania is estimated at a value of over \$4 billion annually.⁶
- A downward trend in volunteer participation in Tasmania is evident. Should this trend persist, there will be a 42% gap between the demand for, and supply of, volunteers and volunteer services by 2029.⁷

³ Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Tas), s7.

⁴ Volunteering Tasmania Inc, The Great Reset: Volunteering in Tasmania post-COVID-19, 2022, pg 4, https://volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The_Great_Reset_Paper_2022_FINAL_Web.pdf.

⁵ ABS, GSS, Summary Results, 2020 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release#data-download>

⁴ Volunteering Tasmania 2019, The State of Volunteering Report Tasmania 2019 Summary, <https://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/State-of-Volunteering-Report-%E2%80%93-Summary.pdf>

⁷ Volunteering Tasmania, The Great Reset Paper, pp. 4, https://volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The_Great_Reset_Paper_2022_FINAL_Web.pdf.

- Volunteering has become a subject of interest to politicians and policy makers across the world. In Tasmania, the significance of volunteering to well-being, safety, connection and belonging has been recognised within the following policies:
 - Healthy Tasmania Strategic Plan 2022-26
 - Community Services Industry Plan 2021-2031
 - Accessible Island: Tasmania’s Disability Framework for Action 2018-2021
 - Food Relief to Food Resilience: Tasmanian Food Security Strategy 2021-2024
 - Our Multicultural Island: Tasmania’s Multicultural Policy
 - Active Ageing Plan
 - It Takes a Tasmanian Village: Child and Youth Well-being Strategy
 - Tasmanian Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector: Strategy and Action Plan 2022/24
 - Neighbourhood House Program: Strategic Framework 2018-2023 Part 1
 - Tasmanian Disaster Resilience Strategy 2020-25
 - Tasmania’s Strategy for Adult Literacy and Numeracy 2016-2025

Increasing pressures on government services [and increased pressures on volunteers and their communities]

- “Population growth is a key strategic focus for the Government because it is a major driver of economic development.”⁸
- Tasmania’s reliance upon volunteers to fill systems gaps will continue to increase alongside an increasing population and demand for government services.
- Volunteering Tasmania’s *State of Volunteering Report 2019*, revealed that 41% of surveyed volunteer inclusive organisations operated in the community services, the highest out of any other sector.⁹
- The emergent volunteer frontline during COVID-19 revealed a significant dependance on volunteers amongst aged, community, and hospice care service providers and raised questions about the sustainability of the volunteer workforce without strategic focus and intervention.
- Volunteers are a vital part of the aged care workforce, supporting the well-being of older people in their homes and in residential settings. As such, volunteers must be considered strategically in workforce planning.
- The *2020 Aged Care Workforce Census Report*, revealed that in November 2020, residential aged care (RAC) facilities reported a 49% decrease in the number of volunteers than that reported in 2016¹⁰, a greater impact than for paid job roles. Volunteers in RAC facilities primarily helped with social activity support, companionship, and planned group activities.
- Services such as Meals on Wheels¹¹ are delivered primarily by volunteers.

⁸ Tasmanian Government, Refreshing Tasmania’s Population Strategy – consultation Paper January 2023, pp. 3, https://www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/414550/Consultation_Paper_-_Refreshing_Tasmanias_Population_Strategy_2023.pdf.

⁹ Volunteering Tasmania, *State of Volunteering Report 2019*, pp. 28.

¹⁰ Australian Government Department of Health, Ageing and Aged Care For Workforce, *2020 Aged Care Workforce Census Report*, pp 22, <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/10/2020-aged-care-workforce-census.pdf>.

¹¹ Meals on Wheels Australian, *Submission Royal Commission into Aged Care and Quality and Safety 2020*, pp. 2, <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/submission/AWF.660.00126.0001.pdf>.

- Volunteer ambulance drivers fill systems gaps and are particularly critical to the health and well-being of rural populations.
- We rely heavily on volunteers to provide supports, activities, and services across all aspects of Tasmanian life. Voluntary work underpins a wide range of activities that contribute to well-being, including health, education, sports and recreation, social services, arts and culture, human rights, emergency services, the environment and conservation, animal welfare, and community support and development.
- Volunteering also plays a role in bolstering the relationship between people and the ‘state’. Volunteers can support community members who have experienced challenges with services, to help them access and participate with the ‘state’ by fostering trust and safety through social relationships and advocacy.

