

Response to the 2023-24 Tasmanian State Budget

Volunteering Tasmania has met with 2023-24 State Budget with mixed emotions.

We welcome funding for the continuation of the Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather (EV CREW) program and look forward to working closely with the Department of Premier and Cabinet – Resilience and Recovery, Local Government Areas, and our members to ensure that the EV CREW remains responsive to contemporary needs.

The EV CREW supports state emergency management planning and facilitates the deployment of surge capacity volunteers during times of need, offering critical assistance to Tasmanians when government services have reached capacity. These volunteers provide immeasurable support to a community's wellbeing as it prepares for, responds to, and recovers from extreme weather events.

We also acknowledge the funding that has been allocated to some key volunteer involving areas, including but not limited to, migrant support services; neighbourhood houses; community transport; gendered violence services; ambulance, fire, and emergency services. While we welcome these funding announcements, we know that volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) require significant systemic and ongoing investment to support the volunteer coordination and systems necessary to attract and retain volunteers.

The announcement of a short-term funding top-up for one year for some community service organisations is welcome, however, it does not cover the increased costs of delivering essential services to Tasmanians. The Budget does deliver some measures aimed to relieve cost-of-living, however, these measures will not address a deepening dependence on volunteers to fill critical systems and service delivery gaps. Despite Tasmania's strong volunteering culture, without strategic intervention to address these sector challenges, it is estimated that there will be a gap of 42% between the demand for, and supply of, volunteers and volunteer services by 2029.

On behalf of our members, Volunteering Tasmania's 2023-24 budget submission asked the Tasmanian Government to provide free Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) registration for volunteers. Tasmania is one of only three Australian states/ territories to charge volunteers for WWVP registration, and it's the most expensive. Volunteers and VIOs have consistently reported that the financial cost and administrative burden of obtaining a WWVP registration is a significant barrier to volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention.

We are disappointed that the Tasmanian Government has chosen not to invest in alleviating this cost for Tasmanian volunteers and VIOs. On behalf of our members, and Tasmania's volunteering sector, we will continue to advocate to the Tasmanian Government for targeted and strategic budget measures which invest in Tasmania's wellbeing through investment in the long, rather than short term future of volunteering in Tasmania.