



Aged Care
Volunteer
Visitors Scheme

ACVVS Volunteer Handbook

Acknowledgement of Country

The Management Committee of ACVVS acknowledges that the service we provide for the people of the Far South Coast takes place on the land of the Yuin people.

We pay our respects to the traditional owners, their elders past, present and emerging.

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Welcome

Welcome to the community of visitors covering the Far South Coast of NSW. You are an important link in providing community support to the aged and isolated.

Loneliness has reached epidemic levels and research has proven it is one of the major factors contributing to dementia. In many ways, you are medicine for the soul.

The Australian Government funds ACVVS through UnitingCare Merimbula. Although the parent body receiving the grant is a church-based organisation, ACVVS is a non-religious community organisation offering support to all people. We are only limited by who the Department deems as eligible and by our budget.

Thank you for joining us in this important endeavour. You bring the most important skill to this work – and that's you. Your presence is the bright spark in someone else's week.

Definition of a volunteer:

Formal volunteering in aged care is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place within organisations (including institutions and agencies)¹.

Principles of Volunteering²

- Volunteering benefits the community and the volunteer
- Volunteering is always a matter of choice
- Volunteering is a legitimate way in which people can participate in the activities of their community
- Volunteering is a vehicle for individuals or groups to address human, environmental and social needs
- Volunteers complement the paid workforce; they do not replace or replicate the work of paid staff
- Volunteering respects the rights, dignity and culture of others
- Volunteering promotes human rights and equality

¹ Volunteering Australia, 'Definition of Volunteering,' available at <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/definition-of-volunteering/#/>.

² Volunteering Resource Hub, 'The Principles of Volunteering,' available at <https://volunteeringhub.org.au/the-principles-of-volunteering/>

What is the Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme (ACVVS)?

The Community Visitors Scheme (CVS) originally commenced in 1992-93. Its goal was to support organisations to recruit volunteers, in order for them to provide friendship and companionship through one-on-one visits to older people. In order to be eligible for a visit, individuals needed to be receiving Australian Government subsidised residential aged care and feeling socially isolated. In 2013-14 the CVS scope was expanded to include group visits in Residential Aged Care Homes (RACH) and one on one visits to Home Care Package recipients.



The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety Final Report was published on 1 March 2021. Recommendation 44c stated the Australian Government (the Government) should promote volunteers and volunteering in aged care to support older people to live a meaningful and dignified life and supplement the support and care provided to them through the aged care system whether in their own home or in a residential care home, by: *'providing additional funding and expanding the Community Visitors Scheme and changing its name to the **Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme**, to provide extended support for older people receiving aged care who are at risk of social isolation'*.

You can read more at:

<https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/final-report-recommendations.pdf>

The scheme is now officially known as the Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme (ACVVS) and delivered by ACVVS Community Organisations.

Aims and Objectives

The objective of the ACVVS is to support people who are socially isolated. The ACVVS is a free service and aims to improve quality of life for the aged care residential or home care recipients participating in the scheme, shown by:

- a general feeling of wellbeing with maintained or increased independence
- increased self-esteem and sense of purpose
- a sense of connectedness to the care recipient's individual community, culture and identity
- a sense of connectedness to other Commonwealth subsidised aged care recipients in the residential aged care home, and increased interactions between the group of residents visited
- reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation and;
- reduced feelings of depression and anxiety.

It is acknowledged social isolation may be more prevalent in some older people from particular linguistic, cultural, and complex vulnerability backgrounds. These persons can include:

- people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities,
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds,
- people who live in rural or remote areas,
- people who are financially or socially disadvantaged,
- veterans,
- people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- care leavers,
- parents separated from their children by forced adoption or removal,
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people,
- people living with a disability,
- people who are deaf or hearing impaired/hard of hearing,
- people living with cognitive impairment, including dementia and;
- people experiencing mental health conditions, and/or who have been exposed to significant trauma.

Who is eligible to receive ACVVS volunteers?

The ACVVS is available to recipients of Australian Government subsidised residential aged care services or home care packages. This includes care recipients approved and on a waiting list/National Priority System for residential care or home care packages.

