

Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Volunteering in Australia

Changing patterns in voluntary work 1995–2006



Improving the lives of Australians

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Contents

Minister's Foreword	v
Parliamentary Secretary's Foreword	vi
Introduction	1
A short history of volunteering in Australia	1
Early beginnings	1
Australian firsts	2
The World Wars	2
The Depression	2
Modern contributions	2
Recognising volunteers	2
This publication	2
Australia	3
Volunteering rate and trends	3
Volunteer hours	6
Volunteer origins	7
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) volunteers	8
Volunteering organisations and activities	8
Volunteering, employment and occupation	10
Volunteering and household income	11
Volunteering and educational qualifications	12
An overview of volunteering across States and Territories	13
The economic contribution of volunteering	13
New South Wales	14
Victoria	16
Queensland	18
South Australia	20
Western Australia	22
Tasmania	24
Australian Capital Territory	26
Northern Territory	28
References	30

Minister's Foreword

Every day, day in and day out, millions of Australians give their time, their enthusiasm and their hard work to help others. They turn up and roll up their sleeves everywhere – from the school canteen, the local footy club, Meals on Wheels and the list goes on.

They are the 5.2 million volunteers – that's 34 per cent of all over-18s – whose grass roots efforts keep many community organisations ticking over.

This booklet, 'Volunteering in Australia: changing patterns in voluntary work 1995–2006', gives an insightful snapshot of the demographics of volunteering – the people who are most likely to take on a volunteering role and what they do.

It's part of the Australian Government's contribution to celebrate 2008 National Volunteer Week which, among other things, recognises and commends the 713 million hours volunteers put in every year.

The Australian Government hopes it will be a useful tool in encouraging even more Australians to give their time to support community organisations.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jenny Macklin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jenny Macklin

Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Parliamentary Secretary's Foreword

Disadvantage, poverty and exclusion divide communities. Volunteering unites us. Voluntary work provides many pathways for us to participate in the social, cultural, civic and economic life of our nation.

Central to the Government's Social Inclusion agenda is a commitment to sponsor and support voluntary efforts. Part of this commitment involves improving our understanding of the nature and patterns of voluntary work.

This publication contributes significantly to our understanding of volunteerism as it highlights how volunteering has changed over a decade to include opportunities such as corporate volunteering and sharing professional skills.

We believe that active participation in society underpins community well-being and fosters strong, caring, inclusive communities. Volunteers make major economic and social contributions to our society and research indicates that volunteering is good for your health.

We also recognise that voluntary activities are changing. For example, young people are driving many new volunteering initiatives and virtual volunteering allows people to contribute to organisations from their desktop.

This publication is a useful resource for government and for community organisations. It will assist us to find new ways of encouraging and fostering volunteer activity, which plays a vital role in building sustainable, inclusive communities.



Senator the Hon Ursula Stephens
Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector
Parliamentary Secretary assisting the Prime Minister for Social Inclusion





Introduction

Volunteers reflect the breadth and diversity of Australian society and bring with them unique experiences from different backgrounds.

Volunteering is something that people chose to do freely without an expectation of payment and for the benefit of the community. While informal volunteering activities like caring for neighbours and assisting family are valued, the emphasis on this publication is on formal volunteering which takes place through not-for-profit organisations.

Volunteers work in all areas of the community and perform many different activities. They are in health and welfare, arts and culture, heritage, environment and conservation, sport and recreation, education, religion, human rights and emergency services. Volunteers visit the elderly for social contact, assist in the school canteen, coach sport teams, raise funds, participate in surf life saving and operate youth groups.

Within Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities there is an enormous amount of what would be termed volunteering or community effort. However, cultural and linguistic differences mean much of that activity is not formalised and hence, within the commonly accepted frames of reference, is generally not acknowledged and fails to attract both material support and wider recognition.

A short history of volunteering in Australia

Early beginnings

There is a well-established practice of volunteering in Australia. That the NSW Colonial Secretary was also the Inspector of Charities (Administrative Arrangements 1856-1901) shows how the colonial Government depended heavily on faith-based organisations and other charities to provide for the disadvantaged. Successive Australian governments have continued to work with churches, non-religious charities and philanthropic organisations to meet the social issues and welfare needs of Australians.

While the principle of volunteering stems from the concept of charity and has a religious foundation, it is not limited to any particular faith. Charitable works were a strong part of the Victorian concept of duty and even the Governor's wife would volunteer her time. Eliza Darling was one, who interested herself in the education of girls from poor backgrounds.

Australian firsts

The Benevolent Society, founded by Edward Smith Hall in 1813, is considered to be Australia's oldest charity, apart from religious foundations. It has since then provided a voice as well as material assistance for the disadvantaged. The Benevolent Society was a pioneer in many of its programs. In 1912, for example, it founded the first antenatal clinic in the British Empire.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service, the oldest air-based medical service in the world, was established in 1928 by the Rev John Flynn to cast a 'mantle of safety' over the outback. Its dependence on volunteers to assist in its work continues to this day.

The World Wars

The voluntary sector played a huge role during both the First and Second World Wars. Organisations such as the Australian Red Cross Society engaged and organised large numbers of volunteers and Legacy was set up to assist men returned from the 1914–1918 war. In 1925 Legacy started to care for the children of deceased servicemen and continues to do so today.

The Depression

The Great Depression from 1929 to 1932 also encouraged volunteering and 'lending a helping hand.' Soup kitchens and clothing handouts were made available by charities until the economic situation slowly improved. Recovery in some sectors actually took until 1939 and then Australia was at war again.

Modern contributions

There are now an estimated 700,000 non-profit and community organisations in Australia and 5.2million volunteers. Many of these bodies rely completely on their volunteers to operate. As well as bringing important social benefits, volunteers contribute an estimated \$42 billion to the Australian economy.

With the further expansion of community organisations, 'peak bodies' formed as similar organisations merged to better coordinate services and avoid overlap. Today, *Volunteering Australia* is the national peak body representing volunteering organisations.

Recognising volunteers

In 1985, the United Nations General Assembly established December 5 as International Volunteer Day and Australia and other nations celebrate the contribution of volunteers on this day. The United Nations also proclaimed 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers, which provided a unique opportunity to highlight the achievements of millions of volunteers worldwide as well as encouraging more people to volunteer their services.

Australia recognises the contribution of its volunteers through events like National Volunteering Week and the presentation of awards and certificates.

This publication

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) collected information about voluntary work in Australia for the first time in 1995. Additional surveys in 2000 and 2006 provided more information about volunteers and the nature of their social contribution. The statistics presented in this publication are based on these three surveys.

Australia

Volunteering rate and trends

The volunteering rate, which is the number of volunteers in a group expressed as a percentage of the group's total population, in Australia has increased over time.

In 1995, 3.2 million volunteers or 24% of the population aged 18 years and over volunteered. In 2000, 4.4 million people volunteered, representing 32% of the population. In 2006, 34% of Australia's population volunteered, representing 5.2 million people.

Figure 1: Volunteer trends – Australia

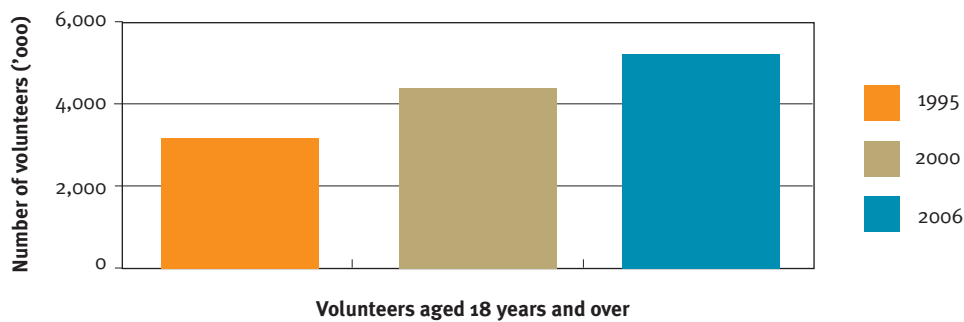
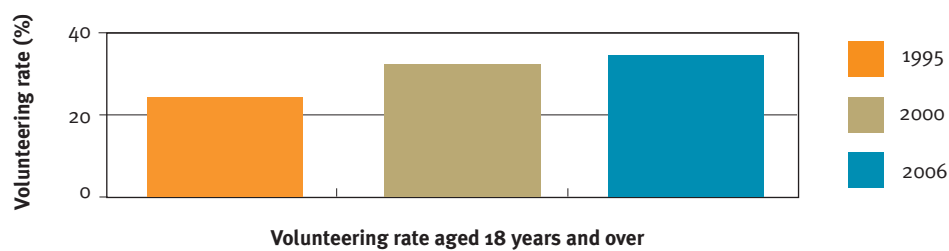


Figure 2: Volunteering rate trend – Australia



Men and women have shown similar volunteering rates with women generally being slightly higher. While 23% of men volunteered in 1995, this rose to 31% in 2000 and 32% in 2006. Over the same period 24% of women volunteered in 1995 rising to 33% in 2000 and 38% in 2006.

Figure 3: Volunteers by age group

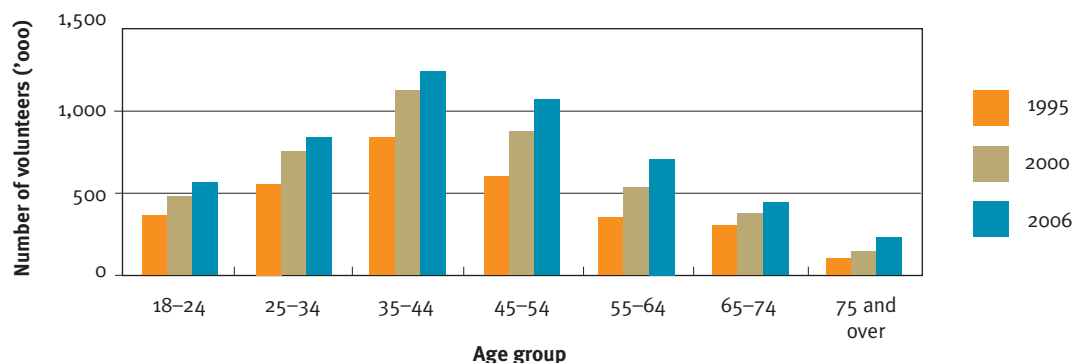
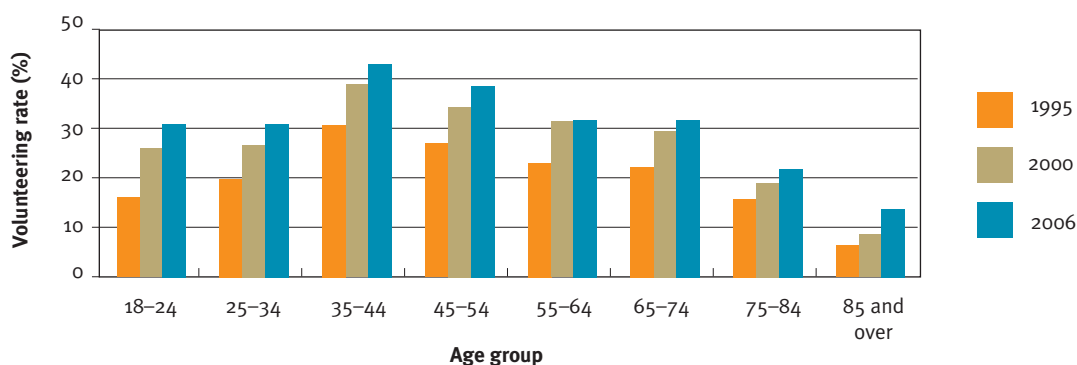


Figure 4: Volunteering rate trend by age group – Australia



Volunteering growth was greatest between 1995 and 2000 then lessened in 2006. With little exception there has been growth across all age groups for both men and women. Those aged 18-24 years have shown the greatest increase in volunteering rate, increasing from 17% in 1995 to 27% in 2000 and 32% in 2006. There was a slight decline in volunteering among men aged 55-64 from 33% in 2000 to 28% 2006.

Figure 5: Female volunteering rate trend by age – Australia

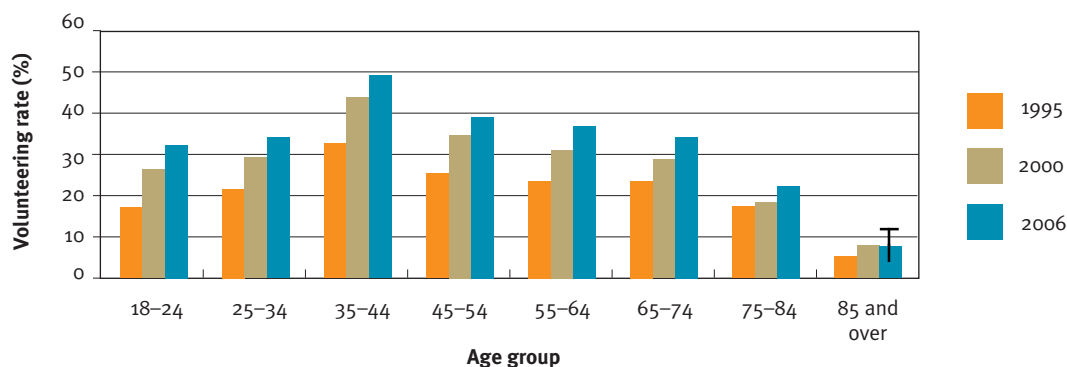
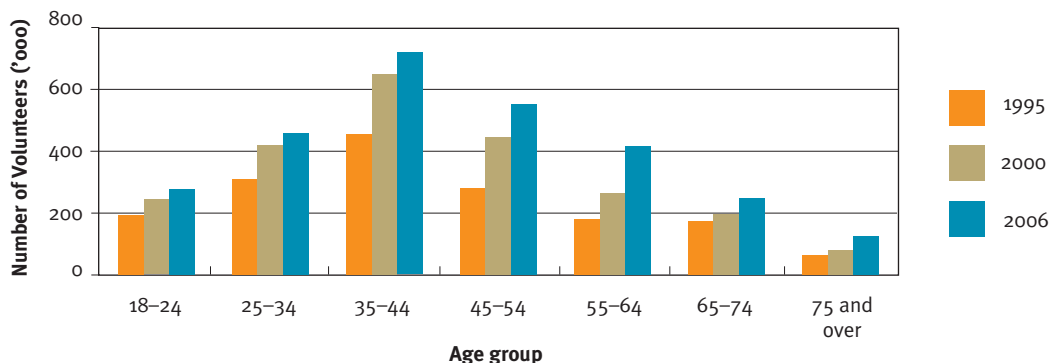


Figure 6: Female volunteers trend by age – Australia



While the pattern of volunteering varies across age groups, in general people aged 35-44 years have been those most likely to volunteer. In 1995, 31% of people in this group volunteered, rising to 40% in 2000 and 44% in 2006. Women show a higher volunteering rate than men with half of all women in this group volunteering in 2006 compared with 38% of men.

