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# Consultation Response

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## Scottish Government Consultation: Health and Social Care Strategy for Older People

June 2022



## **About Us**

Volunteer Scotland is Scotland's National Centre for Volunteering. We believe that volunteering should be an enjoyable, rewarding and fulfilling experience for the volunteer; that volunteers have the right to be safe and protected in delivering their volunteering roles; and that to derive health and well-being benefits from volunteering requires regular and meaningful contributions of time.

Should any queries arise from our response, please contact our Policy Officer by emailing **[sarah.latto@volunteerscotland.org.uk](mailto:sarah.latto@volunteerscotland.org.uk)**

# Introduction

In developing a new Health and Social Care Strategy for Older People it is vital that the Scottish Government consider the important contribution of volunteering. In the Volunteering Action Plan, published in June 2022, the Scottish Government has committed to ensuring volunteering is better reflected in relevant policy.<sup>1</sup>

The role of volunteering in supporting health and social care needs of older people is two-fold. Firstly, volunteers make a key contribution in the delivery of services – both in formal and informal roles - which support older adults; a contribution which is often underrepresented in policy. Secondly, participating in volunteering is proven to improve personal health and wellbeing outcomes, supporting the desire for older people to maintain meaningful and active lives in their communities for as long as possible. This response contains a snapshot of the many and varied impacts that volunteering has on the health and wellbeing of older people.

There are, however, two important caveats to bear in mind. Firstly, for the strategic benefit of volunteering in the health and social care of older people to be realised, significant investment in volunteer involving organisations is required. Whilst volunteering is unpaid, the infrastructure to support it is not free. Secondly, volunteers bring a unique value that goes beyond financial efficiencies. Given the current situation with staff shortages in the health and social care sector, we want to stress that it would be inappropriate for volunteers to be considered an appropriate substitute for paid staff roles in any circumstance.

In our response, we will demonstrate the central role of appropriate volunteering to each of the priorities for the consultation:

- Prevention
- Person Centred Care
- Home First Approach
- Integrated Health and Social Care
- Dignity and Respect at End of Life

We will then detail our four ‘key asks’ to ensure that the significant contribution of volunteers to the health and social care of older people is sustainable.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/isbn/9781804354698> (from 15th June 2022)

# Evidence of Volunteering Impact

## Prevention

One of the most prominent ways that volunteers support prevention and early intervention related to health needs in older adults is through social connection. Research has shown that social isolation and loneliness can be both a cause and consequence of poor health and is linked to increased risk of falls and dementia, amongst other issues.<sup>2</sup>

Volunteers contribute to increased social connection amongst older adults in a range of ways. This is recognised explicitly in ‘A Connected Scotland’ strategy, which gives particular focus to the role of befriending and mentoring.<sup>3</sup> Befrienders provide regular social and emotional support for individuals experiencing social isolation and can also empower individuals to build or restore other social connections within their community.

In research undertaken by Befriending Networks into the benefits of befriending for older adults in one specific project, beneficiaries reported positive changes in their confidence, happiness and social connection.<sup>4</sup> One stated that: ‘this service has had a huge positive effect on my life. I have no family of my own and my befriender has become my family.’

Befriending and mentoring services have a key role in ensuring that many older people have regular meaningful social interactions, which in turn improves their mental wellbeing and can help to prevent onset of more severe health issues. In turn, many community-based services that help to foster social connection are supported or led by volunteers. These include reminiscing groups, lunch clubs or coffee mornings for older people, often in community settings that are increasingly run by volunteer committees.

Many of the opportunities for older people to remain physically active are also supported or led by volunteers. The Scottish Sports Association published a report into ‘why sport matters’ for older adults and social care.<sup>5</sup> It found that participation in sport or being active led to a 30% reduction on risk of falls for those with mobility problems and a 38% reduction in cognitive decline, amongst other benefits. It also recently reported in its 2021 manifesto that Scotland’s 13,000 sports clubs are reliant on 200,000 volunteers.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/threat-to-health/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/connected-scotland-strategy-tackling-social-isolation-loneliness-building-stronger-social-connections/pages/9/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.befriending.co.uk/resources/24642-a-stitch-intime>