More information on eligibility can be found in the ACVVS National Guidelines, which can be viewed at: <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-06/aged-care-volunteer-visitors-scheme-national-guidelines.pdf>

Visit Types

Under the ACVVS, Community Organisations recruit and match volunteers with recipients of residential aged care or home care packages to provide the following types of visits:

Home Care Package

- One-on-one in-person volunteer visits to recipients of an Australian Government subsidised home care package.

Residential aged care

- One-on-one in-person volunteer visits to recipients of Australian Government subsidised residential aged care.
- In-person group visits from one or more volunteers to up to three recipients of Australian Government subsidised residential aged care at the same time, occurring in the residential aged care home.

Your role as an ACVVS Volunteer

In choosing our volunteers we look for people who have a genuine empathy and warmth towards older people, are able to commit to at least 12 months of regular visiting, and are inclusive, patient, and kind. They are amazing qualities to have. Thank you!

We could not provide this service without you. Your role, through your regular visits is to provide friendship and companionship to your older friend. Many older people feel isolated and lonely and through your friendship you will provide them with something to look forward to, a sense of connection and an enhancement to their quality of life.



Your visits at a minimum should be fortnightly, however you are welcome to visit more often. In fact, many older people do request weekly visits. The length of your visits is up to the needs of your older friend and your availability, and this has been considered by your ACVVS Coordinator prior to matching you.

As an ACVVS Volunteer Visitor, you have been provided with a position description outlining your role and what is expected of you and the training we will provide. To get the most out of this role and to keep the ACVVS true to its objectives we ask that you adhere to the position description and not carry out any tasks outside that role.

A few things of note...

Older people are considered vulnerable members of our society, even if they are physically well, and an important aspect of this scheme is not to increase any risk to them.

There are a few things you can do to support this.

- Comply with COVID safe practise and be fully COVID or flu vaccinated if required under your state/territory public health orders or the aged care provider's conditions of entry.
- If you are unwell in any way, please do not conduct face to face visits.
- Please only accept gifts of token value e.g., flowers, chocolates. Your older friend may try to give you a gift of either monetary and/or sentimental value. Decline kindly and ask instead for a favourite recipe, flowers from the garden or just a cup of tea!
- This service is free, and the older person should not make any financial contribution, including towards petrol.
- Outings are very popular and going out for a coffee with your older friend may be the highlight of their day! Please ensure if you go on an outing, you have provided the necessary information to the ACVVS Coordinator and you comply with the requirements of the aged care provider.

- Confidentiality and Privacy. Like all good friendships, respecting the privacy of your older friend is vital and shows respect and genuine care. This includes not discussing any personal information with other volunteers, family, or friends. You may also overhear conversations or see issues relating to other older people in the aged care home. Please also respect the confidential nature of this in the same way.
- Young children and pets are popular with many older people and can really enhance a visit. You are responsible for any young children or pets you take with you. Again, please inform the ACVVS Coordinator and check your older friend would indeed like a visit from a young person or 4-legged friend! Unfortunately, you may not take other adults on your visits.

What you are not required to do:

- When you develop a relationship with someone, particularly if they are vulnerable it is tempting to help where you can. We understand this but to ensure the success of the program, we need you to please not involve yourself in:
 - monitoring standards of care
 - become involved in any family or financial matters
 - provide any personal care
 - advocate for the older person
 - if you are volunteering in an aged care home, please do not supervise, assist with meals or run any lifestyle groups or activities – even if asked by the aged care home; or
 - put the safety of yourself or others at risk.

For a full list, please consult the ACVVS National Guidelines.

If you have any concerns, please contact your ACVVS Coordinator.

Roles and Responsibilities

Our commitment to you

- Training to do your role well
- Ongoing support in your role
- Clarification of your role (through your position description)
- Agreement about hours and conditions (through your volunteer agreement)
- Information and consultation on matters directly or indirectly affecting you and your duties
- Adequate insurance cover
- Respecting your privacy and ensure we request only information we require – your information is kept in a secure manner and only shared with your permission
- Access to relevant information, such as volunteer policies and procedures

Your commitment to us

- Carry out the duties listed in your volunteer position description, including training
- Adhere to the Volunteer Agreement
- Respect the rights and privacy of others
- Adhere to boundaries as provided in the training and volunteer handbook
- Ensure no conflict of interest compromises your volunteer role
- Adhere to our policies and procedures, including our Code of Conduct and the Code of Conduct for Aged Care – see <https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/code-conduct-aged-care-information-workers>
- Complete monthly visit updates
- Accept responsibility for your actions and behaviour
- Give advance notice before leaving the role

Unable to visit in-person?

