



## Submission to the NDIS Review

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## About VolunteeringACT

Volunteering and Contact ACT Ltd (trading as VolunteeringACT) is the peak body for volunteering and provides community information services in the Canberra region. We also deliver programs for people experiencing disadvantage and isolation, people with disability, and people needing support for mental wellness. VolunteeringACT has a vision of an inclusive Canberra, and a mission to foster inclusion by enabling participation and connection.

VolunteeringACT values collaboration, diversity, equity, innovation, integrity, and participation. VolunteeringACT is a people driven, service-focused organisation that represents the interests of 189 members, advocates for and supports volunteers, and engages with the broader Canberra community. Through our activities, we improve inclusivity, enable sustainable volunteering, and create a more resilient Canberra community.

VolunteeringACT is part of the National Network of Volunteering Peak Bodies in Australia. This submission supports and complements the national submission made by Volunteering Australia.

VolunteeringACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the Canberra region. VolunteeringACT pays respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their vital ongoing contribution to our lands.

VolunteeringACT acknowledges volunteers of all genders and sexualities, with all abilities and from all cultures. Their skills, expertise, and time are critical to delivering services and programs, and in making Canberra a better place to live. We also acknowledge the contribution of the volunteer involving organisations that contribute to the health and happiness of our community.

This submission has been made as part of our commitment to ensuring the perspectives and expertise of volunteers, volunteer involving organisations and volunteer leaders informs development of public policy and contributes to achievement of positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes. The content has been informed by the experiences of organisations in our membership and networks, and our experiences of engaging with and delivering services to people living with mental ill health, people with multiple/complex needs including those with a dual diagnosis of substance misuse and mental health, and people with disability, including psychosocial conditions.

## Introduction

VolunteeringACT welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Review.

This submission has been informed by consultations with our members, other volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs), and people with lived experience in the ACT region.

VolunteeringACT provided some initial feedback directly to the NDIS Review Panel during Volunteering Australia's National Policy Group meeting on 7 June 2023. This submission incorporates that feedback, while also focusing on solutions and responding to relevant themes and questions within the recently released *What We Have Heard* Report.

Volunteers are the often-invisible workforce supporting a wide range of services and activities across society and contributing to building healthier and more resilient individuals, communities, and natural environments. Volunteering is an activity that cuts across numerous Government departments/portfolios including (but not limited to) disability, social services, health, mental health, education, and employment. There is great potential for the NDIS to recognise, champion and strengthen the contribution of volunteering to disability support services and to promote and support volunteering as a legitimate pathway to employment and education for people with disability and a contributor to social connection, mental health and wellbeing.

We have provided our key list of recommendations below, with further details on the following pages.

## Recommendations

- 1. That the volunteering sector and its volunteer workforce are recognised as an integral element of the disability support system and included and consulted with in NDIS strategic planning and resourcing processes, as standard.**
- 2. That volunteering is recognised and promoted by the NDIS as a potential contributor to social connection and wellbeing outcomes for NDIS participants.**
- 3. That volunteering is recognised and promoted as a legitimate pathway to employment for NDIS participants.**
- 4. That funding for the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Program supports the costs involved in the management and involvement of volunteers.**
- 5. That the NDIS incorporates active promotion of volunteer programs as an integral part of NDIS service offerings to assist in raising the profile of volunteering as an effective NDIS support component/enhancement.**

6. That, in consultation with the volunteering sector and people with lived experience, the NDIS develop clear National guidance on a) the role of volunteers within the Scheme and b) involving people with disability as volunteers.
7. That the NDIS establish and clearly communicate a nationally consistent approach to screening of volunteer workers that is accessible, streamlined, and free of charge.
8. That the NDIS establishes a robust and consistent data collection process to capture the number of volunteers within the disability workforce and the outcomes they are achieving.
9. That the unmet support needs identified in this submission are responded to within the NDIS Review process, recognising the potential for the volunteer workforce to contribute to meeting these needs in some cases.

