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# Department of Social Security Discussion Paper: Considerations for the future of the Volunteer Management Activity

Diversity ACT Submission

## Diversity ACT Community Services

Diversity ACT Community Services (Diversity ACT) is a community based registered charity, run by volunteers that provides a service hub, social worker, support networks, groups and community resources to assist the LGBTIQ+ community of the ACT Region. We welcome this opportunity to contribute to the discussion on considerations for the future of the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA).

## Background

Diversity ACT is a volunteer based and volunteer run organisation. While our premises are provided by the ACT Government on a peppercorn rent, we receive no ongoing funding from government or private sector sources. Accordingly, Diversity ACT is keenly interested in the VMA and the future of volunteering in Australia.

The recent bushfire season has drawn the attention of Australia to the issue of volunteers and volunteer management. The response to the bushfires by the average Australian demonstrate the decency and humanity of this country. The heart of the nation is on show and it points to an inclusive, giving, informed and caring Australia. Despite this, community sector participants see current volunteering models and approaches as broadly unsustainable over time. If current trends and issues to continue unchanged, it appears that Australia will face a serious shortage of volunteers in future (Kruger, 2019). In this environment, discussions about the future of volunteer management and the role of the Australian Government in that context are both appropriate and welcome.

We note that the *Discussion Paper – Considerations for the future of the Volunteer Management Activity* (the Discussion Paper) specifically mentions that “accessibility requirements, such as for people with disability or culturally and linguistically diverse Australians, needs to be considered and maintained” (Department of Social Services, 2020, p. 3). While there is little evidence available on barriers to volunteering for LGBTIQ+ people, outside of our own organisations (Southby, 2016), there is one study on this topic. The findings of that study highlight

a significant challenge is the anticipated fear or anxiety many people have of the participation process. General concerns for homophobia, biphobia and transphobia were frequently reported as were specific anxieties such as being ‘outed’ and subject to public scrutiny. (Ryrie, 2010)

The LGBTIQ+ community has strong traditions of citizen activism and volunteer/peer health programs (Gates, 2016). We submit that part of the role of the Australian Government is to work towards a society where concerns about homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are not limiting potential volunteering by members of the LGBTIQ+ community. We respectfully suggest that actions such as discussions around the recent Religious Freedoms Bill have in fact been antithetical to involvement in general community volunteering by the LGBTIQ+ community.

The Discussion Paper raises a number of questions against each of the recommendations. Hereafter this submission will address those questions with direct relevance to our organisation.

## Recommendation Two

The Review recommends that the Australian Government work with stakeholders over the coming 12 months to co-design a new program (including the performance framework) that focuses the Australian Government's investment on building the capacity of Volunteer Involving Organisations to effectively recruit and manage volunteers.

### **On what basis could the Australian Government select a limited number of providers?**

Diversity ACT strongly recommends against the use of local members as a vetting service to limit the number of providers. We note that this was the process to apply for a Volunteer Grant as part of the 2019-20 Australian Government Volunteer Grants Selection Round. We also note that the criteria used by the local members to vet applicants were not publically available. We believe that this protocol has the potential to dramatically impact on LGBTIQ+ charities, particularly if their local MP is not supportive of the LGBTIQ+ community.

## Conclusion

Diversity ACT would welcome the opportunity to expand on this submission. Please feel free to contact us on (02) 6231 3126 or by email on [info@diversityact.org.au](mailto:info@diversityact.org.au)

Kind regards,



Shay-Leigh Willis

President

Diversity ACT Community Services

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