Uneven growth and decline in different areas, causing some services to be unsustainable

- Liveable communities are considered as those that are “healthier, more economically vibrant, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable places to live.”¹²
- Programs like Volunteering Tasmania’s Youth Volunteer Army support young people to deepen their connections to and explore opportunities for development within their communities. It fosters a culture of volunteering, builds social capital and supports communities to break down preconceptions about young people’s contributions to their communities. Volunteering through this program enables young people to leverage off their connections and experiences, building pathways to employment.
- As a result of the gendered drivers of economic inequality (such as disproportionate performance of caring roles in the home, society and the work force, unaffordable childcare, etc.), women do not have access to formal volunteering opportunities in the quantities that men do. This has an impact upon their ability to develop skills, networks, leadership opportunities, etc. that advance careers. Volunteering is not exempt from gendered structures, and the gendered barriers to employment need to be considered alongside those to volunteering so women can access equitable employment outcomes.
 - Research data demonstrates that volunteering can support a pathway to paid employment. For example, in a 2018 SEEK survey, 85% of recruiters thought volunteering was just as credible as paid work if it was relevant to the role or industry.¹³

Social cohesion

- Extensive research demonstrates that volunteering is a unique and comprehensive indicator of individual, collective well-being, and national well-being.
- Volunteering increases liveability by building social capital, safety, inclusion, and connection, while also fostering environmentally sustainable communities.

¹² Tasmanian Government, Refreshing Tasmania’s Population Strategy – consultation Paper January 2023, pp. 9, https://www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/414550/Consultation_Paper_-_Refreshing_Tasmanias_Population_Strategy_2023.pdf.

¹³ Volunteering Australia, Key Volunteering Statistics January 2021, https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-Key-Statistics_2020.01.pdf.

- Economic growth alone does not account for a community’s success over time. Governments across Australia and around the world are recognising the impacts that volunteering has to well-being, and its impacts upon life satisfaction and liveability.
- The 2010 General Social Survey shows that volunteers were much more likely to be involved in other aspects of community life than non-volunteers:
 - Volunteers (82%) were more likely than non-volunteers (55%) to have attended a community event recently.
 - Volunteers (44%) were much more likely than non-volunteers (15%) to have ever provided a service or activity in their local area.
 - 62% of volunteers agreed (either strongly or somewhat) that most people could be trusted, compared with 50% of non-volunteers.
 - 82% of volunteers were delighted, pleased or mostly satisfied with their lives, compared to 75% of non-volunteers.
 - People who volunteered through an organisation (64%) were more likely to provide informal assistance to someone outside their own household than non-volunteers (41%).¹⁴
- According to the *2019 State of Volunteering Report*, the primary motivations to volunteer in Tasmania are:
 - to contribute to community (to contribute to communities in emergencies and crisis, to help build community resilience)
 - to support a cause (such as an association to an organisation or cause, need or desire to give back and make a difference)
 - to make a values-based contribution¹⁵
- The Consultation Paper states the 2022 Population Statement projects that “population growth comes primarily (70%) from overseas migration”¹⁶
- Volunteering Tasmania’s work with nine newly arrived migrants through the Volunteer Management Activity highlighted that newly arrived migrants volunteer to:
 - improve employment potential through work experience and job networks
 - expand social networks and connections and gain friendships
 - have opportunities to practice English and improve social skills
 - support permanent residency visa or citizenship applications
 - gain a sense of belonging, be involved in and give back to their local community
- According to *Formal and informal volunteering by cultural and linguistic diversity (ABS 2019)*¹⁷, newly arrived migrants are more likely to volunteer in their communities than formally through an organisation. While this may indicate some barriers to accessing formal opportunities (such as administrative requirements, permanent residency requirements, language barriers, etc.), it does indicate a drive to volunteer at the local level.
- The Healthy Tasmania Five Year Strategic Plan 2022-26 notes, “factors that help people to reach optimal levels of mental health and wellbeing include: purpose through a job, education or

¹⁴ Volunteering Australia, Key Volunteering Statistics January 2021, https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-Key-Statistics_2020.01.pdf.

¹⁵ Volunteering Tasmania, State of Volunteering Report 2019, pp. 20.

¹⁶ Tasmanian Government, Refreshing Tasmania’s Population Strategy – consultation Paper January 2023, pp. 5, https://www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/414550/Consultation_Paper_-_Refreshing_Tasmanias_Population_Strategy_2023.pdf.

¹⁷ Volunteering Australia, Key Volunteering Statistics January 2021, https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-Key-Statistics_2020.01.pdf.

volunteering.”¹⁸ It further states, “support community action that promotes mental health and wellbeing in communities, across all life stages, especially through opportunities for lifelong learning, volunteering, social connection, positive relationship building and reducing loneliness.”¹⁹

- As a driver of inclusion and social change, volunteering offers opportunities to dismantle rigid social and cultural norms, providing opportunities for intersection and connection. It can offer safe and welcoming spaces for people experiencing exclusion.

Conclusion

In Refreshing Tasmania’s Population Strategy, the Tasmanian Government must recognise, consider, and invest in volunteering, if they wish to meet the objectives outlined in the consultation paper. Volunteering is a catalyst for change; opportunity; individual, collective, and environmental well-being; social cohesion; and liveability. It is a crucial component of effective workforce, community and population planning.

People will always give their time, where they can, to matters they care about. While governments have become reliant upon an ever available, volunteer workforce, without strategic intervention, volunteers will not be present in areas that governments depend on them to be.