## The Contribution of Volunteering to a ‘complete and joined up ecosystem of support’

Volunteers are an integral element of disability support in the ACT and across Australia. Recent data indicates that 4.7 per cent of Australian volunteers are engaged by organisations within the disability sector.<sup>1</sup> This equates to around 319,000 volunteers performing a broad range of roles across Australian disability services.<sup>2</sup>

For many organisations providing National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) services, volunteers are an essential part of service provision and integral to a relationship-based care model. Volunteers can provide unique services that add significant value and are very different to those provided by paid workers. For example, volunteers are well placed to provide genuine friendship, personalised support, and opportunities for community engagement.<sup>3</sup> Service providers in the ACT have commented that aspects of their programs could simply not be achieved without the involvement of volunteers.

Despite this, there is a lack of recognition, planning and support for the involvement of volunteers in the NDIS. Existing NDIS policy frameworks, funding models and data collection methods are not sufficient to facilitate or sustain volunteer involvement in the sector and

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<sup>1</sup> Volunteering Australia (2022) *Volunteering in Australia – The Volunteer Perspective*: <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Based on the count of the Australian population reported in the 2021 Census; <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/population-census/2021>

<sup>3</sup> University of Melbourne (2019) *Value Added: Volunteer-Supported Services and the Challenge of the NDIS*, <https://www.interchange.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Value-Added-Volunteer-Supported-Services-and-the-Challenge-of-the-NDIS.pdf>

volunteers are not considered in key strategic and financial planning processes. For example, the volunteer workforce is not included in the NDIS National Workforce Plan: 2021-2025.<sup>4</sup>

It is critical that volunteering is recognised as an integral element within the ecosystem of disability support and that the NDIS Review process incorporates finding ways to ensure the volunteering activities that underpin and contribute to NDIS service delivery are sustainable and supported. There is an opportunity for the NDIS to recognise and champion the significant value that volunteering can add to the disability support services sector and put policies, processes, and resourcing in place to support this.

### **Recommendation:**

- 1. That the volunteering sector and its volunteer workforce are recognised as an integral element of the disability support system and included and consulted with in NDIS strategic planning and resourcing processes, as standard.**

## **Volunteering and Sustainable Outcomes**

The *What We Have Heard Report* specifically asks how the scheme can better support participants to nurture connections to local community, learn new skills and prepare for, join, or stay in employment.<sup>5</sup> Volunteering already acts as a gateway for many individuals to connect with their community around the goals outlined above, and has great potential to contribute much more to all of these outcomes for NDIS participants.

### **Volunteering and Social Connection**

Volunteering has been found to help individuals develop stronger social networks and interpersonal relationships, improve self-esteem, relieve stress, alleviate symptoms of depression, and help with mental health recovery and/or self-management.<sup>6,7</sup> This important link is reflected in the ACT Wellbeing Framework, within the *Social Connection* and *Time* domains, with volunteering used as a key indicator of Canberrans being connected with family, friends, and community, and having the time to live life well.<sup>8</sup> This has also been acknowledged

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Social Services (2021) *NDIS National Workforce Plan: 2021-2025*,

[https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/06\\_2021/ndis-national-workforce-plan-2021-2025.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/06_2021/ndis-national-workforce-plan-2021-2025.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> NDIS Review (2023) *What we have heard*, p19, <https://www.ndisreview.gov.au/resources/reports/what-we-have-heard-report>

<sup>6</sup> Healthdirect (2021) *Benefits of Volunteering*, <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/benefits-of-volunteering>

<sup>7</sup> Head to Health (n.d.) *Purposeful activity – volunteering*, <https://www.headtohealth.gov.au/meaningful-life/purposeful-activity/volunteering>

<sup>8</sup> ACT Government (2023) *ACT Wellbeing Framework – Explore overall wellbeing*, <https://www.act.gov.au/wellbeing/explore-overall-wellbeing>

within the new National Wellbeing Framework, with volunteering included as a measure of the Social Connection Indicator.<sup>9</sup>

Research demonstrates that volunteering can lead to reduced feelings of alienation and loneliness amongst people with disability and empower them to become active providers of support to others.<sup>10</sup>

### **Recommendation:**

- 2. That volunteering is recognised and promoted by the NDIS as a potential contributor to social connection and wellbeing outcomes for NDIS participants.**

### **Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment**

Volunteering is a strong and legitimate pathway to education and employment. It is also an important way for people who are commonly excluded from workplaces to gain transferable skills that will aid them to achieve employment outcomes. For people with disability, their disability can be perceived as ‘non-ability’ when it comes to being in control of their own lives, decisions, and employment prospects. Research demonstrates that volunteering can help people with disability build personal skills, access networking opportunities, and find paid roles.<sup>11</sup>

There is an opportunity for the NDIS to have a stronger role in recognising the potential of volunteering as a key contributor to NDIS Plan goals related to employment and championing what volunteering can do to help improve people’s independence and life choices and the value their diverse life experiences bring to organisations and workplaces.