<sup>5</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-X\\_oQMoiFhyvX5ZQtWj6KFkiXaQQ991Z/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-X_oQMoiFhyvX5ZQtWj6KFkiXaQQ991Z/view)

<sup>6</sup> [https://thessa.org.uk/uploads/downloads/SSA%20Manifesto%202021%20\(A4\).pdf](https://thessa.org.uk/uploads/downloads/SSA%20Manifesto%202021%20(A4).pdf)

Participation in volunteering itself can also have significant health and wellbeing benefits which in turn can prevent or reverse more serious health issues. We conducted research in January 2021 to identify who contributes most to volunteering in Scotland.<sup>7</sup> It found that, whilst the proportion of people aged 75+ who volunteer formally is 7% lower than the national average, this age group actually volunteer the most hours on average.

In another report in December 2018, we found that regular volunteering can alleviate depression, anxiety and stress, reduce loneliness and social isolation, and support the management of more serious mental health conditions such as schizophrenia.<sup>8</sup> Volunteering can also have a significant impact on physical health by promoting healthy behaviours, helping to maintain a level of physical activity that promotes independence and improving volunteers ability to cope with illness.<sup>9</sup> To reinforce this, a survey completed by volunteers for Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland, found that 60% of respondents reported that volunteering helped to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness.<sup>10</sup>

### **Person Centred Care**

Volunteers have a clear and unique role to play in enhancing social care and making it more person-centred. The fact that volunteering is a personal choice changes the volunteer's relationship with the beneficiary and can feel less formal and more personal. Volunteers are also often able to spend more time with beneficiaries than paid employees and can build meaningful relationships.

A case study by Health Improvement Scotland highlights the added value of involving volunteers in care settings for older people.<sup>11</sup> It describes a 72 year old patient, registered blind, who was admitted to hospital with multiple medical conditions. The patient reported that the visits from a volunteer were 'keeping her going' and described the volunteers as 'the kindest people'. Staff members reported that the patient was more amiable and less anxious after a visit from a volunteer.

Volunteering activity can also ensure that the specific interests of older people, are acknowledged in care pathways as well as providing support for their carers. Paths for All engage volunteers to support inclusive walking and wheeling activities for older people, often building in opportunities for social interaction and accessible volunteering opportunities.<sup>12</sup> Two volunteers at their Dementia Friendly Health Walk

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<sup>7</sup>[https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1707411/who\\_contributes\\_the\\_most\\_to\\_scottish\\_volunteering\\_-\\_full\\_report.pdf](https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1707411/who_contributes_the_most_to_scottish_volunteering_-_full_report.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1436178/volunteering\\_health\\_wellbeing\\_-\\_full\\_report.pdf](https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1436178/volunteering_health_wellbeing_-_full_report.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland, 2022

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.hisengage.scot/equipping-professionals/volunteering-in-nhs-scotland/case-studies/positive-effect-of-volunteer-visitors-glasgow/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/walking-for-health/wfh-success-stories/wfh-story/walking-and-talking-started-jessie-and-alices-volunteering-journey>

in Carluke shared their experiences of participating, with one saying: ‘the Friday Walk is an excellent opportunity for people to get out and about for a stroll and a good blether. It is a chance for carers to talk with folk in the same situation as themselves and exercise in the open air is good for everyone. We have both been in the same situation as the people who walk on Fridays so know first-hand how beneficial the walking group can be. Every wee bit of support helps.’

### **Home First Approach**

Volunteers have a key role in supporting older people to stay in their homes and in their communities. As previously stated, the impact of volunteering in reducing social isolation and loneliness and improving mental and physical health outcomes is significant. Regular social interaction helps to prevent the onset of more severe physical and mental health issues, encourages individuals to lead more active lives and also helps individuals to create and sustain other social connections within their local community. This all helps to ensure that older people are able to remain in their homes for longer.