Figure 7: Male volunteering rate trend by age – Australia

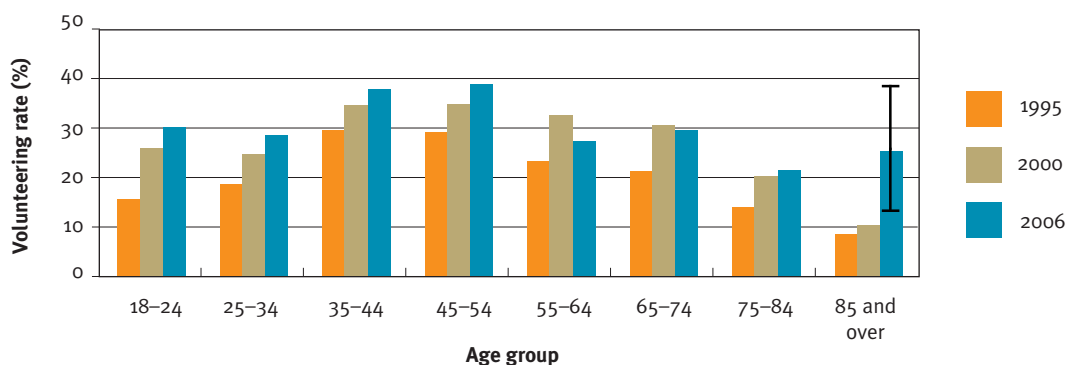
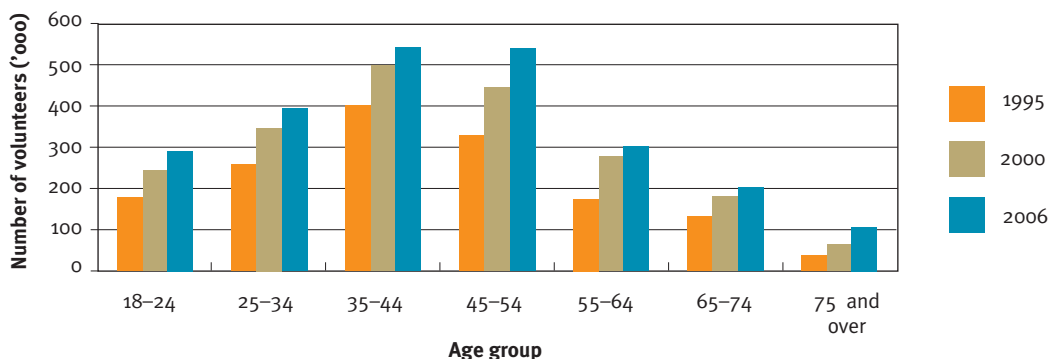


Figure 8: Male volunteers trend by age – Australia

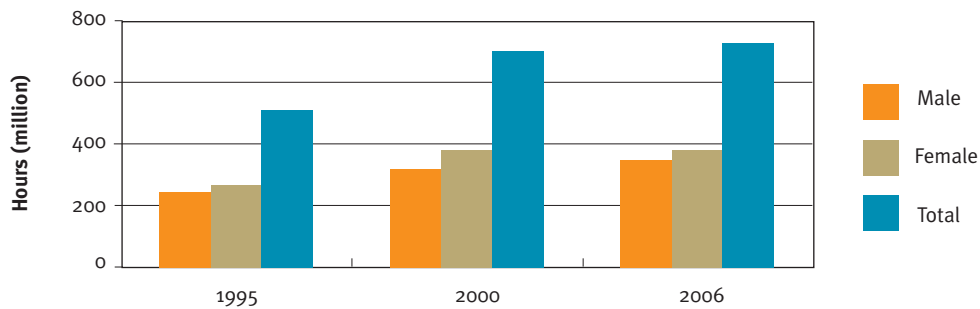


Volunteer hours

Just as the number of people volunteering has grown over time, so has the overall amount of time contributed to the community. The total annual hours that volunteers gave rose from 511 million in 1995 to 704 million in 2000 and 713 million in 2006. Men’s voluntary hours have risen on each occasion while women’s total hours rose from 1995–2000 and then fell slightly in 2006.

Of the 713 million hours given in 2006, men contributed 346 million hours and women contributed 367 million hours.

Figure 9: Total annual hours – Australia



While more people are volunteering, the median hours of voluntary work have decreased across most age groups since 1995. The greatest decrease in median annual hours has been for those aged 35–44. Men’s median annual hours fell by almost half from 74 hours in 1995 to 38 hours in 2006. Over the same time in that age group, women’s median annual hours fell from 78 to 58 hours.

Men and women are volunteering for shorter periods of time with most volunteers contributing relatively few hours and some contributing a large number of hours. During 2006, less than 50 hours per year are contributed by 46% of volunteers while 8% contribute at least 400 hours per year.

The median hours of voluntary work have decreased across most age groups over the years 1995–2006. Even though the highest rate of volunteering has been among those aged 35–44 years, it is also the group with the greatest decrease in median hours. For this age group volunteer hours fell from a median of 76 hours in 1995 to 49 hours in 2006.

Using 2006 median weekly hours, older adults generally spend more time volunteering than younger adults with those aged over 65 giving 2 hours a week. People aged 55–64 had the next highest median hours of 1.5 hours per week. Younger people gave lower median weekly hours.

Figure 10: Median annual hours – Australia

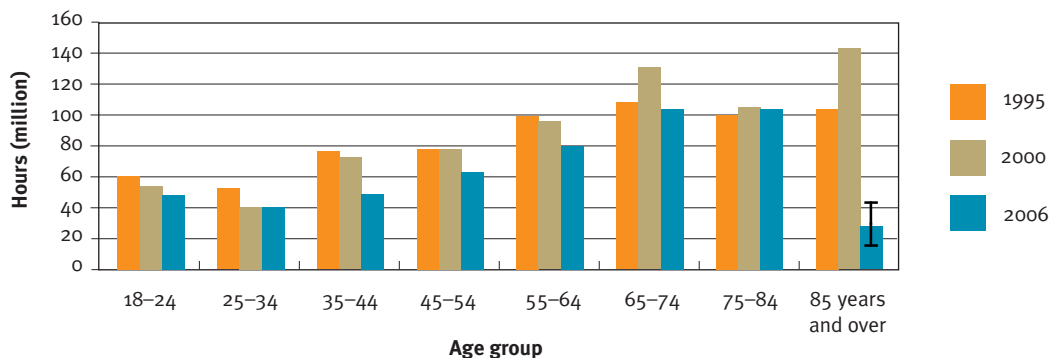


Figure 11: Female median annual hours – Australia

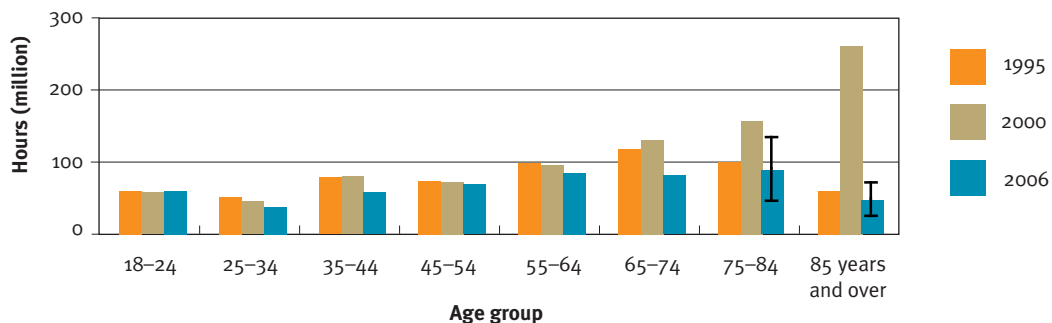
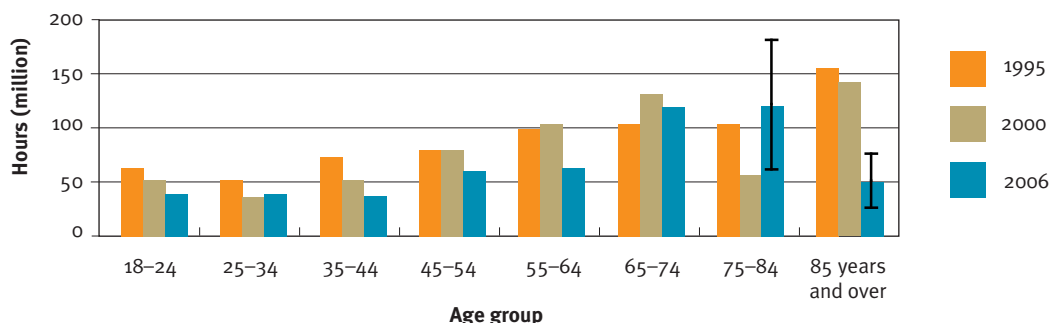


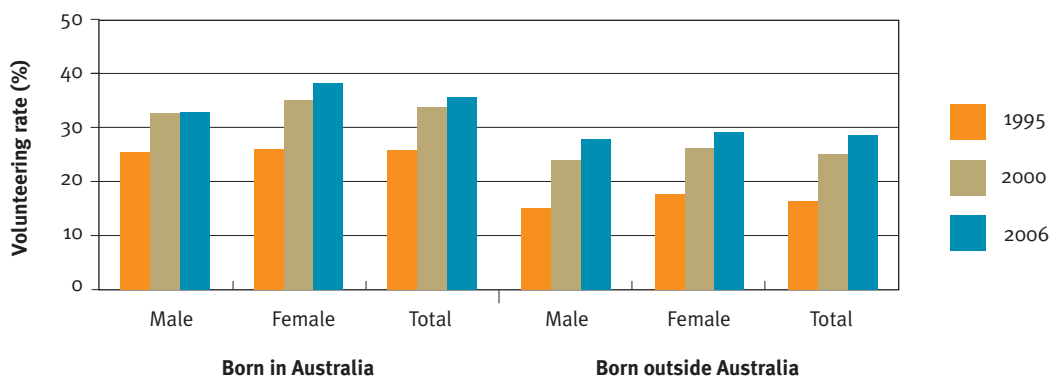
Figure 12: Male median annual hours – Australia



Volunteer origins

Volunteers in Australia are a diverse group and represent a cross section of the Australian population. In general, people born in Australia were slightly more likely to participate in voluntary work than people born outside Australia (36% compared to 29%). While this was the case across most age groups in 2006, the exception was for males aged 25–34 years. In this group, men born outside of Australia volunteered more than their counterparts born in Australia, 32% and 27% respectively.

Figure 13: Volunteering rate by location of birth



Overall across all age groups, women born in Australia had higher volunteering rate than women born elsewhere.

Figure 14: Female volunteering rate in 2006 – by location of birth

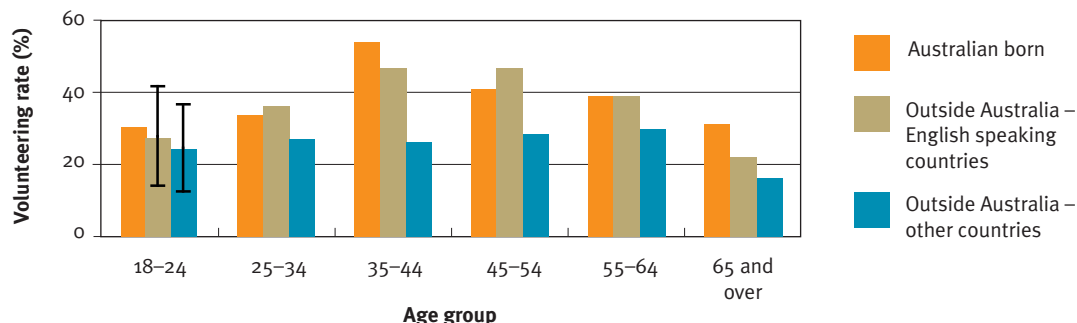
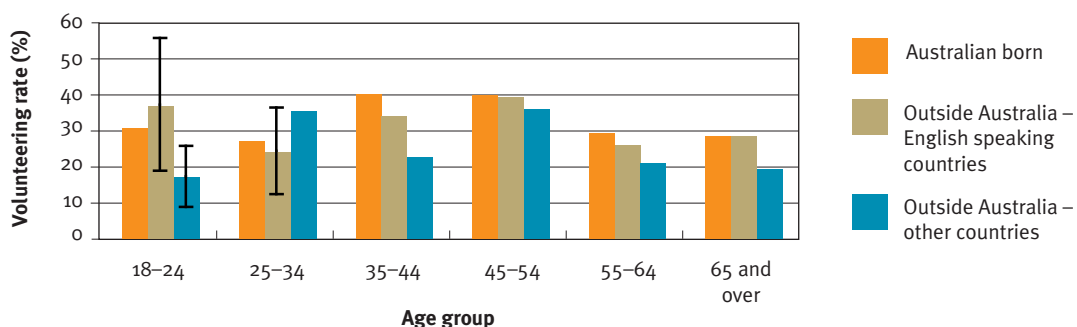


Figure 15: Male volunteering rate in 2006 – by location of birth



Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) volunteers

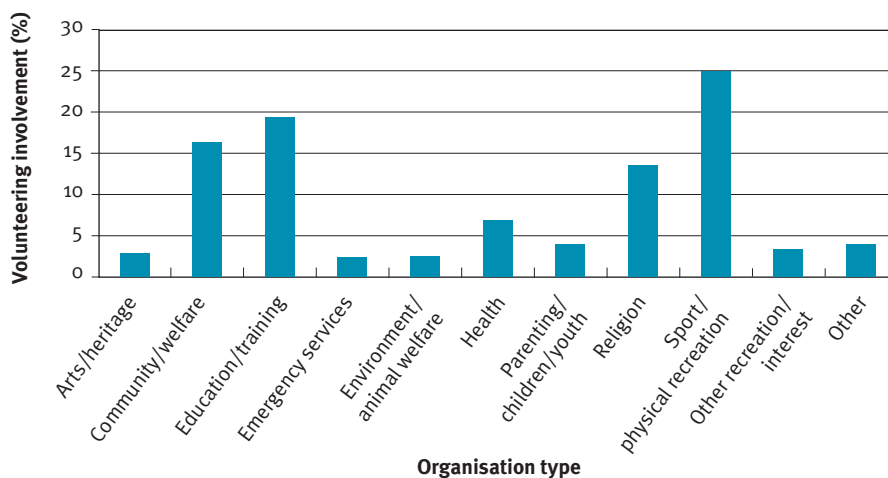
The rate of volunteering amongst people born outside Australia was 17% in 1995 and rose to 25% in 2000. In 2006, the CALD volunteering rate rose slightly to 26%. CALD volunteers participate within their own ethnic and the broader community and are most commonly involved with health, schools and sporting organisations.