It is expected that visits be conducted on a face-to-face basis. However, there may be reasons why in-person visits may not always be possible, such as lockdowns or health issues. If feasible, please consider alternative ways of staying connected, such as making a phone call, video call, or even sending a letter or postcard. Knowing someone is thinking of them can brighten an older person's day, especially during difficult times.

Induction, training, and support

All ACVVS Volunteers will be provided with training in preparation for the role. Training will include information about the objectives of the ACVVS, our organisation, key stakeholders, rights & responsibilities as a volunteer, effective communication, boundaries, conflicts of interest, privacy, duty of care, and escalation pathways for issues of concern or reporting.

Optional training will be offered throughout your volunteering time and we encourage you to avail yourself of training offered which will increase your understanding of matters that impact on older people and improve your relationship with them. If there is a particular topic which you would like to learn more about, please let your ACVVS Coordinator know, and they will be able to point you towards the best available resources.

Support is always just a phone call or email away and your ACVVS Coordinator will keep in regular contact. Please don't hesitate to contact your ACVVS Coordinator if you would like to discuss any matters relating to your volunteering.

Advocacy and ACVVS

It is not the role of an ACVVS volunteer to advocate for the older person. We recognise as a friend you may find yourself in a position where you are asked for help. If a care recipient raises a concern with you, acknowledge what you have been

told and ask if you can share this with your ACVVS Coordinator. You can also refer them to an advocacy service such as OPAN.

For more information on how to discuss concerns and advocacy with a care recipient visit <https://opan.org.au/education/education-for-community/> where you can access a module and factsheet on this topic, and talk to your ACVVS Coordinator.

Volunteer Insurance

Volunteers are covered under UnitingCare Merimbula's Volunteer Personal Accident Insurance. If you would like further information or to view the organisation's insurance policy, please email treasurer@acvvsfarsouthcoastnsw.org

Effective communication with an older person

- Listen attentively and be 'present'. Put your mobile phone on silent.
- Ensure you are in a quiet spot if possible, without distractions and background noise.
- Ask if they are comfortable
- Smile and laugh freely!
- Use positive body language like nodding, leaning forward and making eye contact.
- Don't be afraid of silences. Sometimes, people need a few moments to gather their thoughts.
- Be patient please. To have a valuable conversation, please give an older person time to gather their thoughts and speak.
- Expect old-fashioned views. Culture changes fast. If the older person has opinions that are outdated, try to remember that those opinions were considered acceptable for much of their lives. This is not to say you should accept any racism, sexism or any other 'ism' and anything offensive should be reported to your ACVVS Coordinator



You could ask about:

- Their past – where they were born, did they have siblings, or what is their favourite belonging?
- Their family of choice, friends or pets
- Careers, first jobs, volunteering
- What food, music, movies, books, pastimes they enjoy
- Favourite memories, holidays, or experiences in their life
- What are some things they are proud of
- Holidays, adventures they have had
- Small talk – the weather and roadworks are great topics!

What NOT to do:

- If there is a topic that the person does not wish to talk about or that seems to upset them, do not push them to discuss it.
- Avoid giving unwanted advice; this may come across as unsupportive and belittling.
- Be mindful to avoid condescending language. Listen respectfully and use clear and appropriate tone and language at all times.
- Speak at a normal level. Sometimes it's tempting to speak too loudly or exaggerate your pronunciations to someone with hearing loss but this can distort the words. However, you may need to speak a little slower and more clearly, especially if you are a fast talker.
- Avoid treating an older person differently due to any preconceived notions about older adults or people from diverse backgrounds; consider that they have had full lives with rich experiences.

Embracing Diversity

During your volunteering experience, you will have the privilege of engaging in conversations with older people who come from diverse backgrounds. These older people will encompass a wide range of cultural and ethnic origins, educational backgrounds, values, beliefs, sexual orientations and gender diversity, and worldviews.

Here are some key points to keep in mind:

Embrace Listening: Approach each conversation with an open mind and be attentive to their stories and experiences. It is crucial to maintain a non-critical and non-judgmental stance. This opportunity presents a remarkable chance to expand your worldview and gain insights into how others think, live, and feel.