This type of social connection is often provided by volunteers who are doing so on behalf of an organisation such as Silver Line, Age Scotland or Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland. In 2020, 5% of formal volunteers, which equates to c. 59,140 people, supported activities aimed at older people (a drop of 2% from 2018 figures which can likely be attributed to challenges of engaging formal volunteers during the pandemic).<sup>13</sup> However, the past 2 years have seen the number of people volunteering informally, i.e. not on behalf of an organisation, to ‘keep in touch with somebody at risk of being lonely’ increase by 51%, from 18% in 2018 to 69% in 2020, which equates to c1.76 million people.<sup>14</sup> This highlights the vital contribution of informal volunteers in supporting older people to stay in their homes.

Volunteers also provide support to older adults in the prevention of malnutrition. The charity Food Train provides a range of volunteer services to support older people to eat well, including a shopping service and engaging volunteer ‘meal makers’. In a report published in 2018, Food Train found that the increase in demand for services coupled with reductions in public funding are providing significant challenges. They found a postcode lottery of statutory food services for older adults, with many Local Authorities offering very limited choice in the services they provide.<sup>15</sup>

Organisations like Food Train engage volunteers in a range of roles to support the provision of food, helping to ensure that more older adults are receiving nutritious food in their homes. In addition to this, a significant number of informal volunteers are supporting older people in their communities to access food. In 2020, 1.3 million

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1776485/scottish\\_household\\_survey\\_2020\\_-\\_initial\\_findings\\_final.pdf](https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1776485/scottish_household_survey_2020_-_initial_findings_final.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.thefoodtrain.co.uk/images/documents/CFHS\\_MM\\_Report.pdf](https://www.thefoodtrain.co.uk/images/documents/CFHS_MM_Report.pdf)

volunteers reported that they helped informally with shopping, collecting pensions, collecting benefits, or paying bills.<sup>16</sup>

Another key service supporting older people to stay in their homes is the provision of community transport. According to Age Scotland, a third of older people report having had difficulty getting to a medical appointment due to lack of suitable transport, and 57% report infrequent services as a barrier to using public transport.<sup>17</sup> For the Community Transport Association, 'community transport is about providing flexible and accessible community-led solutions in response to unmet local transport needs, and often represents the only means of transport for many vulnerable and isolated people, often older people or people with disabilities.'<sup>18</sup>

Many community transport services are either volunteer-led or reliant on volunteers. Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport Company engages volunteers to drive older people and those with reduced mobility to medical appointments, community events and to get shopping.<sup>19</sup> According to one volunteer, Kenny, BSCTC is a 'lifeline' for older residents. Transportation is also provided by informal volunteers. In 2020, 20% of informal volunteers, which equates to 510,000 people, provided transport or supported somebody away from their home.<sup>20</sup>

For older people who do end up spending an extended period of time in hospital, many volunteer-led services provide support to readjust to life at home. The Royal Voluntary Service provides a 'Home from Hospital' service, which begins when the older person is still in hospital.<sup>21</sup> As result of the plethora of services provided by the Royal Voluntary Service, all volunteer-led, 88% of vulnerable people they supported in 2021 said it helped them feel more able to cope.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, and as previously stated, participating in volunteering activity itself can have significant impacts on physical and mental health outcomes, thus increasing the likelihood of older people being able to remain in their homes. As stated in our research, 'for older people volunteering can help them maintain their functional independence; or reduce their level of function dependency for longer than would otherwise be the case'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> [https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1776485/scottish\\_household\\_survey\\_2020\\_-\\_initial\\_findings\\_final.pdf](https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1776485/scottish_household_survey_2020_-_initial_findings_final.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-scotland/documents/politics-and-government/parliamentary-briefings/2019/age-scotland-msp-briefing---transport-scotland-bill---stage-3.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <https://ctauk.org/about-cta/what-is-community-transport/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://ctauk.org/member-profile-badenoch-and-strathspey-community-transport/>

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1776485/scottish\\_household\\_survey\\_2020\\_-\\_initial\\_findings\\_final.pdf](https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1776485/scottish_household_survey_2020_-_initial_findings_final.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/our-services/support-in-hospitals/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/about-us/our-impact/measuring-our-impact/the-difference-we-made/>

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1436178/volunteering\\_health\\_wellbeing\\_-\\_full\\_report.pdf](https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1436178/volunteering_health_wellbeing_-_full_report.pdf)

## **Integrated Health and Social Care**

Perhaps the most significant environments where volunteers can appropriately contribute to health and social care are care homes and NHS settings. As previously stated, the value added by volunteers is often in helping to ensure that care is person-centred and responds to the social or emotional needs of older people.