Volunteering organisations and activities

The types of organisations people volunteer in were not identified prior to 2000. Volunteers contribute to a wide variety of organisations and perform many different activities. Most volunteering occurs in non-profit organisations (84%) and government sector organisations (14%).

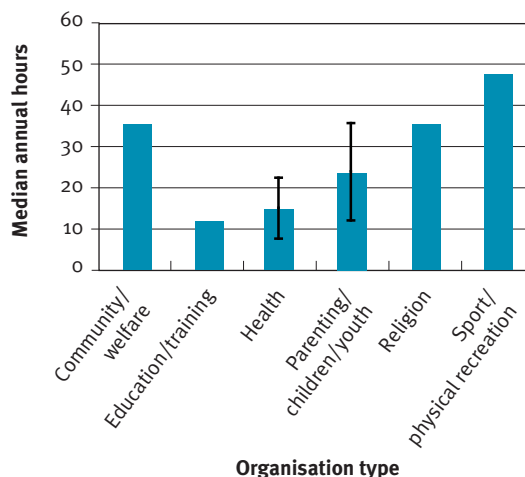
Sport/recreation, education/training, community/welfare and religious groups were consistently the most common types of organisations for which people volunteered across all states and territories. Together, these account for 74% of all volunteering involvement.

Figure 16: Volunteering involvement by organisation type – 2006



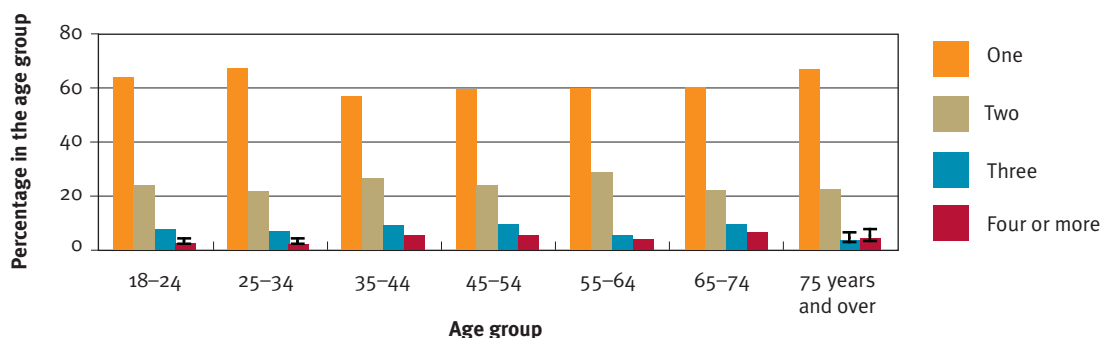
Median hours spent volunteering for religious organisations was equal to hours spent for sport and physical recreation, both 48 hours per year. These were higher than for all other types of organisations.

Figure 17: Organisation type and median annual volunteering hours – 2006



Most volunteers served only one organisation (62%) but a small proportion (4%) contributed to more than three.

Figure 18: Number of organisations volunteered for – by age – 2006



Volunteers worked for organisations that were either fully staffed by volunteers or staffed by both volunteer and paid staff. Just over half of the organisations that volunteers worked for had a combination of paid and volunteer staff while 44% of organisations were fully staffed by volunteers.

Almost half of volunteering activity involved fundraising and sales (48%).

Preparing and serving food, teaching / instructing / providing information and performing administrative work were other important activities. Transporting people and/or goods accounted for 22% of volunteer activity.

Some volunteer activities fit traditional stereotypes. Women were more likely than men to be involved in food preparation and serving. Men were more likely to be involved in repairs, maintenance, gardening, coaching and refereeing. Men and women had similar rate of involvement across other activities.

Volunteering, employment and occupation

Volunteers were more likely to be in paid employment, either full-time or part-time than those who were unemployed or not in the labour force. While the volunteering rate was lower for people not in employment, they generally contributed more voluntary hours than people who were.

Figure 19: Volunteering rate by labour force status – 2006

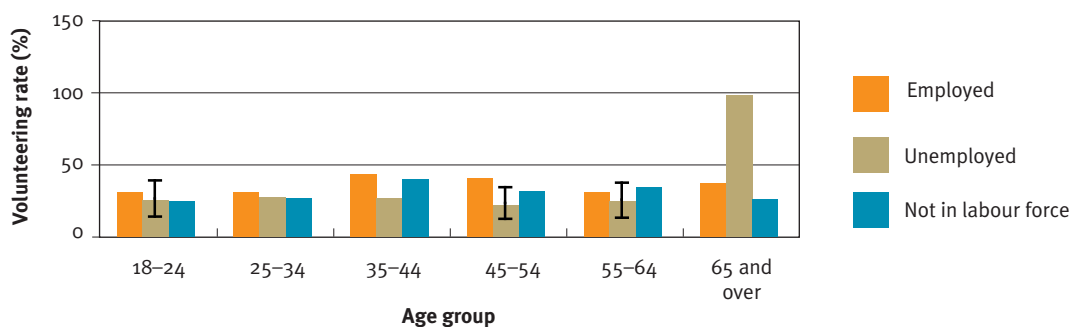


Figure 20: Employed persons volunteering rate by full-time/part-time status – 2006

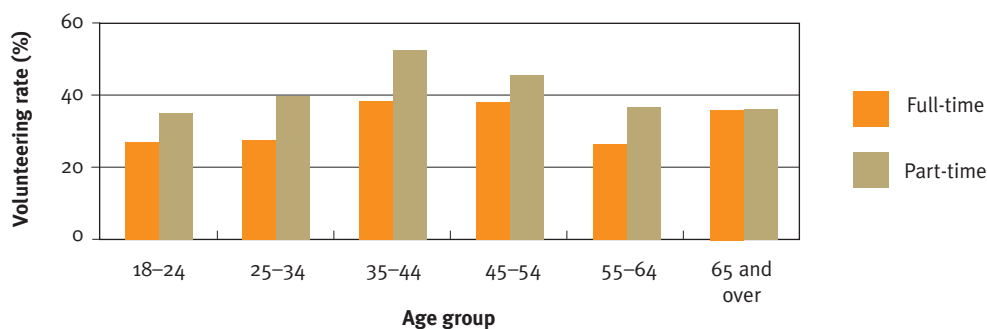
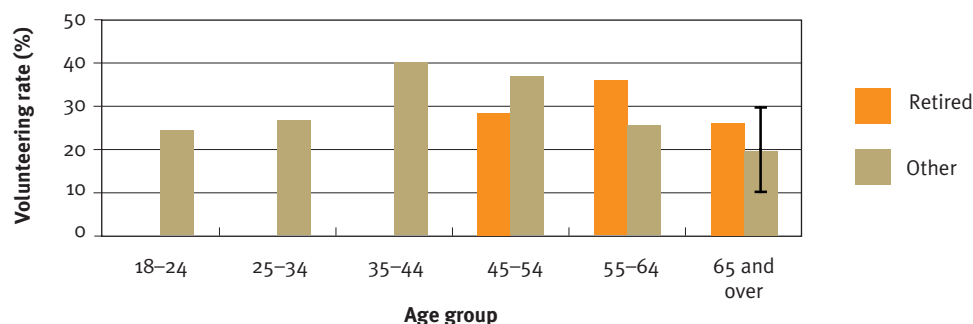


Figure 21: Volunteering rate for persons not in the labour force – 2006



In 2006, employed men volunteered an average 2.2 hours a week, unemployed men gave 3.4 hours and retired men gave 5.9 hours. Retired women similarly provided more voluntary work, 3.5 hours compared with 2.4 hours by women not in the labour force. Women who worked part-time gave 2.3 hours while those in full-time employment gave 2.1 hours and unemployed women 2.0 hours a week.

People generally volunteered in areas that related to their type of paid employment. Those employed in health and community services for example, were more likely to volunteer in these areas. There is a similar association for volunteers in other areas.

The volunteering rate varied between occupational groupings. Managers/administrators and professionals (46%) and advanced clerical and service workers (45%) showed the highest volunteering rate.

Volunteering and household income

Volunteering information relating to household income was collected for the first time in 2006. People with the highest 20% of gross weekly incomes volunteered at a higher rate (39%), compared with those from households with the lowest 20% of gross weekly incomes (25%). Women from higher income households volunteered at a slightly higher rate (41%) than men in comparable households (37%).

Figure 22: Volunteering rate by equivalent gross weekly household income quintiles – 2006

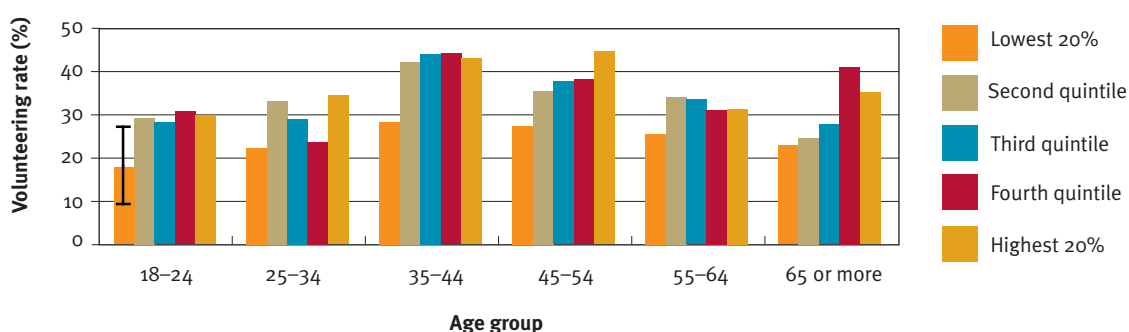


Figure 23: Male volunteering rate by equivalent gross weekly household income quintiles – 2006

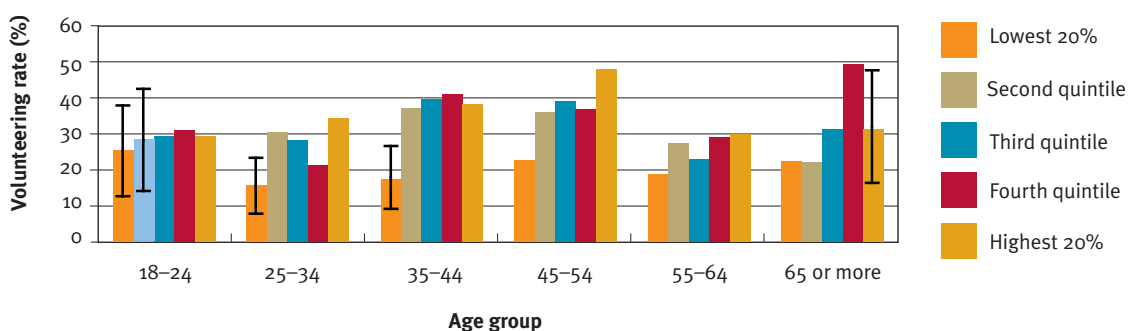
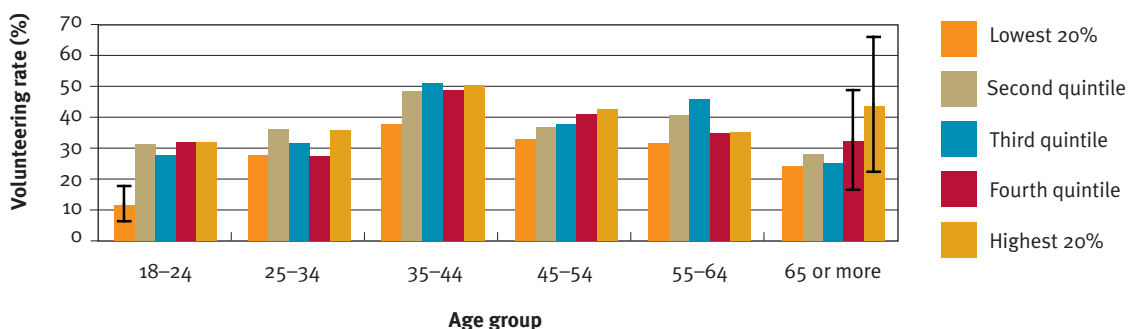


Figure 24: Female volunteering rate by equivalent gross weekly household income quintiles – 2006



Volunteering and educational qualifications

Information about educational qualification of volunteers was first collected in 2006. The volunteering rate shows a relationship between educational levels and occupational groups. People in occupations with higher educational qualifications showed higher volunteering rate than people in occupations with lower educational qualifications.

Figure 25: Volunteering rate by level of highest non-school qualification – 2006

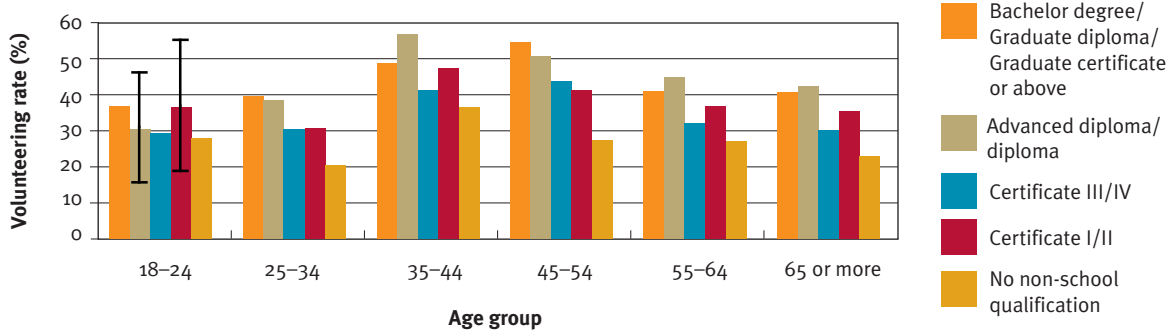


Figure 26: Male volunteering rate by level of highest non-school qualification – 2006

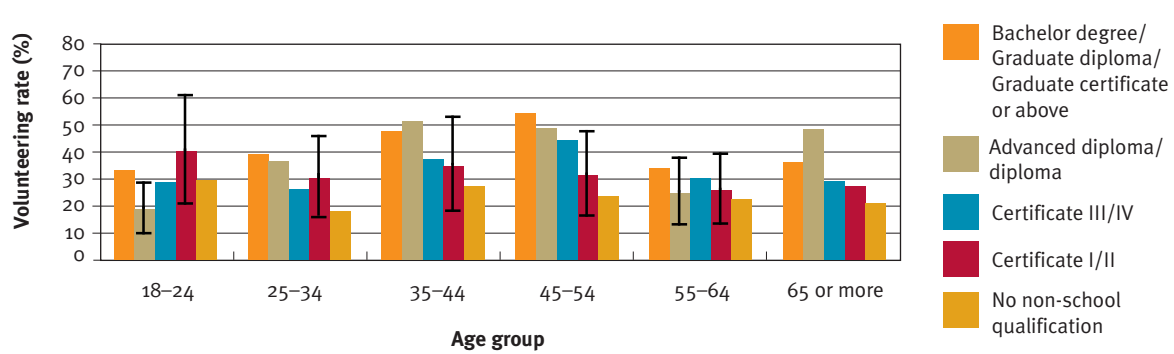
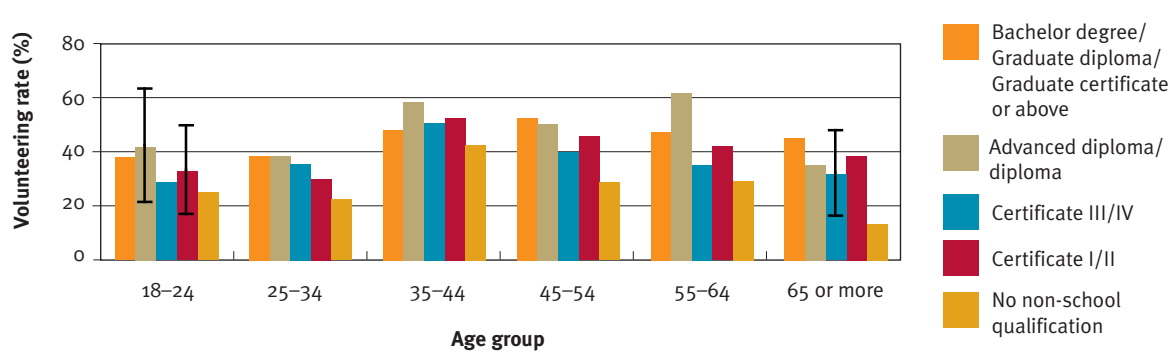


Figure 27: Female volunteering rate by level of highest non-school qualification – 2006



An overview of volunteering across States and Territories

States and Territories displayed differing patterns of volunteering. Between 1995 and 2006, all States and Territories except South Australia had an increase in volunteering rate. The volunteering rate in South Australia rose from 27% in 1995 to 38% in 2000 and dropped to 32% in 2006.