Avoid Stereotyping: It is important to recognise that not everyone within a particular culture, religion, or community shares the same perspectives or behaviors. Stereotyping individuals based on their background can lead to unfair assumptions. Instead, appreciate the unique qualities of each person you encounter and treat them as individuals. Avoid making assumptions about their thoughts and emotions based on preconceived notions.

By respecting and celebrating diversity, you will foster a more inclusive environment that promotes understanding, empathy, and mutual respect among all individuals involved.



Boundaries

It is not easy setting and maintaining clear boundaries when you volunteer in a community role such as the ACVVS. You will develop a rapport with and fondness for people.

Keeping a clear boundary in this role is vital. It is up to you to set your emotional and personal boundary around how much of your personal life you are willing to share. Of course, you want to have a genuine and warm conversation with the older people you connect with, but you can still do that and balance this with boundaries around your personal space.

As tempting as it may be, please don't try and 'fix' any problems that may be discussed with you or give advice even if it is in line with your profession e.g., you are a doctor and they inform you they have a sore knee.

If it is matter linked to the services they receive, ask them if they would like you to pass the concern on. If they give you permission, please pass on to your ACVVS Coordinator.

Examples of requests that would break the boundaries of this role.

- Can you help me understand this legal letter I received?
- Can you help me open a bank account?
- Could you advocate for me with my aged care provider?

If you feel uncomfortable, or the older person is inappropriate, abusive, or aggressive etc., stay calm, let the older person know that it would be a good time to leave and thank them for their time. Please report this to your ACVVS Coordinator as soon as possible.

If you are concerned regarding physical, emotional, or domestic circumstances – ask the older person if they are safe and that you would like to offer further support by escalating the concern to the ACVVS Coordinator as soon as possible. Even if the older person says no – you must report your concerns as a duty of care.



Things not to do:

- Loan/give money to an older person or accept money from an older person
- Socialise with your older friend outside of the specified volunteer arrangement
- Be careful about sharing your own personal grief or challenges e.g. loss of a job or family conflict.
- Establish a romantic or intimate relationship with the older person
- Give or receive gifts more than token value e.g. flowers or chocolates
- Offer advice or counsel

Addressing Conflicts of Interest

What is a conflict of interest? A conflict of interest arises when an individual's personal affiliations, such as family, friendships, financial considerations, or social factors, have the potential to compromise their objectivity, decision-making, or actions within the workplace.



In order to uphold the integrity of our volunteering role, it is of utmost importance that you consciously set aside any personal biases or interests. By focusing solely on the responsibilities and expectations of the role, you can ensure that there is no room for any potential conflict of interest.

By remaining impartial and prioritising the well-being and needs of the individuals we serve, you contribute to a transparent and trustworthy environment where the best interests of all parties involved are upheld.

Respecting Privacy

To ensure the utmost confidentiality and respect for the older people you are matched with, please adhere to the following guidelines:

1. **Confidentiality:** Refrain from discussing with any third parties' issues or matters raised by the older people you interact with. It is crucial to maintain their privacy and uphold the trust they place in us. Unless reporting to your ACVVS Coordinator under a duty of care (see below) or the Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS), any information shared with you during your volunteering experience must remain strictly confidential.

2. **Duty of Care:** There may be instances where you feel a sense of responsibility to raise concerns for the well-being or safety of an older individual. In such cases, it is your duty to report the concern to your ACVVS Coordinator, ensuring that it is on a strictly 'need to know' basis in order to protect the individual's confidentiality.

3. **Social Media:** It is strictly prohibited to share any information or post photos related to the older people you are matched with on any social media platforms. Respecting their privacy means refraining from disclosing any details that could potentially compromise their confidentiality or dignity.

By maintaining these privacy standards, you contribute to creating a safe and secure environment where the confidentiality and well-being of the older individuals remain paramount.

Duty of Care

- Duty of care is your legal and ethical obligation to act in a way that ensures the safety and wellbeing of yourself and others.
- Duty of care is about individual wellbeing, welfare, compliance, and good practice.
- Volunteers have a 'duty of care' to the older persons you are matched with, other volunteers and staff members.
- In simple terms, you must always act in a safe manner and immediately report any concerns about the welfare of yourself or others.
- This means that you should always be abiding by the organisation's code of conduct, policies, and procedures.
- Your role is to be observant and to note any areas of concern in relation to the people you are supporting.