Continuing and ongoing support for people with disability to access volunteering as a pathway to employment, and more support for volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) to build their capacity for inclusion and change their organisational culture is vital for strengthening volunteering – both in terms of increasing the number of opportunities available, but also improving the quality of those volunteer experiences.

In the ACT we have had feedback that young people with disability would benefit from volunteering being a recognised ‘bridging’ option to help aid their transition from education either into the workplace, or into the next phase of their career/skills development journey. Volunteering can provide a safe and supportive vocational learning environment as part of an

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<sup>9</sup> Australian Government (2023) *Measuring what Matters Statement*, p56, <https://treasury.gov.au/publication/p2023-mwm>

<sup>10</sup> Yanay-Ventura, G (2018) “Nothing About Us Without Us” in *Volunteerism Too: Volunteering Among People with Disabilities*, *Voluntas*, 30(1): 147,163, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-018-0026-7>

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

overall education/skills development approach and a much needed 'stepping stone' for young people with disability to safely try out different work settings/roles at their own pace and build up their practical experience in preparation for paid employment further down the track.

**Recommendation:**

- 3. That volunteering is recognised and promoted as a legitimate pathway to employment for NDIS participants.**

## Supporting Volunteer Programs

While volunteers offer their time for free, there are costs associated with running volunteer programs and they require adequate funding to ensure their viability. There is a need for greater resourcing for volunteer programs and volunteer management functions/staffing that contribute to the disability services sector (both within and outside of the NDIS). While demand for these activities is rising, funding levels are not. Volunteers require ongoing line management to ensure their volunteering experience is ethical, safe, inclusive, and in line with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement (currently being refreshed).<sup>12</sup> It is vital that programs are run in this way, as this ensures they are sustainable and deliver high quality outcomes, which adds significant value to NDIS and other related support services.

Funding volunteer-led services/activities through individual package funding can be problematic in most circumstances. The provision of block funding through the ILC program offers a more stable arrangement which is critical to volunteer program sustainability and effectiveness.

VolunteeringACT currently leads the ILC-funded **Inclusive Volunteering Pathways to Employment (IVP) Program** operating across Tasmania, NSW, and the ACT in partnership with the Centre for Volunteering (NSW) and Volunteering Tasmania. This program has a working relationship with Department of Employment Service Providers to facilitate inclusive volunteering opportunities for people with disability and has a proven track record of delivering positive and sustainable volunteering outcomes for them. The block funding approach means the IVP Program is provided free of charge and involves working closely with participants to understand their individual employment goals, find a suitable placement, overcome barriers, and support them in a volunteering journey that is both rewarding and enjoyable. The IVP Program also provides training and works with organisations to help them become more inclusive as they involve people with all abilities and from all background in their workplace.

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<sup>12</sup> Volunteering Australia (2015) *The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement*, <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/national-standards-and-supporting-material/>

The IVP Program clearly demonstrates real outcomes for real people. Participants frequently report back to VolunteeringACT that their involvement in the program has made a significant difference to their social connectivity and their employment prospects. Two recent examples of participant feedback are provided below:

*“I was shy. I was focused on finding employment and I couldn’t find a job. Volunteering changed my life. Before volunteering I had limited interaction with others. Now I am able to interact with people, people from Australia and people visiting Australia. I’m learning about science; it is an interesting place to volunteer. I feel like an important person. I translate for Arabic visitors; I am part of a team. I feel like I have found my place. I feel Australian.”*

– IVP Participant

*“I am delighted to inform you that I have been offered a job as an Administration Officer. It’s a permanent full-time opportunity. I will be forever grateful to you for assisting me via Inclusive Volunteering Program. I will always be thankful to the volunteering community as well. Thank you for helping a mother to get back into the workforce after a maternity break. Thank you for being so helpful and supportive in my journey.”*

– IVP Participant

The IVP Program is an excellent example of how a block funding approach can deliver tangible, sustainable outcomes and provide effective support to empower people with disability to engage in volunteering and improve their job prospects, while also upskilling organisations in inclusive practice.

