

# Volunteering

## Indicator overview

### VicHealth Indicators Survey

VicHealth Indicators are used to measure community wellbeing with a focus on social determinants of health.

Survey topic areas include: wellbeing, healthy eating and sedentary behaviour, use of green space and safety, smoking policy, alcohol, using of social networking, participation in arts activities and the community, social attitudes, and work, life and time.

### Introduction

Volunteers are essential for many aspects of our society, and people who volunteer make a valuable contribution in both economic and social terms. In 2006–2007, the value of work contributed by volunteers to not-for-profit institutions in Australia was estimated to be \$14,598 million (ABS 2009). Volunteering takes various forms, including donating time to charities or local community groups, contributing to environmental management through replanting and cleanup campaigns, and providing specialised skills not usually available to not-for-profit organisations.

### Health benefits

The relationship between volunteering and health is well-established (Borgonovi 2008). Numerous studies have found positive relationships between self-reported health and various forms of volunteerism. Volunteering can alleviate depression, increase satisfaction with life, lower the frequency of hospitalisation and boost a person's ability to cope with illness (Van Willigen 2000, Black and Living 2004, Lum and Lightfoot 2005).

Individual motivations for volunteering are numerous, and include gaining workplace experience, increasing skills and networks, gaining personal satisfaction, contributing to the community, making a difference, forging friendships and having fun (Black and Living 2004).

The effect of volunteering on the functioning and connectedness of a community is increasingly recognised by public health practitioners. The contribution of volunteers to a variety of organisations helps to build social networks, increases shared values and strengthens social cohesion (Woolley 1998). Engagement in collective action toward a common purpose increases connectedness among individuals in a community (Baumeister and Leary 1995).

By volunteering, individuals can become more outwardly focussed, leading to a decrease in social isolation, greater social inclusion and the promotion of good mental health (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008).

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## Find out more

Victoria's volunteering portal, Department of Planning and Community Development, Melbourne.  
[www.volunteer.vic.gov.au](http://www.volunteer.vic.gov.au)

Volunteering Victoria.  
[www.volunteeringvictoria.com.au](http://www.volunteeringvictoria.com.au)

Volunteering Australia.  
[www.volunteeringaustralia.org](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org)

*Voluntary work Australia 2010*, Australian Bureau of Statistics.  
[www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4441.0Main%20Features22010?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4441.0&issue=2010&num=&view=](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4441.0Main%20Features22010?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4441.0&issue=2010&num=&view=)

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