What to report to your ACVVS Coordinator under Duty of Care

- Concerns about wellbeing, behaviour, or safety (physical or emotional)
- Memory changes – disorientated, confused.
- Mobility changes
- Any witnessed or unwitnessed (advised by older person) falls.
- Pain (especially chest pain)
- Changes in personal grooming, health, or family circumstances.



Monthly Visit Updates

Timely reporting of your visits is crucial for two main reasons: UnitingCare Merimbula is required under the grant to provide accurate information to the Australian Government and acknowledging your invaluable contributions.

Your visits can be reported via a text message to the coordinator directly after each visit. This is to ensure that they are not forgotten, to alleviate paper usage and to accommodate regular communication between you and the coordinator in order for them to be able to recognise your valuable efforts. If you don't wish to use texts please talk with the coordinator and a preferred method will be arranged.

By promptly informing us about your visits, we can accurately report the data to the Australian Government, which enables them to make informed decisions and allocate resources effectively. Additionally, capturing your generous contribution allows us to recognise and appreciate the meaningful impact you are making through your volunteering efforts.

We appreciate your cooperation in providing these updates promptly, as it plays a significant role in maintaining transparency, accountability, and recognising the positive difference you are making in the lives of others.

Concluding your volunteering commitment

We understand circumstances may arise where you are no longer able to continue in your volunteering role, despite your initial intentions and generosity. In such cases, we value the opportunity to have a conversation with you to explore if there are any possible solutions or support, we can provide to help you continue, such as taking a short break or adjusting your level of commitment.

If you are considering resigning from your role, we kindly request that you reach out to your ACVVS Coordinator at your earliest convenience. This will allow us to address the situation promptly and ensure a smooth transition. Your open communication is greatly appreciated.

We genuinely appreciate your dedication and we want to ensure that your volunteering experience remains positive and fulfilling. Your well-being and satisfaction are important to us, and we are here to assist you in any way we can.

Feedback and Complaints

We highly value your feedback and want to create an environment where your voice is heard. If you have any feedback or concerns related to your volunteering role or any aspect of ACVVS, we encourage you to share them with us.

Your feedback is essential in helping us improve our programs, processes, and overall experience for volunteers. We appreciate your insights and suggestions, as they enable us to better understand your needs and make necessary adjustments to ensure a positive and rewarding experience for everyone involved.

Feedback is also important to improve the experience and wellbeing of older people receiving aged care services. If you see or hear something that concerns you, you should speak to your ACVVS Coordinator.

Other key points to remember are that:

- You should always feel safe in your volunteering role.
- Anyone can make an anonymous, confidential complaint to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (the Commission).
- Under the Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS), there are several reportable incidents that an aged care provider is obliged to always report to the Commission.
- An advocacy service like the Older Person's Advocacy Network (OPAN) also provides free, confidential, and independent advice.

If you are unsure about where to go with feedback or complaints or would like more information to help you or an older person understand their options, speak with your ACVVS Coordinator.

Emergencies

Emergencies can arise from personal injuries, fire and smoke, bomb threats and many other issues. If you are in an aged care home, you would have received induction on your first day on what to do. Please adhere to this. If you are visiting an older person in the community, stick to a few simple steps.

1. Ensure you are safe first and remove yourself from danger. If it is safe, help others.
2. Call 000 and ask for the service required.
3. Contact your ACVVS Coordinator and aged care provider to report the incident.



Important: Please always have a charged mobile phone with you and let someone know where you are going and what time to expect you back.

Policies and Procedures

Additional policies and procedures that are applicable to the ACVVS volunteering role can be found at our website: acvvfsfarsouthcoastnsw.org

Further training and resources:

Your ACVVS Coordinator has access to training modules and resources that could be highly beneficial for you. Feel free to reach out and ask about them.

Thank you!

Your commitment to the ACVVS is appreciated and we're so grateful you've decided to join us. By giving your time and skills, you're making a real difference in the lives of the people we help. Your dedication and passion will help us succeed in our mission. Thank you for being a valued member of our team, and we're excited to work together to create positive change.