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**16 September 2015**

Senate Select Committee on Health  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

### **Senate Select Committee on Health**

Volunteering Tasmania (VT) is the Peak body for volunteerism in Tasmania. We make a positive impact on volunteering, and as a result, we help to improve and sustain our wonderful community and the people within it. Our focus is creating an environment that promotes and sustains effective volunteerism.

VT wishes to provide additional comment to the Senate Select Committee on Health, and on the Interim Reports released. We note observations from the Committee around health promotion, prevention and early intervention.

Our statement supports submissions made by TasCOSS and the Social Determinants of Health Advocacy Network. We wish to however, highlight additional perspectives from the volunteer sector on the relationship between volunteering, health promotion and prevention.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recognises health as a “state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.<sup>1</sup> It is important that a discussion about health does not exclude the social determinants of health. A fair, inclusive and vibrant society must include strategies to support overall community health and wellbeing.

Locations of socio economic disadvantage are more likely to experience higher health risks. This places a number of challenges for Tasmania, which has a higher proportion of its population in the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) in the lowest quintile. Within these SEIFA areas, multiple factors can contribute to poor health outcomes, including: social exclusion; high unemployment; age; and low educational attainment.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> WHO, “WHO Definition of Health”, *World Health Organisation* at <http://www.who.int/about/definition/en/print.html> (accessed 11 September 2015)

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force: Detailed*. Cat No 6921.0 (Canberra, 2013)

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There are a range of challenges that face health inequity in Tasmania. VT suggests a holistic approach to wellbeing is necessary; one that considers the wider social and community services that support health and wellbeing.<sup>3</sup>

Volunteering is a core component of any investment in preventative health measures. Research shows that there are a range of health benefits in volunteering including: functional health, mental wellbeing, self-reported health and life satisfaction. A strong correlation exists between the well-being, happiness, health, and longevity of people who volunteer.<sup>4</sup> Whilst not all volunteering opportunities will assist in promoting health and wellbeing, there is increasing correlation between volunteering and the social determinants of health.

We would support recommendations by the Social Determinants of Health Advocacy Network to consider action for a coordinated approach to health, health promotion and health equity – particularly in investigating measures that reduce health inequality and positively improve a broader approach to health and wellbeing. We see volunteering and engaged civic communities as an important part of such an approach.

I encourage the Federal Government to consider the impact of preventative health measures and welcome the opportunity to discuss this further at any stage.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Adrienne Picone'.

Adrienne Picone  
CEO, Volunteering Tasmania

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<sup>3</sup> Tasmanian Medicare Local, "Social Determinants of Health Project- Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines", <http://www.primaryhealthtas.com.au/> (accessed 10 September 2015)

<sup>4</sup> M. A. Musick, and J. Wilson, "Volunteering and depression: the role of psychological and social resources in different age groups", *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 56 (2003): 267; S. G. Post, "Altruism, Happiness, and Health: It's Good to Be Good", *International Journal of Behavioural Medicine*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2005): 66; F. Borgovni, "Doing well by doing good. The relationship between formal volunteering and self-reported health and happiness", *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 66 (2008): 2331

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