



# The Facts: Volunteering and Health

## (October 2016)

The information gathered here gives a snapshot of current research on volunteering and health. Volunteering Tasmania makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of the information, but recognises that information may change over time, particularly as new research comes to light.

### **What is health?**

Volunteering Tasmania (VT) acknowledges the definition of health as per the World Health Organisation. We view health as a state of wellbeing - not just the absence of disease or infirmity. We consider health holistically, and to be more than physical wellness. Health includes our overall physical, mental and social wellbeing.

### **What are the health benefits of volunteering?**

There is a range of research showing the health benefits of volunteering. Some specific examples of the links found between volunteering and health outcomes includes:

- A study of 5,000 Americans showed that volunteers felt less stressed and slept better than non-volunteers;
- Volunteers self-identify as having better overall mental health;
- Volunteering is shown to benefit older individuals. A long term study showed that volunteers had a lower mortality rate than non-volunteers;
- Volunteers are pro-active in preventative health. The Harvard School of Public Health studied over 7,000 adults over 50 years, and found that volunteers were 47% more likely to get cholesterol checks; 30% more likely to get flu shots; and 38% had fewer overnight hospital visits.

There is a range of research on volunteering and health which shows that, in general, volunteers are more likely to be satisfied with life and report fewer incidents of depression and anxiety. Research suggests this is because volunteers have good social connections, more power and more control over their life.

## Does volunteering actually make you healthier?

The majority of existing research on volunteering and health outcomes is based on international research. We are still yet to fully understand the impact of volunteering on health in Australia, and no long term research has been done on this subject. We also don't know how volunteering contributes to the health of individuals in different age groups and socio-economic backgrounds. It's an ever-expanding area of investigation, and one Volunteering Tasmania wants to investigate more.

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