As an example, Volunteer Edinburgh manages a volunteering service at the Royal Edinburgh hospital. As part of this service, volunteers – who are themselves inpatients at the hospital – create personalised CDs for patients of dementia.<sup>24</sup> This service was described by one Occupational Therapist Assistant Practitioner in the dementia service as ‘invaluable’, particularly in easing stress and bringing cheer.

Similarly, Generations Working Together reported on a pilot where young volunteers from schools in Caithness visited older people in local hospital wards and care homes to build intergenerational relationships and deliver social activities.<sup>25</sup> Benefits of the project for older people included an increase in self-esteem, confidence and self-worth, and ‘the senior generation offers their experience and understanding of life and what it used to be like which invokes memories of the past and keeps alive the local history of the area.’

## **Dignity And Respect at End of Life**

Finally, volunteers can also have an important role in ensuring dignity and respect in palliative care settings.

In research published in 2017, it was found that volunteers had a positive contribution to seriously ill patients and their families by improving their wellbeing.<sup>26</sup> There was also some suggestion that those patients visited by volunteers survived longer than those who did not. However, the study also highlighted the necessity for volunteers to receive adequate training and support, not least due to the potential for vicarious trauma.

Marie Curie provides care and support to people who have a terminal illness and their families. They engage volunteers in a range of roles across their services, including in home-based and hospice settings. Their Helper service matches volunteers to individuals with a terminal illness to provide emotional and practical support, excluding personal care, clinical care or formal counselling. They share the experience of Merdella, a 90 year old woman who was matched with Hardev who provides social support.<sup>27</sup> They bonded over their shared love of food from their home countries, and Merdella said that ‘she’s like a daughter to me. She understands me’.

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<sup>24</sup> Royal Edinburgh Hospital Volunteer Hub Annual Report 2021-22, Volunteer Edinburgh

<sup>25</sup> <https://generationsworkingtogether.org/case-studies/befriending-caithness-intergenerational-link>

<sup>26</sup> <https://bmcpalliatcare.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12904-017-0193-0>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/blog/having-hardevs-calls-to-look-forward-to-makes-me-happy/278619>

St Columba's Hospice Care, based in Edinburgh, have over 650 volunteers supporting their work in a range of roles, including in the hospice café, in the gardens or in the community as a 'compassionate neighbour'. Again, they place real importance on the support and training they provide to volunteers given the sensitive and challenging nature of their roles.

## Volunteering: Key Asks

### 1. Resource and Infrastructure

Given the contribution of volunteers in health and social care services for older people, it is vital that resource and infrastructure to support this are reflected in a new Health and Social Care strategy for older people.

We published research in 2021 exploring the impact of Covid-19 on volunteering in Scotland. Adequate resource was identified as the number one concern for Volunteer Involving Organisations, with 48% of respondents identifying funding as a priority for their recovery.<sup>28</sup> In particular, there is a 'pressing need' for additional staff resource for volunteer management and coordination.

This reinforces the fact that adequate resource, particularly for the engagement of skilled volunteering practitioners, is required to realise the benefits of volunteering for older people. It is vital that this Strategy acknowledges the importance of valuing and investing in volunteer management roles, both to recruit and retain skilled staff and to ensure volunteers have the best possible experience.

### 2. Standards for Volunteering in Health and Social Care

It is crucial that volunteers in roles which support the health and social care of older people have the training and support they need to complete their roles confidently and safely. We know from several of the examples detailed above that volunteering with older people often requires, for example, specific medical knowledge or support from the effects of vicarious trauma.