Another example from the ACT of a block funded program that specifically provided support for people with psychosocial disability was the **Connections Program**. The Connections Program was a one-to-one social support and mentoring program for people experiencing social isolation that spanned two decades and was implemented by VolunteeringACT up until 2021. This Program followed a strengths-based, recovery-oriented model to reduce stigma associated with mental illness, social isolation and to increase positive self-perception. Screened and appropriately trained volunteers established safe and supportive structured friendships with participants, enabling them to reconnect with their broader community.

This Program was both low-cost and highly successful, demonstrating a significant impact on participant mental health and wellbeing. Surveys conducted in the final year of the program by VolunteeringACT in 2020-21 revealed that 83% of Program participants had seen an



improvement in their connections with friends, 91% of participants indicated an improvement in their connections with family and 75% of participants indicated an improvement in their connections with community. Participants also reported a high awareness of the correlation between social connections and mental health with 83% of participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing that a lack of social connection prior to their involvement in the Program had negatively impacted their mental health.

*“The Connections Program has literally been a lifesaver for me. Having a social connection; someone to sit down for a coffee and chat about things, means not only to have that social connection but also gave me something to look forward to every few weeks.”*

*– Connections Participant*

Despite the program being excellent value for money and repeatedly demonstrating strong outcomes, funding for Connections ended as a result of external changes in the health and social care funding landscape, including the introduction of NDIS packages, and this Program was unfortunately caught between different funding regimes, without being covered/sustained by either.

VolunteeringACT's consultations have also highlighted a need for greater assistance with marketing and raising the profile of volunteer programs within NDIS service provider organisations and what they can achieve, to assist with attracting volunteers to the disability sector. VIOs have advised us this is something they feel should be occurring and coordinated at a National level within the NDIS as a business-as-usual function, rather than being left to individual States and Territory organisations to undertake this.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 4. That funding for the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Program supports the costs involved in the management and involvement of volunteers.**
- 5. That the NDIS incorporates active promotion of volunteer programs as an integral part of NDIS service offerings to assist in raising the profile of volunteering as an effective NDIS support component/enhancement.**

## Overcoming Barriers to Volunteering within the NDIS

Our consultations have revealed some significant barriers to volunteering within the NDIS system, both for VIOs providing disability services and people with disability wishing to volunteer.

### Clarifying the Role of Volunteers within NDIS and Guidance on Involving NDIS Recipients as Volunteers

Given the significant scale and importance of volunteering in the disability sector, there is a need to clarify the role of volunteer involvement in the NDIS workforce.

VolunteeringACT has heard from several VIOs in the ACT that they do wish to increase volunteer involvement in NDIS-funded disability services but are unsure about the types of activities and responsibilities that are appropriate or acceptable for a volunteer to undertake in this setting.

It has been suggested that, in consultation with the volunteering sector, the NDIS could provide clarity on this by developing guidelines related to engaging volunteers within the Scheme. These guidelines should be developed in consultation with people with disability and the volunteering sector and reference relevant existing guidelines including the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement. Importantly, they should also include clear guidance around risk management, onboarding and safeguarding requirements for volunteers working within the NDIS.

Similarly, while most VIOs show a desire to be inclusive of people with disability, the majority are not well equipped to do so. Organisations are often overly concerned about possible risks (perceived or actual) and fearful they could do the wrong thing regarding inclusion, and this lack of confidence can lead to inaction. There is a need for more support, guidance, and information from a national level to assist organisations to feel more confident in engaging people with disability as volunteers. People with disability and the volunteering sector should be directly involved in shaping this guidance and information, using their lived experience expertise to ensure it is fit for purpose and meaningful. The State and Territory Volunteering Peak Bodies are separately funded to support organisations to involve volunteers with disability so this expertise can be leveraged.

Importantly, the volunteer placement process should always be person-centred.