In 2006, both the ACT and Queensland had the highest proportion of volunteers, each with 38%. Tasmania, Northern Territory and Western Australia were slightly less with 36% of their population volunteering.

The volunteering rate also differed across parts of states with people living outside capital cities more likely to volunteer. Capital cities overall had a volunteering rate of 16% in 1995, 28% in 2000 and 32% in 2006. The volunteering rate outside capital cities was 24% in 1995 and 38% in both 2000 and 2006.

Amongst men, in capital cities across Australia men aged 45-54 years had the highest volunteering rate at 41%. Beyond capital cities, men aged 18-24 and 35-44 years had the highest volunteering rate at 42% each. Amongst women, those aged 35-44 years had the highest volunteering rate both in capital cities and beyond, 44% and 56% respectively.

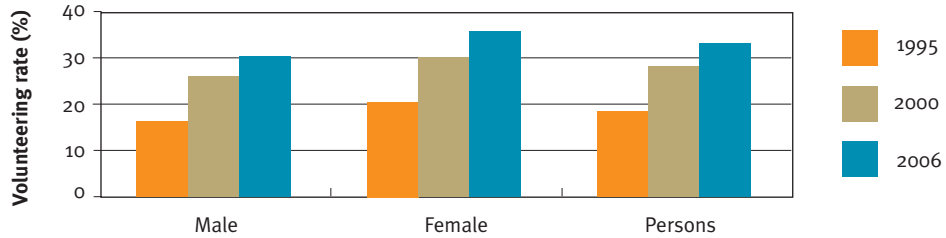
The economic contribution of volunteering

As well as the many social and welfare related benefits that volunteering provides to the community, its economic value has been estimated at around \$42 billion per annum.

New South Wales

In New South Wales the volunteering rate was 19% in 1995. This rose to 30% in 2000 and 33% in 2006.

Figure 28: NSW volunteering rate 1995, 2000 and 2006



While women volunteered more often than men, they gave similar amounts of annual volunteer time with 62 and 60 hours respectively in 2006.

Figure 29: NSW annual hours 1995, 2000 and 2006

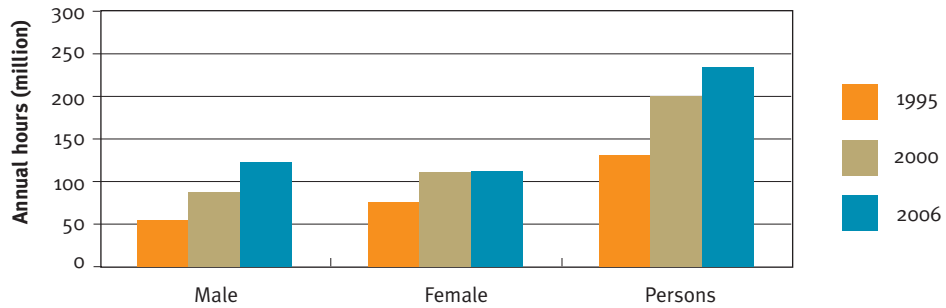
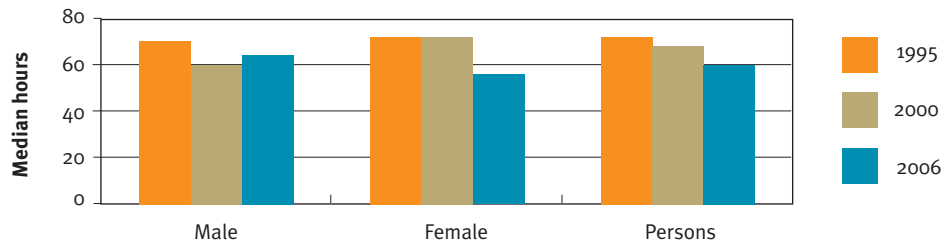


Figure 30: NSW median hours 1995, 2000 and 2006



People living outside the capital city area had a higher volunteering rate, 37% compared with 30% for those living in Sydney during 2006.

Figure 31: NSW volunteers – 2006

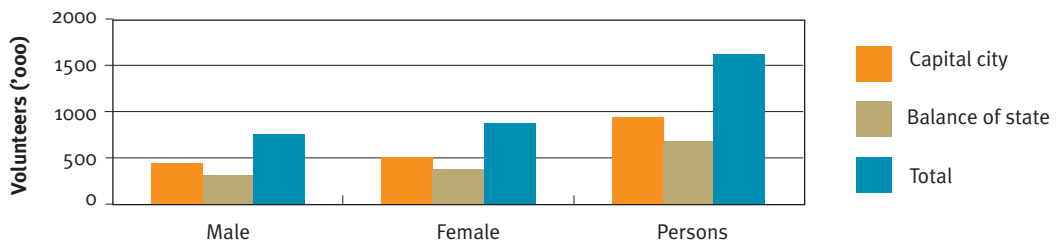


Figure 32: NSW volunteering rate – 2006

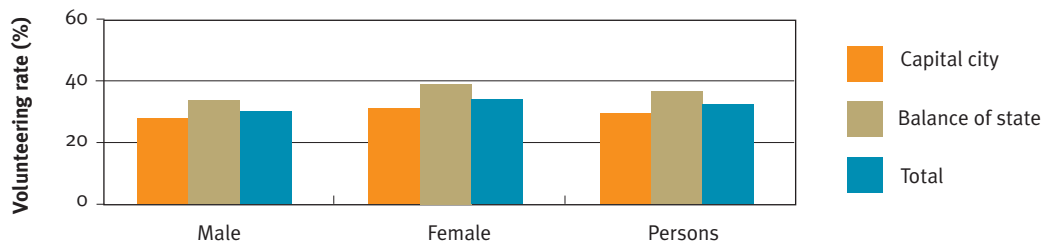


Figure 33: NSW volunteering rate by age groups – 2006

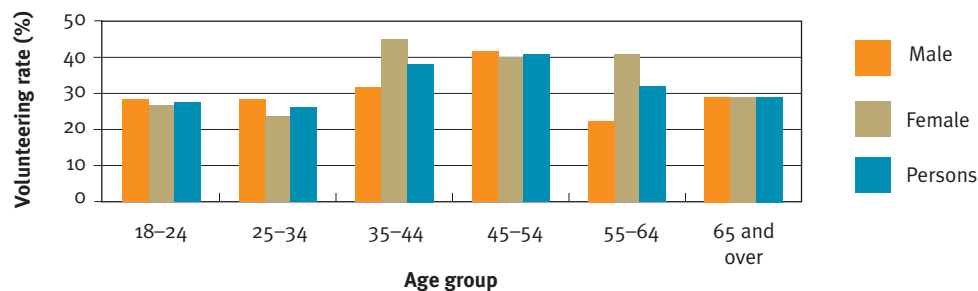


Figure 34: NSW volunteering rate by type of organisation – 2006

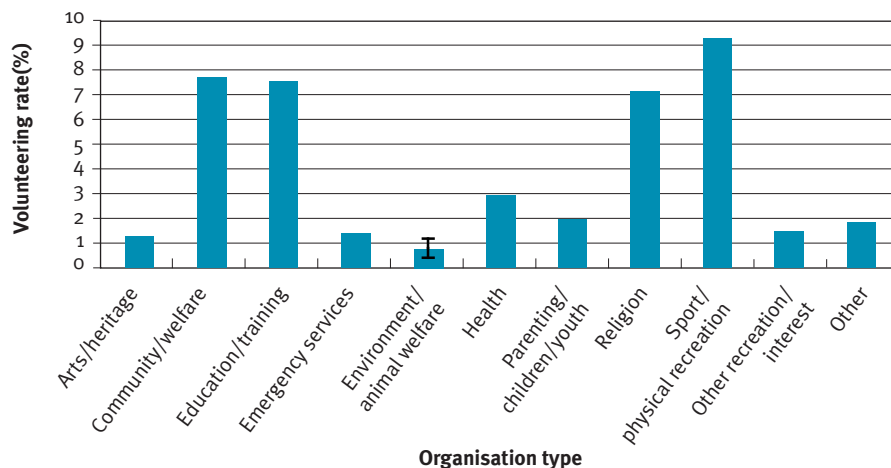
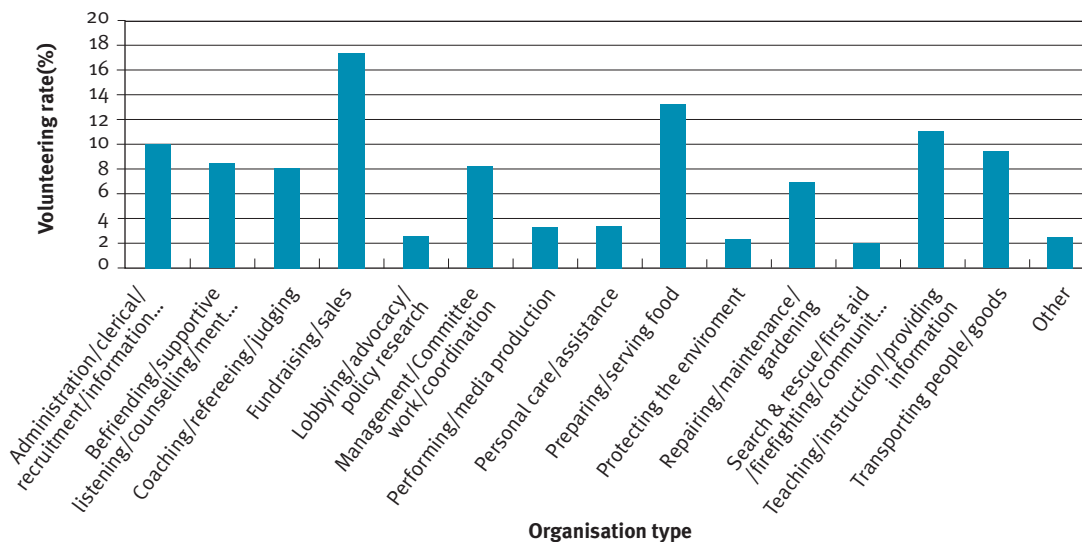


Figure 35: NSW volunteering rate by type of activity – 2006

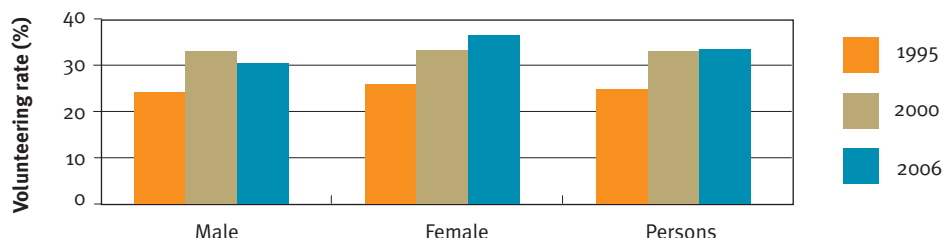


Victoria

Victoria's volunteering rate was 25% in 1995. It rose to 33% in 2000 and remained the same in 2006.

The volunteering rate was slightly higher for women than men over this time with 36% and 30% respectively in 2006.

Figure 36: VIC volunteering rate 1995, 2000 and 2006



People outside the capital city area volunteered at a higher rate than those living in Melbourne, 41% compared to 30% respectively in 2006.