Research published by NCVO in 2019 found that volunteers who feel well supported are much more likely to feel satisfied overall.<sup>29</sup> In addition, this research also found that 19% of volunteers felt that their volunteering 'was becoming too much like paid work'. We know from our own research that this level of burden can impact on the positive wellbeing benefits of volunteering, and

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<sup>28</sup> [https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1771556/road\\_to\\_recovery\\_-\\_full\\_report.pdf](https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1771556/road_to_recovery_-_full_report.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> [https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy\\_and\\_research/volunteering/Volunteer-experience\\_Full-Report.pdf](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy_and_research/volunteering/Volunteer-experience_Full-Report.pdf)

can actually lead to declining wellbeing due to excessive volunteer hours, emotionally demanding roles and lack of effective support.<sup>30</sup> As such, it is important that volunteers who support the health and social care of older people have quality volunteering experiences that do not become over-formalised.

We would like to see the development of clear standards for the involvement of volunteers in health and social care, with a focus on embracing widely accepted quality standards such as Investing in Volunteers and the Volunteer Friendly Award. We would also welcome the development of communities of practice for practitioners supporting volunteers in such roles. These Standards would also be beneficial for funders and commissioning officers when procuring services that involve volunteers to ensure adequate resource to support volunteering best practice.

### **3. Appropriate Volunteering Roles**

In the provision of health and social care services volunteers can have a valuable role to play, but it is vital that this is not a replacement for paid staff. In response to a question regarding waiting lists for social care in parliament on the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022, the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care stated that ‘Through contact with partnerships, I am aware that there is a range of local initiatives across the country to support recipients of care, using volunteers, redeployed staff and third sector partners.’<sup>31</sup> Whilst we welcome the recognition of volunteers in the provision of health and social care, referring to them as part of a solution in the context of staff shortages could unintentionally condone the displacement of paid staff by volunteers.

Volunteer Scotland and the Scottish Trade Union Council developed a shared Volunteer Charter identifying the key principles for ‘assuring legitimacy and preventing exploitation of workers and volunteers’.<sup>32</sup> In particular, the 5<sup>th</sup> principle states that ‘volunteers should not carry out duties formerly carried out by paid workers nor should they be used to disguise the effects of non-filled vacancies or cuts in services.’ The principles in the Charter should be referenced explicitly in the Health and Social Care Strategy for Older People.

### **4. Social Prescribing**

Given the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering for older people detailed in the ‘Prevention’ section above, we believe there is scope to further explore volunteering as an activity that could be prescribed by physicians and health care workers such as nurse practitioners

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<sup>30</sup> [https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1436178/volunteering\\_health\\_wellbeing\\_full\\_report.pdf](https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1436178/volunteering_health_wellbeing_full_report.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/what-was-said-in-parliament/meeting-of-parliament-04-05-2022?meeting=13725&iob=124566#124566>

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1475885/volunteer\\_charter\\_10\\_principles.pdf](https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1475885/volunteer_charter_10_principles.pdf)

The Scottish Volunteering Forum submitted a response to the Health and Sport Committee consultation on Social Prescribing in August 2019 acknowledging the potential benefits for ‘prescribing’ volunteering as a preventative or early intervention measure.<sup>33</sup> However, the response also highlighted the lack of capacity in many volunteer involving organisations to provide supportive and inclusive volunteering opportunities, particularly for those with medical conditions. As such, there is clear value in prescribing volunteering activity, but it is vital that this takes place in tandem with dedicated resource for supported volunteering.

## Conclusion

We believe that volunteering has a clear role in supporting the health and wellbeing of older people. Volunteers in both formal and informal roles provide a range of services which can prevent health conditions of older adults from becoming more serious, ensure care is person-centred and help older people to remain in their communities. Volunteers can also help to maintain dignity, respect and social connection for older people at the end of their lives. Participating in voluntary activity also has many proven health benefits and can support older adults to maintain their wellbeing and reinforce community connections.

As a result, we have detailed 4 suggestions for ensuring that the vital role of volunteering is reflected in a Health and Social Care Strategy for Older People:

- Resource and infrastructure
- Standards for volunteering in Health and Social Care
- Appropriate volunteering roles
- Social prescribing

Volunteers are at the heart of person-centred and community-based services for older people, helping them to live rich, independent lives and maintain dignity during ill health. It is vital that this strategic contribution of volunteering to health and wellbeing is recognised in a Health and Social Care Strategy for Older People.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://scottishvolunteeringforum.org.uk/consultation-responses/>



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