

Volunteering in Australia worth \$290 billion a year

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New figures tallied by Dr Lisel O'Dwyer show volunteering is now worth \$260 billion in Australia.

The monetary value of volunteering in Australia is worth much more than originally calculated, new figures from Flinders University researcher Lisel O'Dwyer show.

Dr O'Dwyer has re-evaluated her study into the economic contribution of volunteering to Australian society – first conducted at the University of Adelaide in 2011 – with the new data showing a massive increase in the value of volunteering from \$200 billion to \$290 billion a year.

According to the latest report, the economic contribution of volunteering to Australian society surpasses revenue sources from major sectors including mining, agriculture, defence and retail.

The revised figures have been calculated using broader methodological measures, Dr O'Dwyer said, encompassing "more realistic estimates" of the value of lives saved, the financial worth of emotions and latest inflation rates.

"There's a standard figure for what a life is worth and we can estimate how many lives that [volunteers](#) such as firefighters or surf lifesavers generally save per year," Dr O'Dwyer, based in the School of Social and Policy Studies, said.

"We can't directly quantify how many lives have been saved through volunteer efforts so it's really a best guess, however I still think it's quite a conservative figure," she said.

"There are also lives which have been indirectly saved through volunteers, such as a Meals on Wheels volunteer finding an elderly customer unconscious at home, and the updated figures now take this into account."

Dr O'Dwyer said the revised valuation also includes estimates on the emotional impact of volunteering, both for volunteers and the people and organisations affected by their actions, using an economics-based measurement.

"Emotions are not usually accounted for in economic impact statements but people already spend money on emotions; we spend money on things like books and entertainment to experience [positive emotions](#) and we pay for counselling to avoid negative emotions so why not put a dollar value on what we can experience in other areas of life?"

While the current figures are still likely to be "grossly under-estimated", Dr O'Dwyer said it remains important to enumerate the economic value of the sector to recognise and promote its contributions to Australian society.

"If something can be expressed in monetary terms it gets more attention, and attention and financial support are really what the volunteer sector needs.

"Many organisations using volunteers are battling on shoestring budgets while giving so much to the community, yet without evidence to show the value of their work it's difficult for them to secure for government support."

Despite the significant economic value of volunteering in Australia, Dr O'Dwyer says the true value of volunteering spans far beyond a dollar figure.

"The real value of volunteering is difficult to measure. Volunteers tend to be fitter, healthier and have greater social connections, which produce general goodwill and flow-on effects for governments – there's less crime and greater community wellbeing.

"And people who experience the benefits of volunteering have a better quality of life."

According to [Volunteering Australia](#), there are more than six million volunteers in Australia, with people aged 45 to 54 comprising the highest bracket of volunteers and slightly more women (38 per cent) than men (34 per cent) giving their time to voluntary work.

Provided by Flinders University

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