Figure 37: VIC annual hours 1995, 2000 and 2006

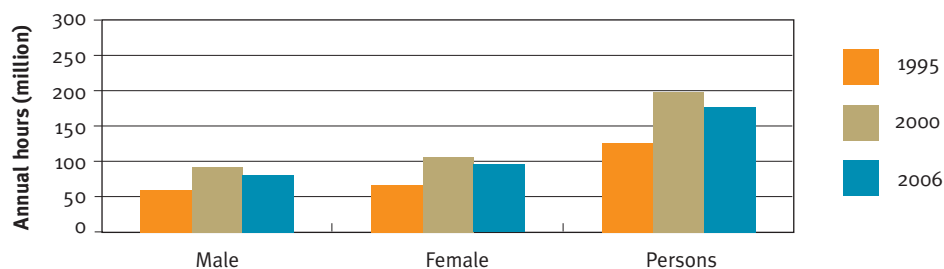


Figure 38: VIC median hours 1995, 2000 and 2006

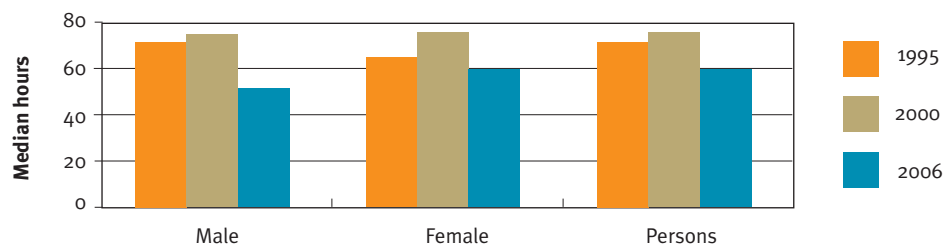


Figure 39: VIC volunteers – 2006

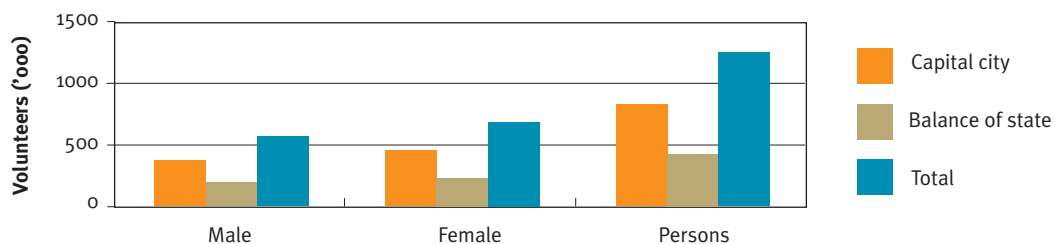


Figure 40: VIC volunteering rate – 2006

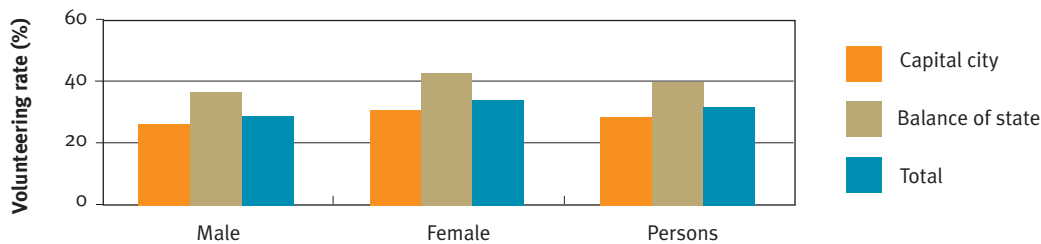


Figure 41: VIC volunteering rate by age groups – 2006

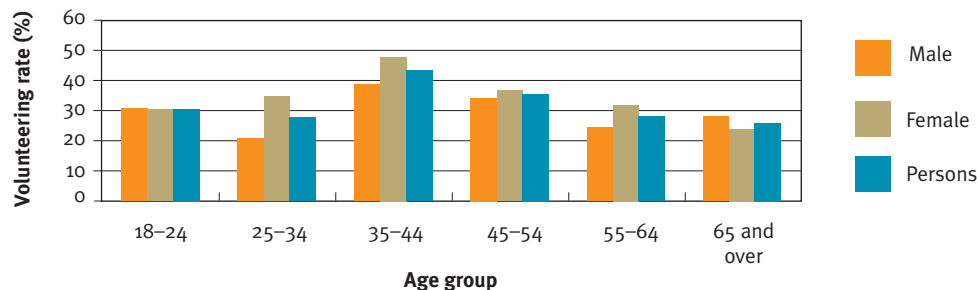


Figure 42: VIC volunteering rate by type of organisation – 2006

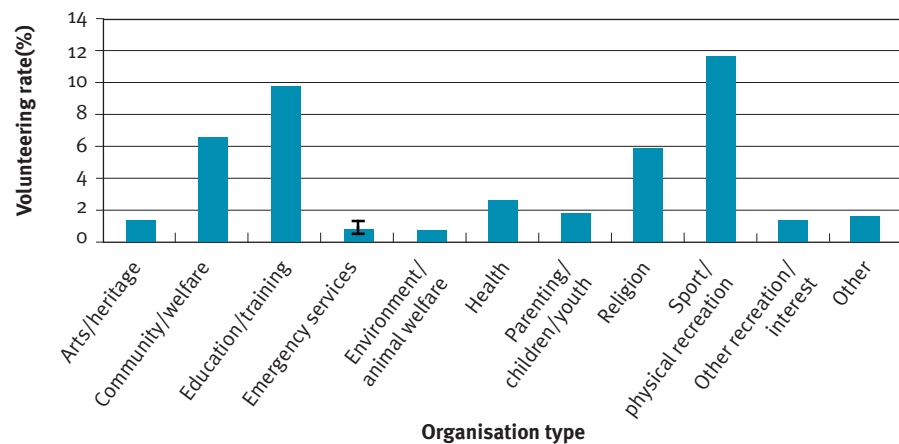
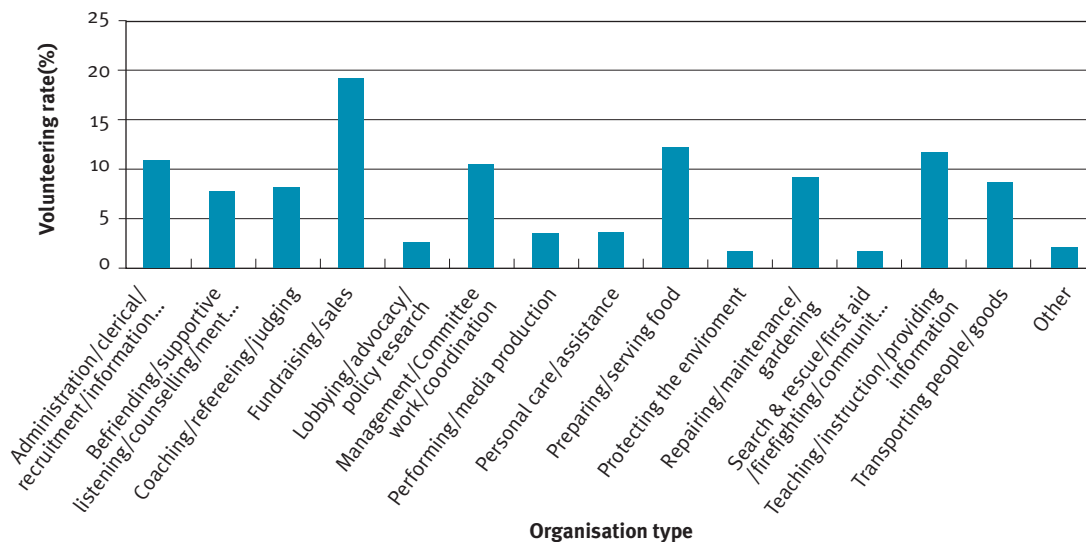


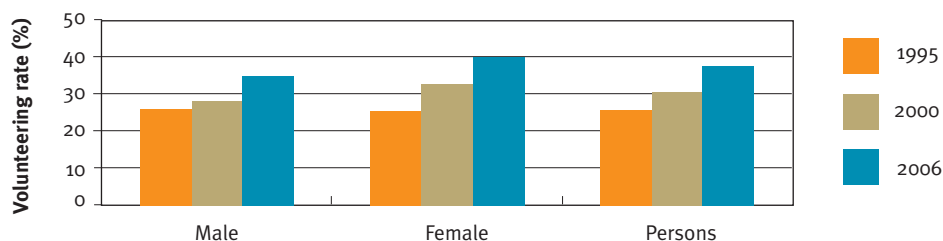
Figure 43: VIC volunteering rate by type of activity – 2006



Queensland

In Queensland, 26% of the population volunteered in 1995. This rose to 31% in 2000, and 38% in 2006.

Figure 44: QLD volunteering rate 1995, 2000 and 2006



The volunteering rate was the same through all parts of the state in 2006.

Women have volunteered at a slightly higher rate than men, at 41% and 36% respectively in 2006.

In 2006, women contributed many more volunteer hours (78 hours) than men who contributed 35 hours.

Figure 45: QLD annual hours 1995, 2000 and 2006

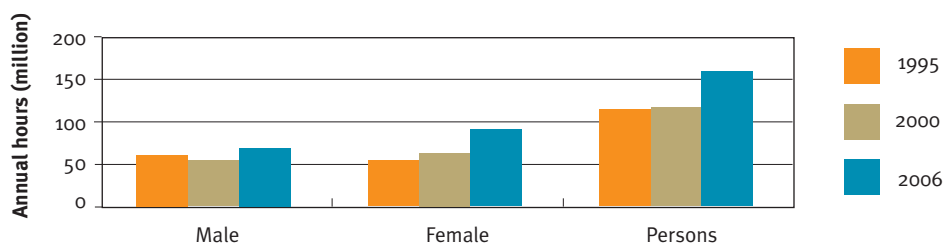


Figure 46: QLD median hours 1995, 2000 and 2006

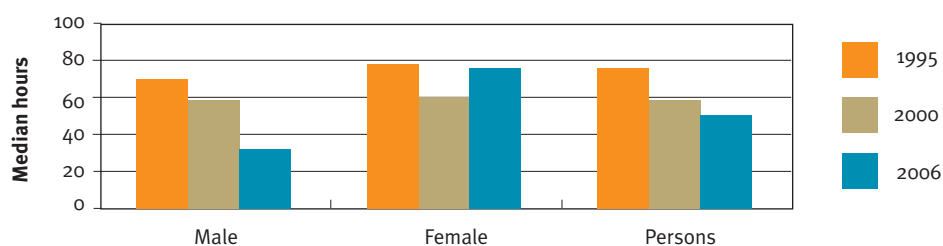


Figure 47: QLD volunteers – 2006

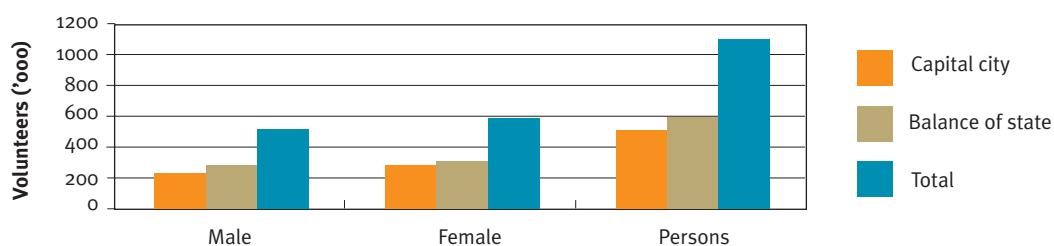


Figure 48: QLD volunteering rate – 2006

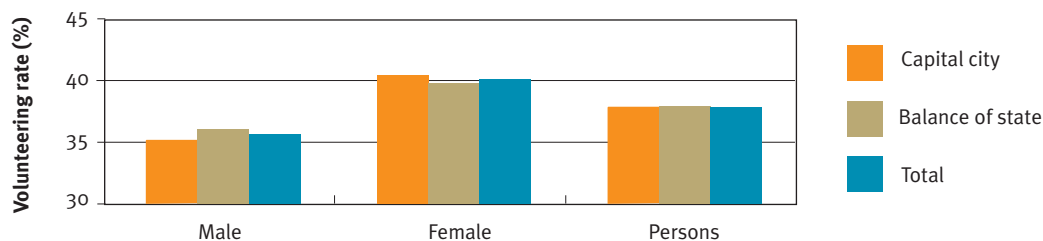


Figure 49: QLD volunteering rate by age groups – 2006

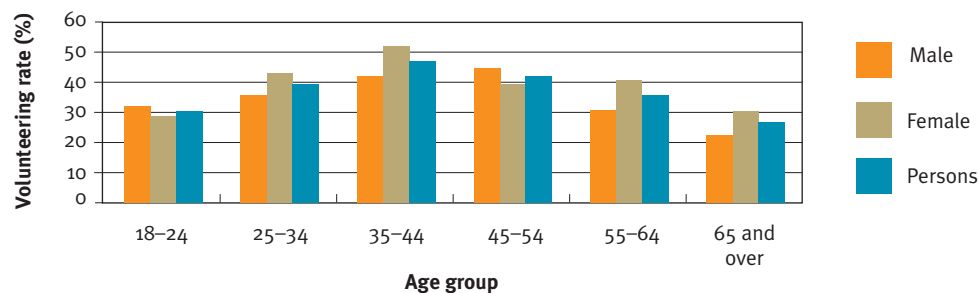


Figure 50: QLD volunteering rate by type of organisation – 2006

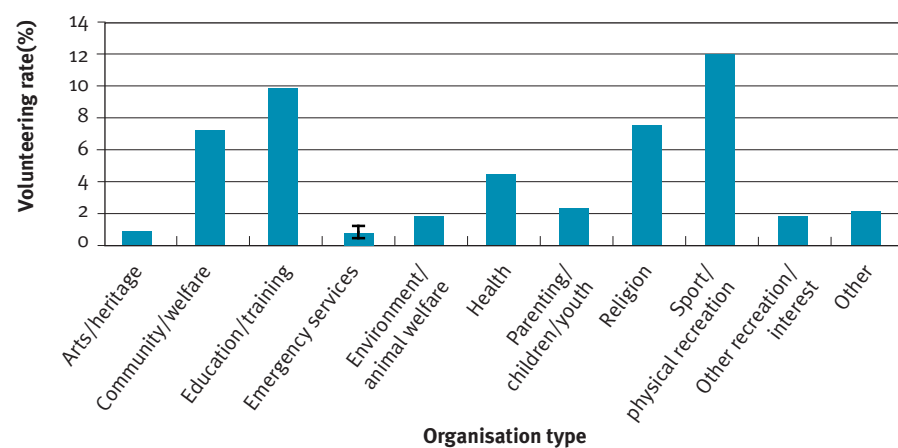
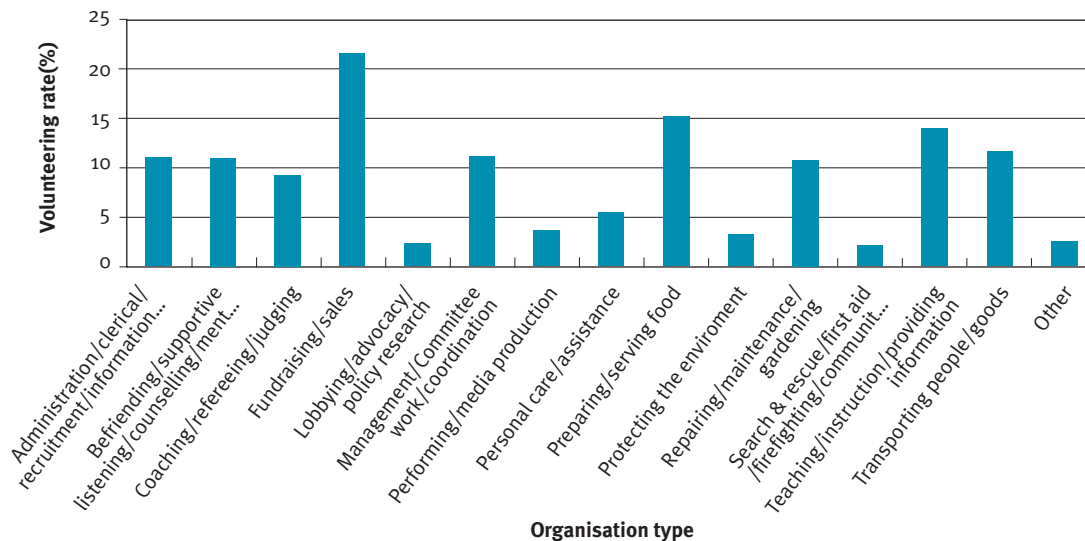


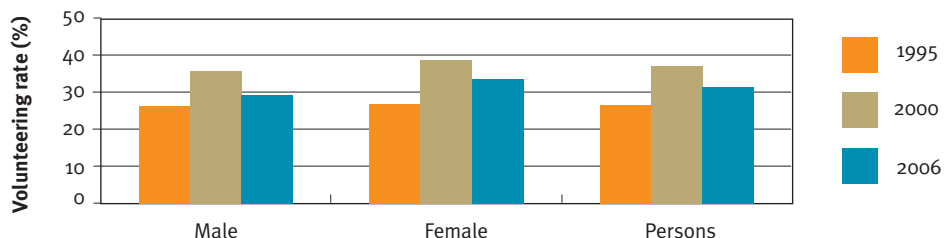
Figure 51: QLD volunteering rate by type of activity – 2006



South Australia

The volunteering rate in South Australia rose from 27% of the population in 1995 to 38% in 2000 and declined in 2006 to 32%.

