

This factsheet provides guidance for health care professionals to assist with managing expectations for volunteers involved in supporting people with palliative care needs. Clear expectations help health care professionals and volunteers work together effectively, ensuring patients and families receive compassionate, holistic support.

What is Palliative Care Volunteering?

Palliative care volunteering involves offering support to people living with life limiting illnesses and their families. Volunteers function under a formal volunteering program and are supported by a volunteer coordinator and organisational policies

What to expect from volunteers

- Volunteers are not staff or paid employees
- They provide companionship, listening and comfort, not clinical care
- They do not administer medication or perform medical tasks
- Volunteers complement professional care; they do not replace it
- They may assist with non-clinical tasks such as reading aloud, sitting with patients, or providing emotional support
- Some volunteers offer specialised roles (e.g., massage, biography writing) with appropriate training.

What volunteers need from Health Care Professionals

- Clear boundaries about their role and what is outside their scope
- Respect and professional treatment as part of the care team
- Training, supervision and support, including orientation to the care environment
- Timely communication about patient needs and any changes that affect their role
- Acknowledgement of emotional challenges and access to debriefing when needed
- Safe spaces to work and clarity on infection control and safety protocols.

Why Boundaries Matter

Boundaries protect clients, families, and volunteers. They ensure safety, maintain trust, and clarify roles so everyone knows what to expect.

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