VolunteeringACT has heard from a large VIO in the ACT that they have recently been approached by two different NDIS providers asking for a Memorandum of Understanding

(MOU) that would allow them to place multiple NDIS participants into volunteer roles within their retail outlets. While this approach may speed up the process of placing people into volunteer roles, it does not meaningfully consider each individual volunteer's likes, dislikes, and role ambitions and is clearly not in line with the core NDIS aims of enabling people living with disability to exercise choice and control over the direction of their life goals and achieve greater independence. This could lead to negative experiences/outcomes as, for example, placing a person who finds it difficult to interact with new people into a retail role may be overwhelming for them. A process that involves working with a person to find them a volunteer role that is tailored to their needs, skills, and interests, such as the process undertaken within the IVP Program outlined above, is a safer, more ethical, and person-centred approach and one which repeatedly demonstrates positive and sustainable outcomes for participants.

A National approach with clear direction coming from NDIS on all of these issues will ensure greater consistency of risk management processes, help remove barriers to volunteering faced by people living with disability, ensure they have genuine choice and control over their support package goals, and support safe, person-centred, and inclusive practice across all jurisdictions.

### **Onboarding and screening volunteers**

There is a need for a national, consistent, and streamlined approach to volunteer worker screening across jurisdictions. Within the ACT, there is confusion amongst VIOs with respect to compliance requirements for volunteers involved in NDIS-funded disability support programs or activities. In the ACT volunteers can apply for a free Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) card and as part of this process indicate that they will be involved in NDIS activities. However, this is not the case in bordering NSW and given the close proximity of ACT to NSW this can cause issues. For example, it is common that someone who is a resident of Queanbeyan in NSW may wish to volunteer within the ACT as they may live closer to the ACT opportunities than others in NSW.

While adequate and robust volunteer screening and induction is essential to ensure safety, there is a need for this process to be reviewed in consultation with the volunteering sector and updated to be nationally consistent, portable across jurisdictions and available to all volunteers free of charge.

VIOs have also reported that Aged Care Providers in the ACT require staff and volunteers to complete National Police Checks every three years. This appears to be a compliance duplication and organisations have asked whether this should remove the need for NDIS Worker Screening Checks. At a national level, the Aged Care and Sports sectors have both recently recognised the importance of volunteers and conversations are also occurring in these

sectors regarding the need for a national approach to volunteer screening, presenting clear synergies and a timely opportunity for NDIS to link with Federal counterparts on this issue.

## **Lack of Data**

While evidence suggests there is significant involvement of volunteers in disability services, there is a lack of accurate jurisdictional and national data available on the true size and scale of volunteers within the overall disability workforce, including how many NDIS-registered providers currently engage volunteers, the specific roles/activities undertaken by these volunteers and their impact. Properly collecting and collating this data is important for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the full NDIS workforce and its needs and gaps and is an essential action for the 'Measuring Outcomes and Performance' priority area identified within the *What We Have Heard Report*.<sup>13</sup>

### **Recommendations:**

- 6. That, in consultation with the volunteering sector and people with lived experience, the NDIS develop clear National guidance on a) the role of volunteers within the Scheme and b) involving people with disability as volunteers.**
- 7. That the NDIS establish and clearly communicate a nationally consistent approach to screening of volunteer workers that is accessible, streamlined, and free of charge.**
- 8. That the NDIS establishes a robust and consistent data collection process to capture the number of volunteers within the disability workforce and the outcomes they are achieving.**

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<sup>13</sup> NDIS Review (2023) *What we have heard*, p16-17, <https://www.ndisreview.gov.au/resources/reports/what-we-have-heard-report>

## **Additional Support Needs**

VolunteeringACT runs a Community Information service for the ACT. Through this hub, we often have requests by phone and in person for assistance with things that are not provided by other support services people may be engaging with. In relation to the NDIS, identified gaps and additional needs are outlined below, some of which could potentially be addressed (either fully or partially) through volunteer engagement.

### **Support to Volunteer**

Our consultations have revealed that some people with disability would benefit from a support person to assist them in undertaking volunteering roles or activities. The support provided could range from assistance with transport or physical access, to support in learning new skills or communicating with other volunteers. When volunteers do not have NDIS funding for this type of support, it can create a barrier to volunteering and can reaffirm a lack of equity in opportunities for them to participate fully in their community. VolunteeringACT has also heard reports from NDIS participants that while they can access NDIS support in completing processes and paperwork related to gaining employment, the same support is not currently offered for volunteer roles.