Figure 52: SA volunteering rate 1995, 2000 and 2006



In 2006, there was slight difference in volunteering across the state with 30% in the metropolitan area compared with 35% for the balance of the state.

Women living outside the metropolitan area had the highest rate of volunteering at 41%, compared with men or women in any area.

Men contributed slightly more median annual hours than women (59 hours and 53 hours respectively).

Figure 53: SA annual hours 1995, 2000 and 2006

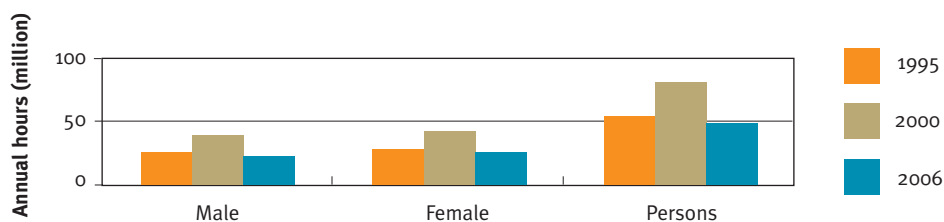


Figure 54: SA median hours 1995, 2000 and 2006

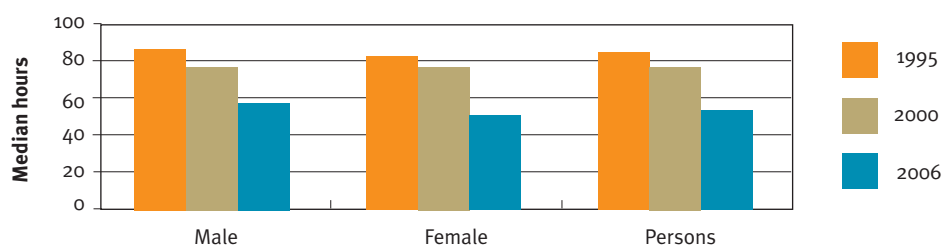


Figure 55: SA volunteers – 2006

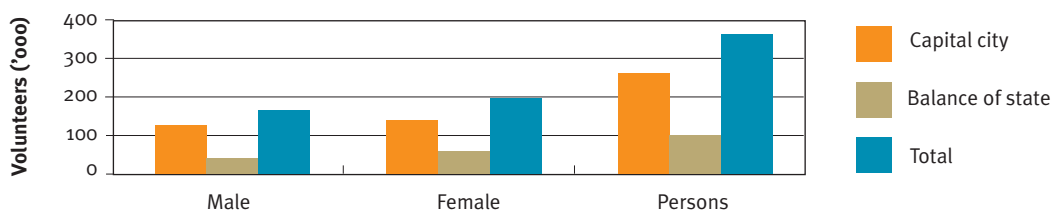


Figure 56: SA volunteering rate – 2006

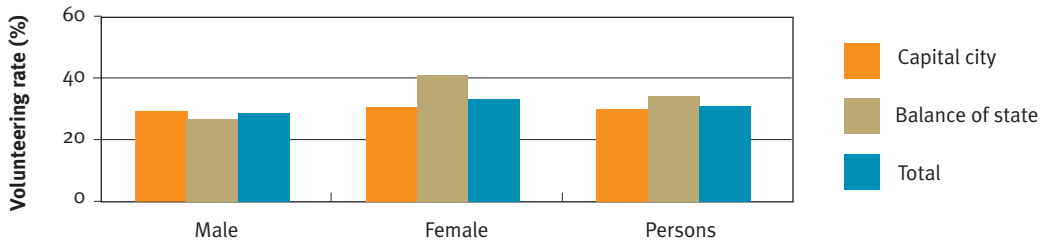


Figure 57: SA volunteering rate by age groups – 2006

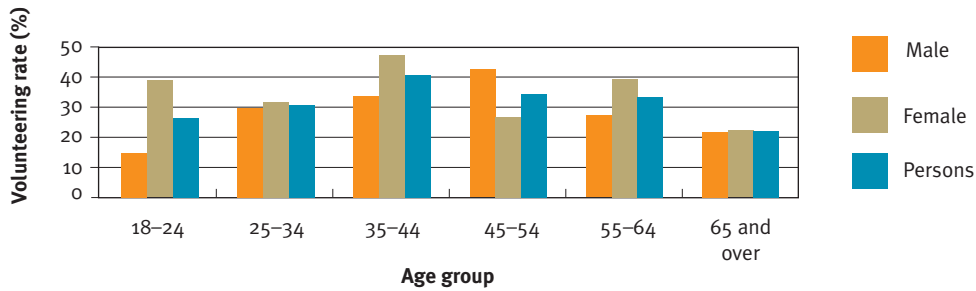


Figure 58: SA volunteering rate by type of organisation – 2006

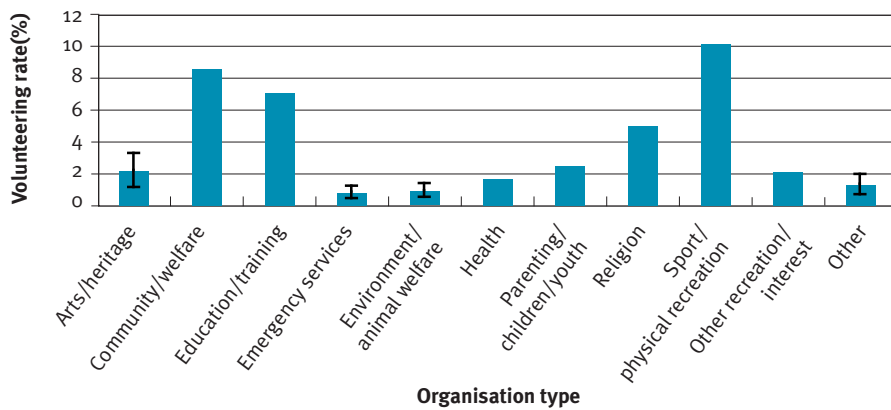
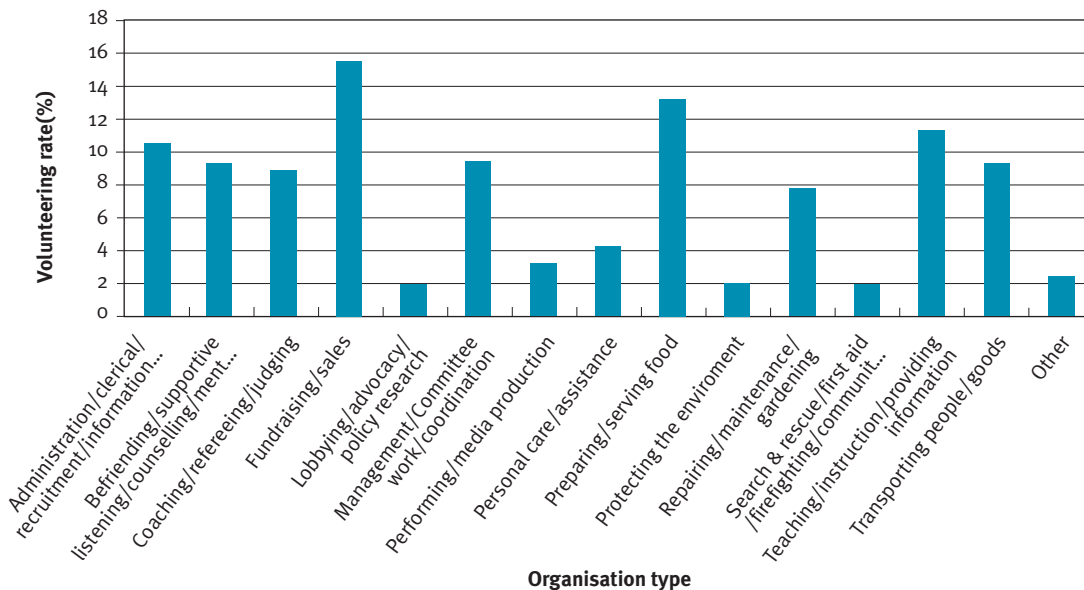


Figure 59: SA volunteering rate by type of activity – 2006

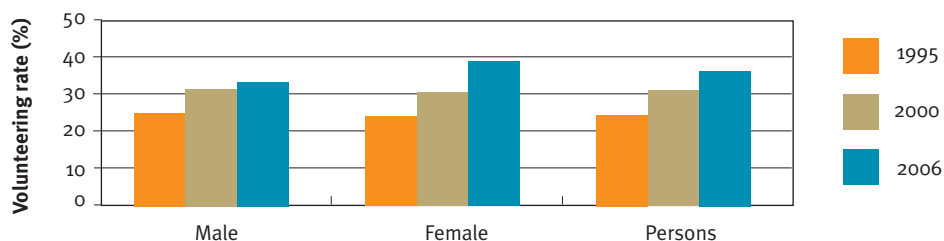


Western Australia

Volunteering rate in Western Australia was 25% in 1995. This figure rose to 32% in 2000 and 37% in 2006.

Women volunteered slightly more than men, 40% compared to 35% in 2006.

Figure 60: WA volunteering rate 1995, 2000 and 2006



There was little difference between the metropolitan area and the rest of the state. Women outside the metropolitan area contributed a higher number of median annual hours (59) compared with women and men in the metropolitan area (52 and 50 hours respectively).

