



## Assessing work for volunteers deemed vulnerable persons to COVID-19

D/1.1.18

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### Purpose

The health, safety and wellbeing of our workers including volunteers is paramount in the operations of the UCAQ. This document seeks to provide guidance on determining the role a vulnerable volunteer worker may undertake given the COVID-19 environment.

### Scope

Synod office, Presbyteries, and congregations with particular reference to volunteers who are within the government criteria of vulnerable persons.

### Government advice for vulnerable persons

The Australian Health Protection Principles Committee (AHPPC) identifies the following people at greater risk of more serious illness with COVID-19, and are deemed vulnerable persons:

- Over 70 years of age
- Over 65 years of age who have existing health conditions or comorbidities, and
- First Nations People over the age of 50 who have existing health conditions or comorbidities,
- Are significantly immunocompromised or taking immunosuppression therapy;
- Have chronic medical condition, including:
  - Chronic renal failure
  - Coronary heart disease or congestive heart failure
  - Chronic lung disease including severe asthma (for which frequent medication consultations or the use of multiple medications is required), cystic fibrosis, bronchiectasis, suppurative lung disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or chronic emphysema
  - Poorly controlled diabetes
  - Poorly controlled hypertension.

Government advice for vulnerable persons includes:

- washing your hands often with soap and water, including before and after eating and after going to the toilet, and when you have been out to shops or other places
- staying 1.5 metres away — 2 arms' length — from other people. This is an example of physical distancing.
- Where physical distancing is not possible it is recommended that face masks be worn
- for the immuno-compromised, continuing to stay at home and avoid contact with others
- for the immuno-compromised continuing to avoid non-essential travel.
- Refer to Synod Guidelines on COVID-19 Vulnerable Persons – government advice.



## Procedure

### 1. *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (WHS Act)*

Under the WHS Act, **volunteers are workers** if they carry out work in any capacity for a person conducting business undertaking (PCBU).

The WHS Act requires a PCBU to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of their workers while at work in the business or undertaking.

Volunteers who carry out work for PCBUs are required to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and not to create risks to others.

### 2. **What is reasonably practicable to protect vulnerable volunteer workers**

Deciding what is reasonably practicable to protect workers or other persons from harm, requires taking into account and weighing up all relevant matters, including the degree of harm that is likely to occur if the risk of contracting COVID-19 eventuates.

If a vulnerable person contracts COVID-19, it can result in serious illness or death, which means the degree of harm that might result from the risk or hazard is very high. You must consider all available control measures to limit exposure to vulnerable people, even if the likelihood of them contracting COVID-19 may be low.

### 3. **Vulnerable voluntary worker's risk assessment**

The Australian Government authority, Australian Health Protection Principles Committee (AHPPC), recommends that where vulnerable workers undertake work, a risk assessment **must be** documented.

The risk assessment is to be approved by the Church Council. A Church Council may seek guidance from the Synod office prior to approving the risk assessment.

The vulnerable volunteer worker **must not undertake** any duties until the risk assessment has been approved by the Church Council.

Once the vulnerable volunteer has been approved, they will receive a copy of the approved plan and a copy of the risk assessment is to be submitted to the Presbytery. All Presbyteries are PCBUs under the WHS Act and share in the responsibilities to ensure workers and workplaces are safe also.

### 4. **Identify a vulnerable voluntary worker**

If the volunteer answers yes to any of the worker questions and yes to any of the work questions in the worker assessment below they are not to undertake voluntary work within the congregation until a risk assessment has been completed. The risk assessment needs to be endorsed by the ministry leader or supervisor and submitted to Church Council for approval.

The Church Council considers the work to be performed and:

- Evaluates the risk,
- Considers any additional control measures that may reduce the risk, and
- Approves, changes the proposed plan or not approve the risk assessment.
- Provides a copy of the completed documentation to their Presbytery office.

The worker is **not** to commence voluntary work within the congregation before approval is granted by Church Council.

### 5. **Evaluating the risk**

When conducting a risk assessment for a worker that is a vulnerable person for the risk of exposure to COVID-19 you must consider:

- the characteristics of the worker,
- whether a non-vulnerable worker can perform the task
- features of the workplace, and



- the nature of the work.

Remember to keep all information about a worker's medical conditions confidential in accordance with the UCAQ Privacy Policy and the *Privacy Act*.

Where risk cannot be managed appropriately, the Church Council and the worker should consider alternate ways for the worker to serve and how they may participate in the life of the Church whilst meeting the recommended requirements from AHPPC.

## 6. Monitoring

The vulnerable volunteer worker is required to advise the Church Council and update the risk assessment if there is a change in their health status applicable to the vulnerable persons categories identified by the government.

The Church Council should regularly check the health state of the vulnerable volunteer worker.

## Worker assessment

[Vulnerable Volunteer Risk Assessment to be completed](#)

## Related documents

[Synod Wide Work Health and Safety Policy Statement](#)

[C/1.3 Critical Incident and Issues Escalation Policy](#)

[Vulnerable Volunteer Risk Assessment](#)

## Definitions

Term	Meaning
Person conducting business undertaking (PCBU)	Section 5 of Work Health and Safety Act 2011 defines a PCBU as being conducted when a person conducts a business or undertaking alone or with others regardless as to whether it is for profit or gain. (S 5 (1)).  For the purposes of The Uniting Church, all Presbyteries are considered a PCBU and all Congregations with a paid Ministry Agent or worker are considered a PCBU. Congregations run solely by volunteers are not a PCBU but the Presbytery is their overseeing PCBU.
Worker	Section 7 of Work Health and Safety Act 2011 defines a person as a worker if they are carrying out work in any capacity for the PCBU. It includes employees, contractors and subcontractors, labour hire workers, work experience students and volunteers.
Volunteer	A person who, in a church activity, is rostered for a duty, involved in running the activity, and/or directed to perform specific tasks other than to join in communally.

## Revisions

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3.0	23.11.2020	General Secretary	23.11.2020	COVID Coordinator	COVID Coordinator
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