Through our involvement in the IVP Program, VolunteeringACT has been able to fill part of the support gap highlighted above through the placement of volunteer mentors, as well as upskilling VIOs on other inclusive practices such as buddy programs. However, this service is currently at capacity and greater recognition of this type of support as an unmet need and expanded funding for it would enable more people to engage more widely in a safe and sustainable way, in line with their individual support plan goals.

### **Support to Attend Community Events**

There is a desire amongst people with disability in the ACT to receive more support related to attendance at and engagement in social and community events. These types of activities may support important longer-term goals for NDIS participants such as social connection, quality of life and independence. There is great potential for volunteers to assist in the provision of this type of social and informal support and this is already occurring within VIOs in the ACT. For example, one organisation shared with us that they engage volunteers to accompany people with disability to sing-along events. The volunteers provide social and moral support and encourage participants to sing, making them integral to the success of the activity.

## **Support Applying for the NDIS**

Consultations in the ACT have also revealed a clear need amongst people with disability for support in preparing and submitting NDIS applications. Ideally this support would be provided by someone with lived experience who has been through the process themselves, making their input more accessible and relatable. Some organisations have indicated that this is a service they are already providing, and one that can involve input from appropriately experienced and/or trained volunteers. This responds directly to the 'Applying and Getting a Plan' priority area identified in the '*What we have heard*' report and would contribute to making access and planning simpler and less stressful for participants.<sup>14</sup>

## **Support for People with Low Literacy**

VolunteeringACT has heard from people with disability who have poor literacy that they often struggle to understand written information related to their NDIS package and/or struggle to engage with website content and instructions. While the NDIS may cover connecting participants with more formal processes, support is often not available for simple tasks such as reading information and writing letters. Volunteers could be well-placed to deliver such support.

## **Support with Moving Homes**

VolunteeringACT has heard that people with disability (both NDIS and non-NDIS participants) are lacking support and assistance in moving to a new home. This includes support with decluttering, disposing/recycling items, and the physical moving process. With the increasing cost of living and housing market pressures, we are seeing an increase in need for this type of assistance across the board, but particularly amongst people with disability. Not getting this assistance places them in a very vulnerable position and at increased risk of physical injury if they are trying to navigate this themselves, as well as potential for financial exploitation by unscrupulous operators of moving services.

### **Recommendation:**

- 9. That the unmet support needs identified in this submission are responded to within the NDIS Review process, recognising the potential for the volunteer workforce to contribute to meeting these needs in some cases.**

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<sup>14</sup> NDIS Review (2023) *What we have heard*, p6, <https://www.ndisreview.gov.au/resources/reports/what-we-have-heard-report>

## Other Issues

There are a couple of other issues raised within our consultations that do not have specific recommendations attached, but we would like the NDIS Review team to be aware of and consider within ongoing discussions.

### **Intersections of Aging and Disability**

There is significant intersection between aging and disability and this can impact on NDIS support needs. Older NDIS participants may already be on plans that provide support for lifelong disabilities, but as they age, they may acquire new disabilities that are not covered in their original plans. For example, VolunteeringACT heard from one NDIS participant with a NDIS approved package for autism, that they were unable to receive support for mobility issues that developed due to old age. There is a need for greater flexibility and linkage between aged care and the NDIS to ensure a coordinated and person-centred approach that meets all of the support needs of older people with disability.

### **Continued Impacts of COVID**

It is important to acknowledge that although the height of the pandemic has passed, COVID is still circulating in our population and continues to impact on people's lives and the operation of services. In the volunteering sector, many VIOs have not yet fully recovered their volunteer numbers and programs back to pre-COVID levels.

A reduction in volunteering during the height of the pandemic led to an erosion of volunteer infrastructure, meaning that available supports for volunteers with disability have also been reduced and have still not fully recovered.

COVID has also introduced other barriers to volunteer involvement such as vaccine mandates, mask mandates and social distancing, which has made it harder for some people with disability to volunteer, as well as to access services that they need through these organisations. This can add to the administrative burden for VIOs, making it more difficult for them to engage volunteers and provide the right supports.

## Authorisation

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

Jean Giese  
Chief Executive Officer

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