Figure 61: WA annual hours 1995, 2000 and 2006

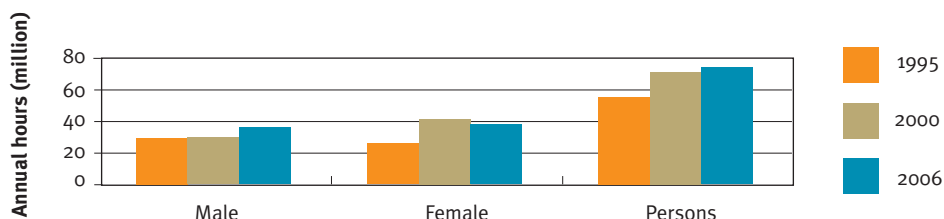


Figure 62: WA median hours 1995, 2000 and 2006

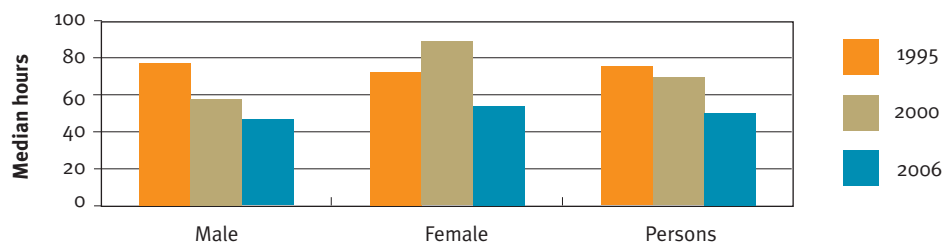


Figure 63: WA volunteers – 2006

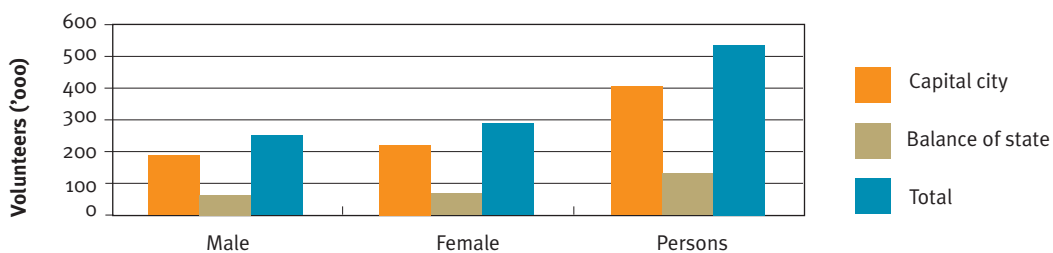


Figure 64: WA volunteering rate – 2006

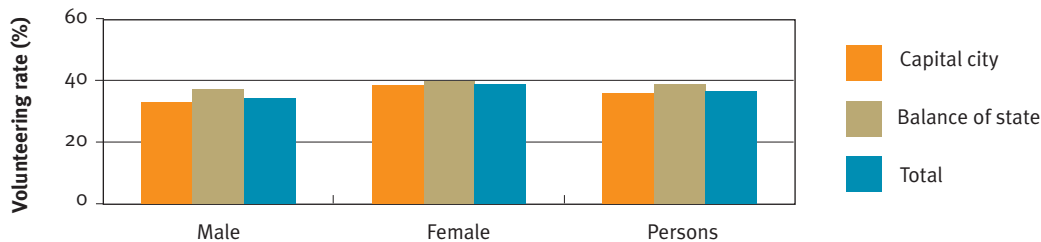


Figure 65: WA volunteering rate by age groups – 2006

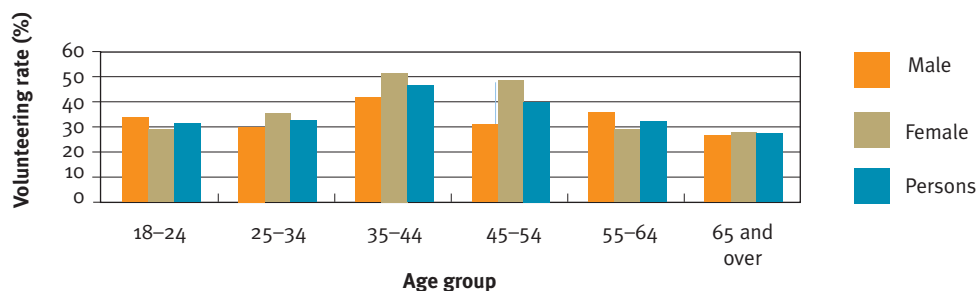


Figure 66: WA volunteering rate by type of organisation – 2006

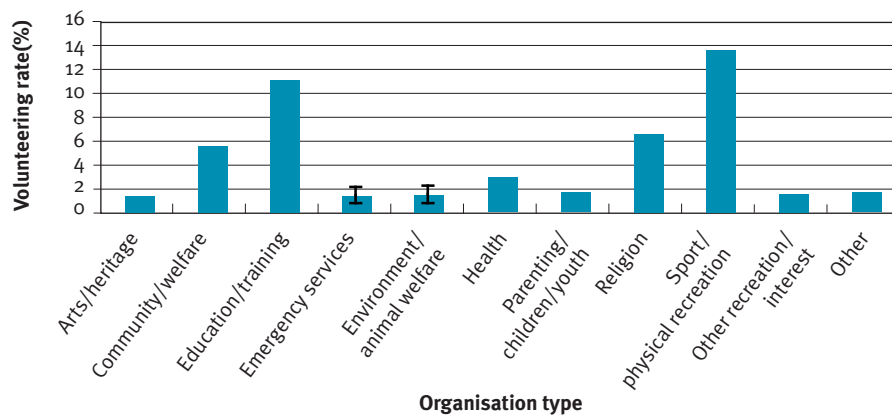
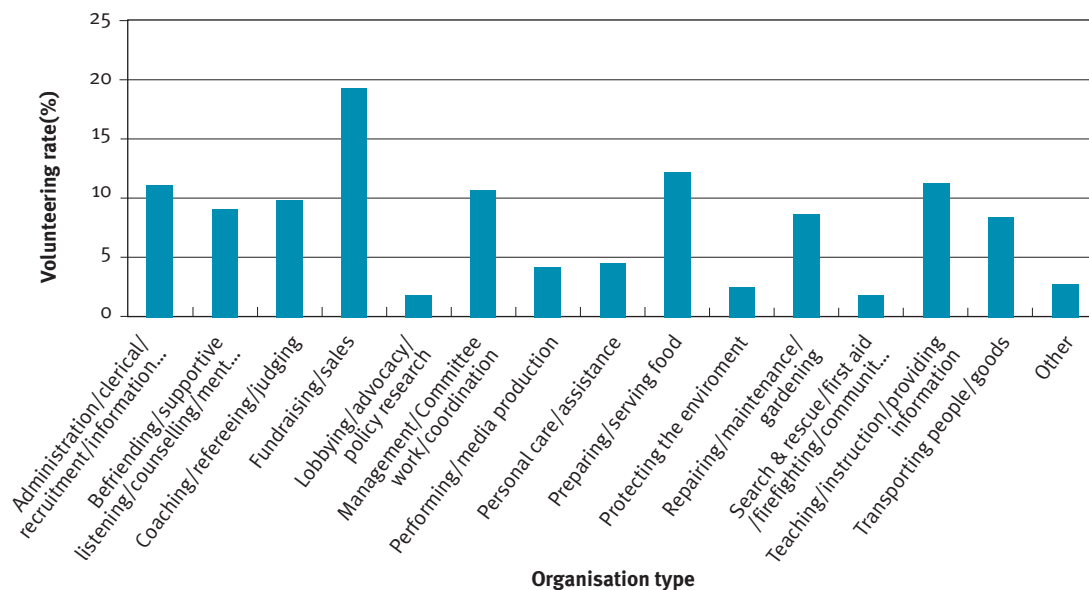


Figure 67: WA volunteering rate by type of activity – 2006

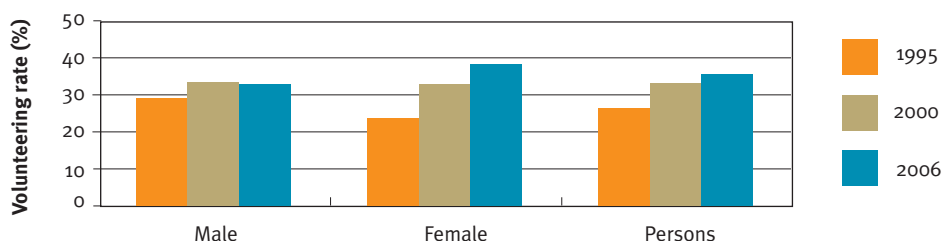


Tasmania

Tasmania’s volunteering rate was 27% in 1995. It grew to 34% in 2000 and 36% in 2006.

Women volunteered at a slightly higher rate than men. Women outside the capital city had the highest volunteering rate of 41% in 2006.

Figure 68: TAS volunteering rate 1995, 2000 and 2006



The median annual hour contributed by men (60 hours) was higher than that of women (52 hours) across all areas of the state in 2006.

Figure 69: TAS annual hours 1995, 2000 and 2006

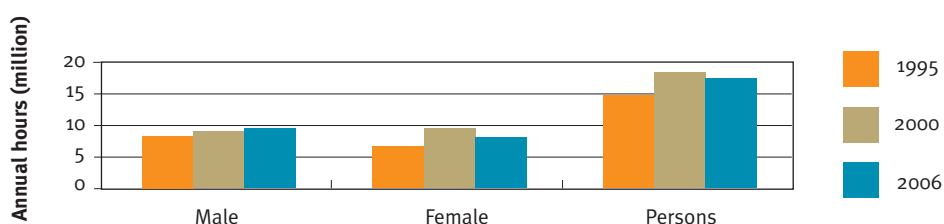


Figure 70: TAS median hours 1995, 2000 and 2006

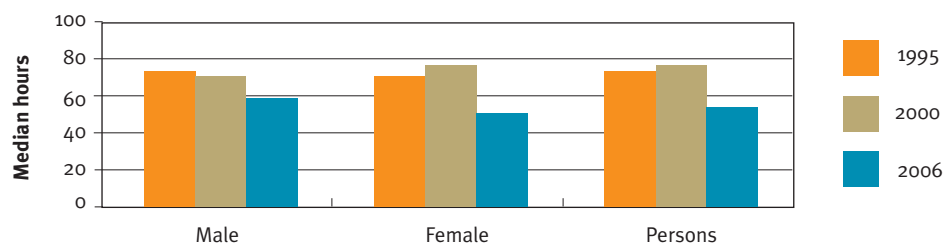


Figure 71: TAS volunteers – 2006

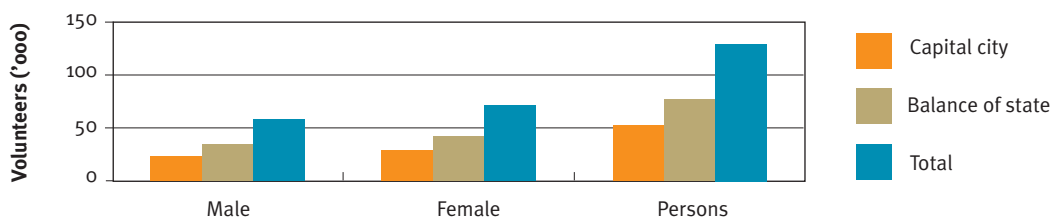


Figure 72: TAS volunteering rate – 2006

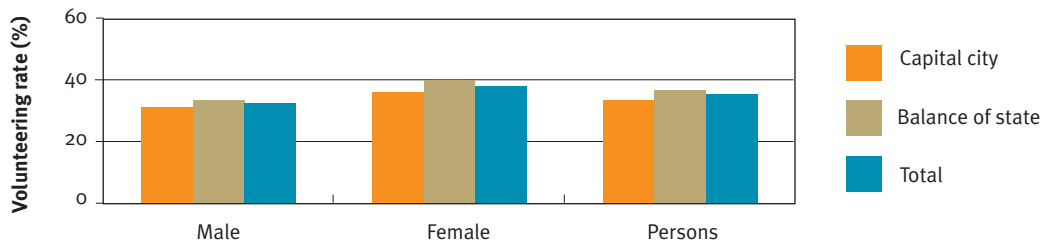


Figure 73: TAS volunteering rate by age groups – 2006

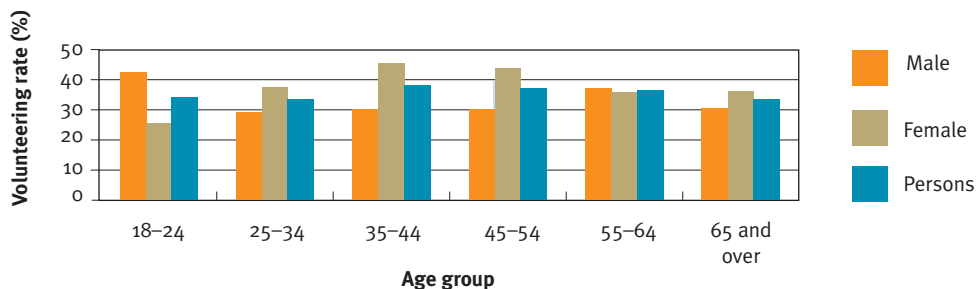


Figure 74: TAS volunteering rate by type of organisation – 2006

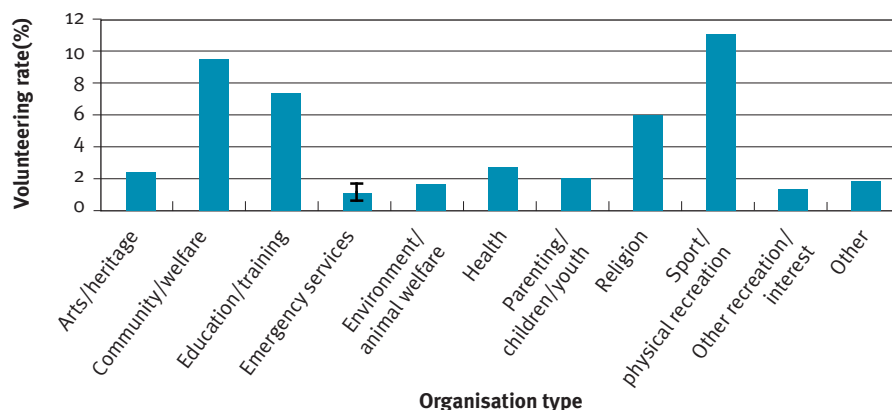
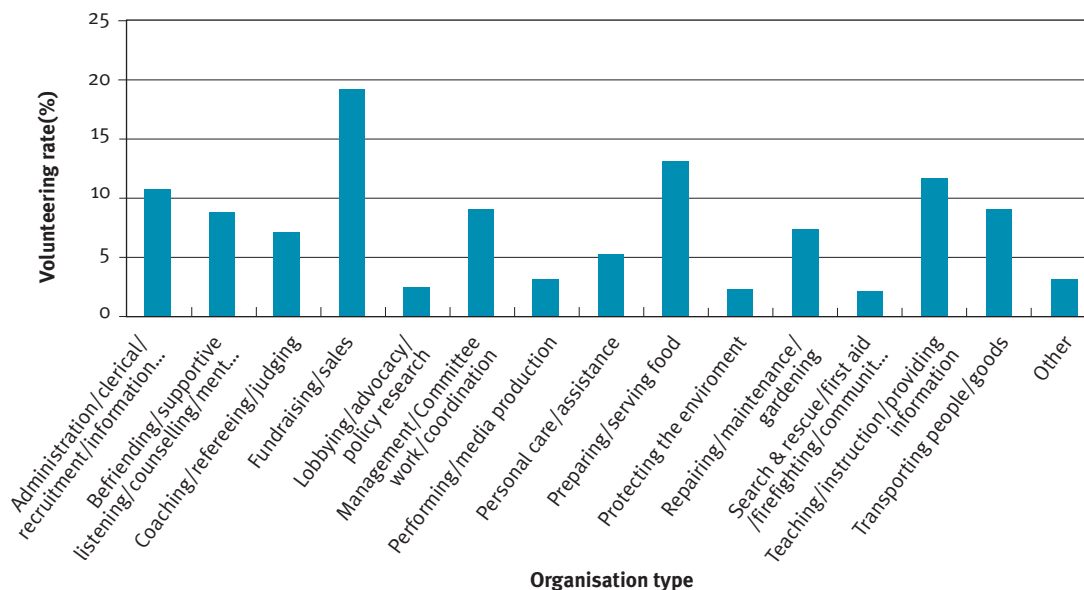


Figure 75: TAS volunteering rate by type of activity – 2006

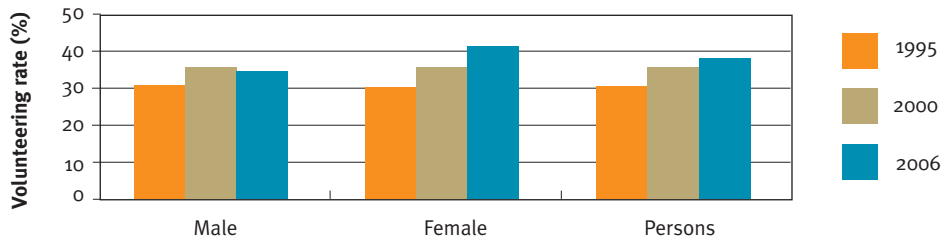


Australian Capital Territory

The volunteering rate in the Australian Capital Territory rose from 31% in 1995 to 36% in 2000. It rose slightly to 39% in 2006.

Women volunteered at a higher rate (42%) than men (35%) in 2006.

Figure 76: ACT volunteering rate 1995, 2000 and 2006



There is little difference between the number of hours men and women have contributed in 2006 with 52 hours for men and 48 hours for women.

Figure 77: ACT annual hours 1995, 2000 and 2006

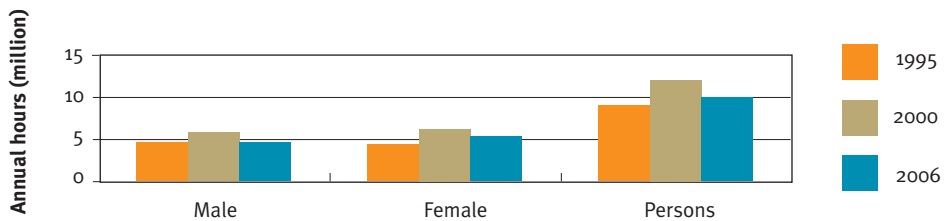
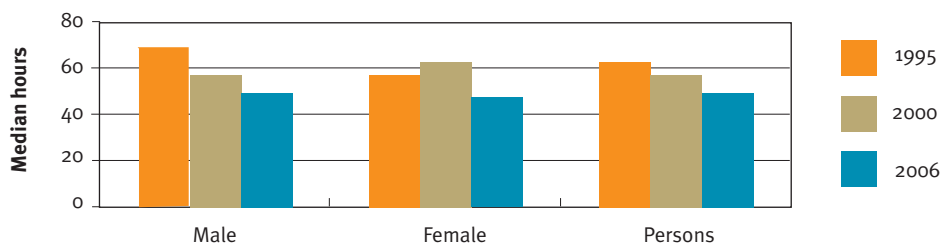


Figure 78: ACT median hours 1995, 2000 and 2006



There was no separation of the Australian Capital Territory into capital city and remainder of the territory in gathering volunteering information.

