

1. In considering volunteering, it seems there are dual benefits
2.
  - i. If people are volunteering it increased the ability of organisations to reduce loneliness
  - ii. If people are volunteering, this increases their own social connectedness. Is this the case and would you like to share some more information on this, including some of the hurdles & barriers involved

Volunteering does indeed provide dual benefits by positively impacting both the individual who volunteers and the community they serve. Many organisations rely on volunteers to run programs that bring people together, such as community events, support groups, or care services for isolated populations like the elderly or those with disabilities. Volunteers help create safe, inclusive spaces where individuals can interact, share experiences, and build friendships, thereby reducing feelings of isolation. Volunteering often involves teamwork and collaboration, providing an opportunity to build meaningful relationships with others who share similar values or interests. Studies have shown that volunteering is linked to improved mental well-being, including reduced rates of depression and anxiety, likely due to increased social interaction and the sense of purpose derived from helping others.

Several challenges to participating in volunteer exist, especially when considering working professionals and caregivers, who may feel they lack the time to commit to regular volunteering. Some individuals may not know how to find suitable volunteer opportunities or lack access to resources (e.g., transportation or technology) to engage with them. While most volunteering is unpaid, there can still be associated costs like travel, childcare, or missed work opportunities. Fear of exclusion, language barriers, or discomfort in new social settings may deter individuals from volunteering. Many physical and/or mental health issues can make it difficult for some individuals to participate in traditional volunteering roles.

Volunteering can be hindered by administrative barriers such as extensive paperwork, background checks, and rigid onboarding processes, which may discourage potential volunteers. While volunteering is a valuable tool to combat loneliness, it is not a standalone solution; a whole-community approach that fosters inclusive spaces, social initiatives, and systemic support is essential to address loneliness effectively in NSW.

- any additional information you wish to provide to the committee.

Social prescribing report & guidelines here

<https://www.racgp.org.au/advocacy/advocacy-resources/social-prescribing-report-and-recommendations>