

\$12 million cut an affront to volunteers and volunteering

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Volunteer Support Organisations will need to brace for the disastrous impact of a dramatic cut to the Department of Social Services Strengthening Communities program in last night's Federal Budget, with funding for the program set to shrink from \$40.5 million to \$28.4 million over the next four years.

Over \$8 million of that cut will take place in the first year, with Strengthening Communities funding set to fall to \$32 million in 2016-17, in a surprise move that comes as a complete shock to the volunteering sector.

"This initial \$8 million cut is close to the total 2015-16 Budget expenditure on the Volunteer Management grants program, at \$6.4 million" said Volunteering Tasmania CEO, Adrienne Picone.

"This cut is an absolute affront to the volunteering sector. Even after all the evidence provided in recent years to support further investment, with a return on investment in Tasmania of 4:1, the government has still chosen to make a cut – and a dramatic one," said Ms Picone.

"Volunteering and civic participation underpin our society. Volunteers are everywhere, doing essential work where gaps appear in service delivery in our communities.

"These gaps are widening after each and every cut to Not-for-profit organisations, and instead of supporting the unpaid workers who fill these gaps, the Government is ripping at the very framework that holds it all together," said Ms Picone.

"Gone are the days that volunteering 'just happens'. In the current environment of legislation and red tape, as well as increased pressure to manage and undertake more highly skilled roles with greater responsibility, volunteer involving organisations cannot do it on their own.

"They need assistance from volunteer support organisations like Volunteering Tasmania to ensure volunteers are well looked after, that they are safe, and to prevent them from walking away," she said.

"The State of Volunteering Report: Tasmania 2014 states that in 2014, Tasmanians donated 7.1 million hours. The cost to replace these volunteers is \$2.5 billion. And yet, the Government still makes cuts," she said.

The same report states that if Government increased their investment in volunteering by as little as 1% per year, we could add an average \$70.6 million per year in value to the Tasmanian economy.

"The Federal Government must commit to continue its funding for volunteer management; for the sake of volunteers, and for those whose lives are made better because of them," said Ms Picone.

Volunteers and those who support the volunteering sector are invited to have their say using #volunteersarevoters.

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