Figure 79: ACT volunteers – 2006

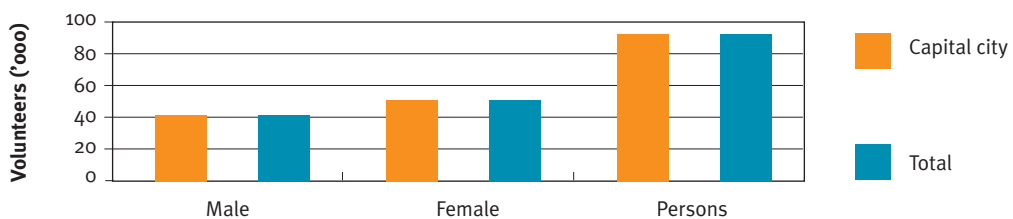


Figure 80: ACT volunteering rate – 2006

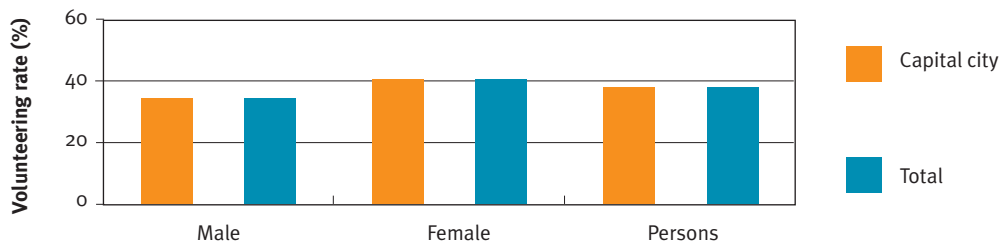


Figure 81: ACT volunteering rate by age groups – 2006

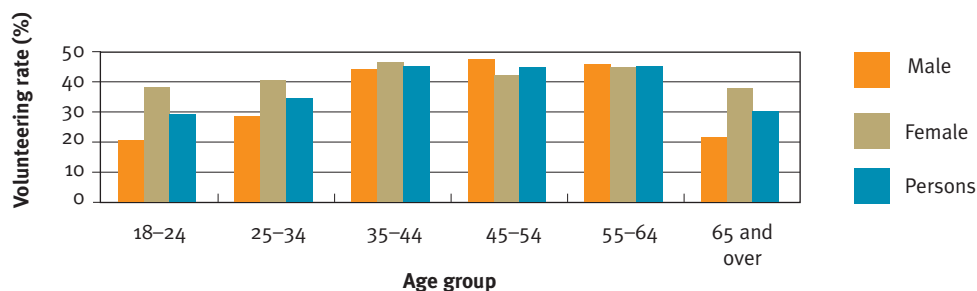


Figure 82: ACT volunteering rate by type of organisation – 2006

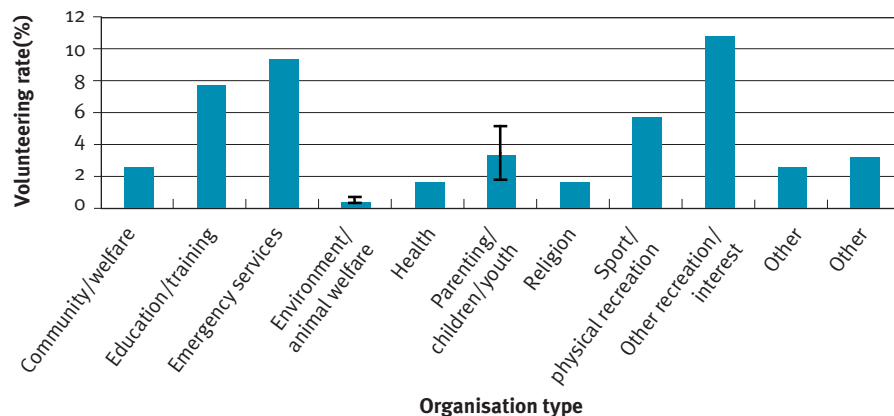
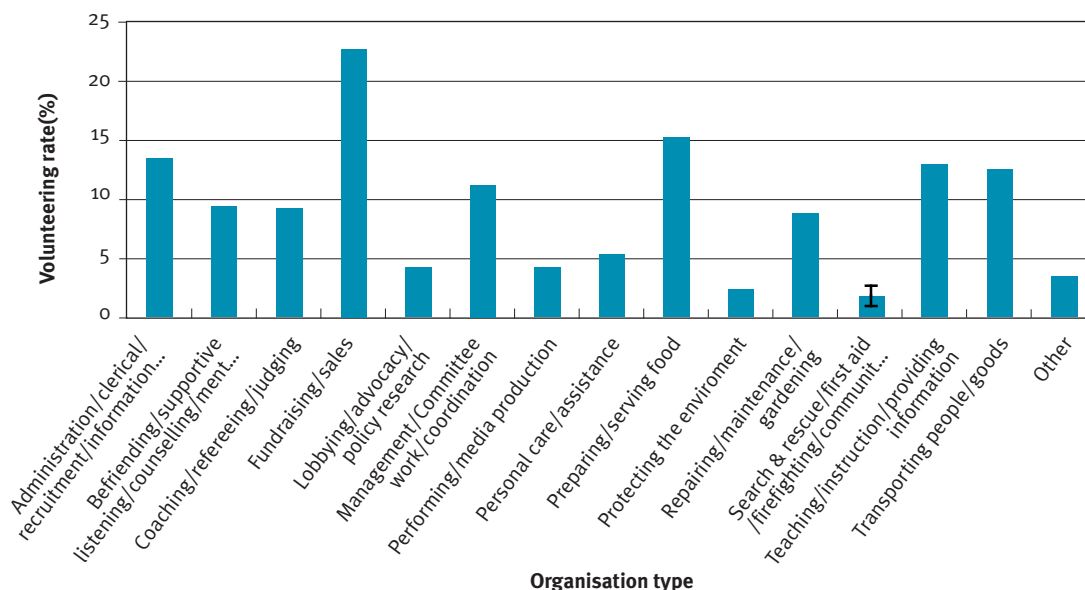


Figure 83: ACT volunteering rate by type of activity – 2006

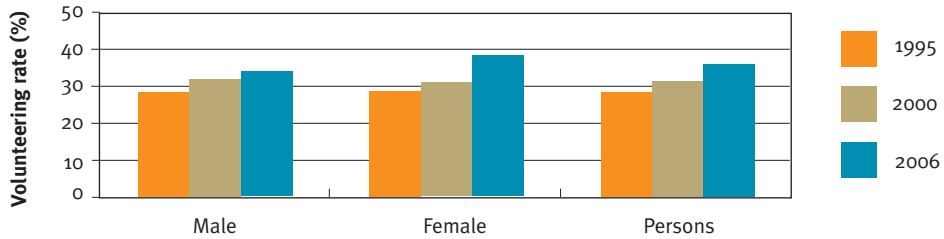


Northern Territory

In the Northern Territory, volunteering rate has increased from 29% in 1995 to 32% in 2000. The rate rose slightly in 2006 to 36%.

There is little difference in volunteering rate between women and men in the Northern Territory, being 38% and 34% respectively in 2006.

Figure 84: NT volunteering rate 1995, 2000 and 2006



Women contribute more volunteer hours than men with 67 median hours compared to 48 median hours in 2006.

Figure 85: NT annual hours 1995, 2000 and 2006

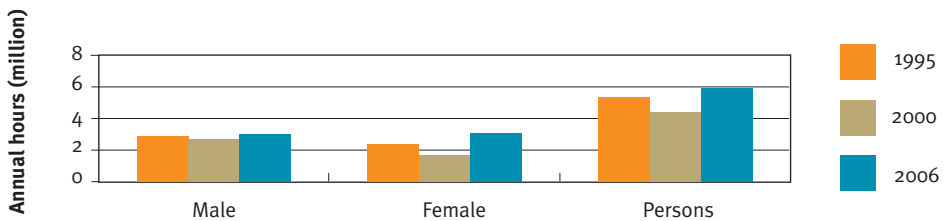


Figure 86: NT median hours 1995, 2000 and 2006

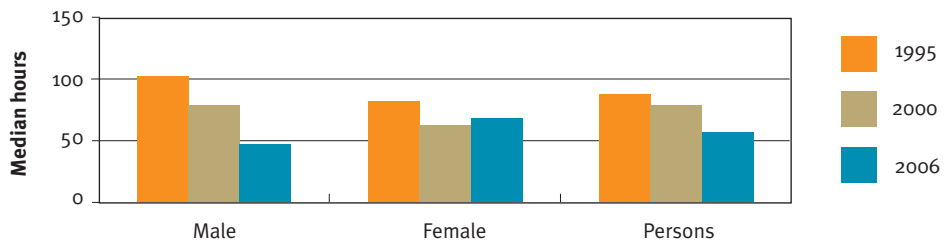


Figure 87: NT volunteers – 2006

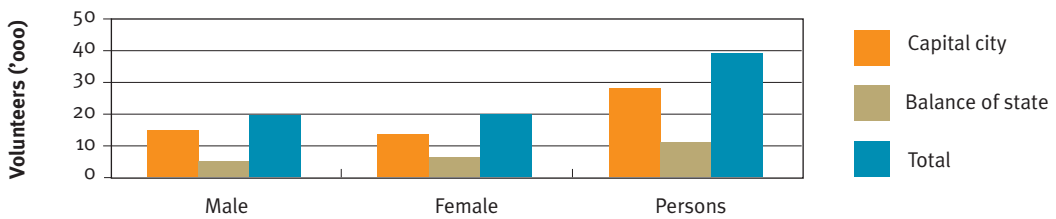


Figure 88: NT volunteering rate – 2006

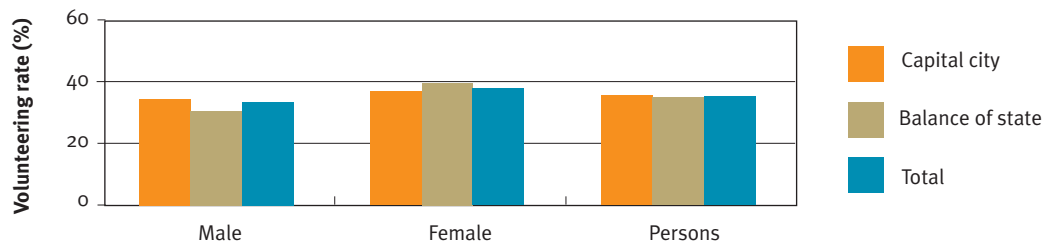


Figure 89: NT volunteering rate by age groups – 2006

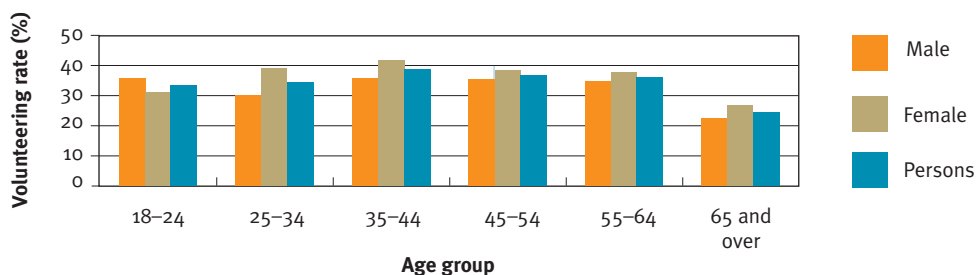


Figure 90: NT volunteering rate by type of organisation – 2006

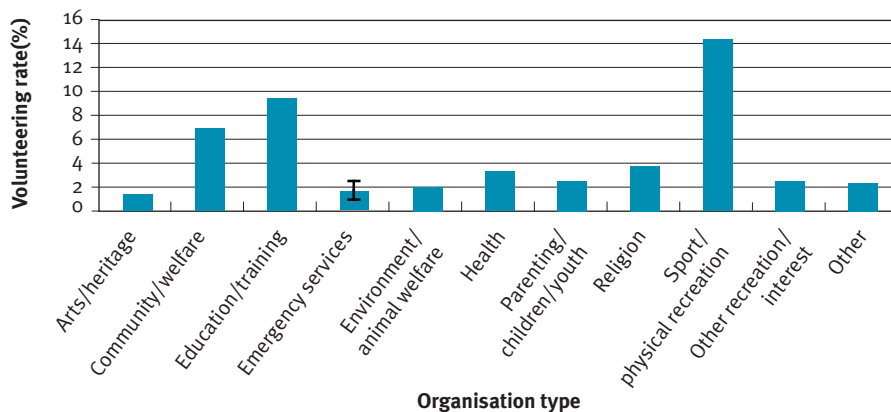
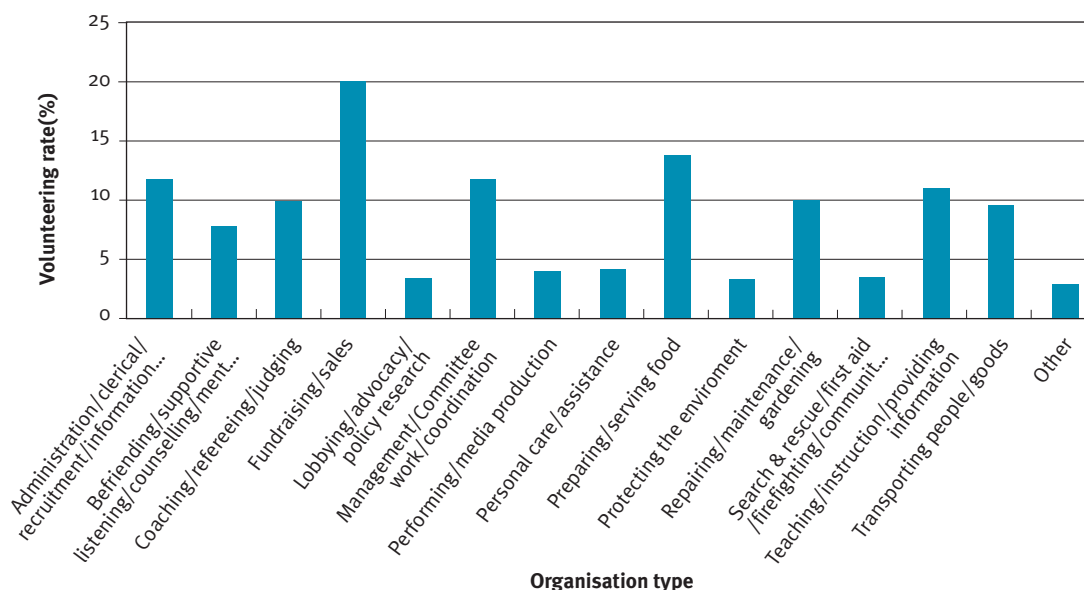


Figure 91: NT volunteering rate by type of activity – 2006



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