

Summary of VIO Webinar 21 September 2026

National Approach to Care Worker Screening Webinar

Introduction

Erin Cassie, Assistant Secretary and Head of the Taskforce, Department of Finance, welcomed participants to the webinar on the National Approach to Care Worker Screening.

An Acknowledgement of Country was provided, recognising the Traditional Owners of the lands on which participants joined, including the Ngunnawal people of Canberra, and paying respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

The webinar outlined the proposed national reforms to care worker screening, the work of the Taskforce, the benefits of a national approach, and findings from consultation activities and survey responses.

Volunteers and Screening Reform

While referred to as National Care Worker Screening, the reform recognises the essential contribution of volunteers, who are considered workers under some legislation, including the Aged Care Act 2024. Many volunteers already hold Working with Children or NDIS Worker Screening checks. The Taskforce is committed to ensuring reforms benefit volunteers while avoiding unintended consequences.

Engagement has occurred with Volunteering Australia, Volunteering WA, and other volunteer peak bodies through roundtables and public consultation. This webinar was conducted following a suggestion from Volunteering WA to provide greater visibility of the proposed reforms and consultation process

Government Scope

In November 2025, under the National Competition Policy Federation Funding Agreement, Commonwealth, state and territory treasurers agreed to work together on a National Worker Screening Check project. The Commonwealth was tasked with leading development of a second-pass business case to assess how existing Commonwealth and state databases and ICT systems could be leveraged to improve the safety and efficiency of worker screening in the care and support economy.

The objective is to build on existing Working with Children Check, NDIS Worker Screening, and aged care reforms to:

- Reduce administrative burden.
 - Improve workforce and volunteer mobility.
 - Enable faster onboarding.
 - Maintain strong safeguards for vulnerable people.
 - Prevent unsuitable individuals from moving between sectors undetected.
-

The Taskforce

The Commonwealth established the Taskforce within the Department of Finance. The team includes representatives from:

- Treasury
- Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
- NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
- Department of Health

The Taskforce is currently in the scoping phase, working with governments, peak bodies and industry participants to understand what a national screening model should and should not include

Why Reform Is Needed

Public consultation undertaken in 2025 found that 32 of 45 submissions supported a more coordinated approach to worker screening.

The reform is intended to improve:

Safety

- Reduce fragmentation across jurisdictions and sectors.
- Allow checks to follow workers and volunteers across boundaries.
- Improve information-sharing between regulators.
- Prevent individuals from moving between vulnerable cohorts to avoid detection.
- Enhance safety for vulnerable people, workers and volunteers.

Productivity

- Reduce waiting times for screening outcomes.
- Improve consistency of screening decisions.
- Lower administrative costs.
- Simplify compliance and monitoring requirements.
- Support workforce participation and volunteering.

The Taskforce noted that volunteer contributions are an important component of national productivity and service delivery.

Relationship to Other Reforms

The project sits alongside broader national reforms, including:

- Working with Children Check reforms.
- The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission's National Continuous Checking Capability.
- Existing NDIS Worker Screening arrangements.
- Previous work to extend NDIS-style screening into aged care.
- Potential future expansion to other sectors, such as veterans' care, where governments determine screening is appropriate.

The intention is to design a system capable of accommodating future policy decisions and additional sectors if required.

Industry Engagement Findings

Consultation has occurred through:

- Industry roundtables.
- Peak body engagement.
- Worker representative groups.
- One-on-one user research.

Key findings included:

- Volunteers disengage when onboarding and administrative requirements become too onerous.

- Repeated identity verification, multiple applications and fees create significant burden for volunteer-involving organisations.
- Strong support exists for a nationally consistent approach.
- Improved workforce and volunteer mobility is highly valued.
- In-person identity checks are a significant source of friction.
- Applicants want visibility of their application's progress and expected processing time.
- Delayed clearances prevent workers and volunteers from commencing roles.
- Identity documents are sometimes rejected due to differing state requirements.
- Stakeholders strongly support worker screening as an essential safety mechanism.

Participants consistently expressed support for maintaining strong safeguards while simplifying processes and reducing duplication.

Volunteer Survey

Following consultation with Volunteering WA, the Taskforce developed a short survey as an alternative to lengthy user research interviews. The survey remains open until 25 September 2026. More than 600 (as at 24/09 over 830) responses were received from volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations.

Theme 1: Duplication and Fragmentation

Volunteers reported frustration with completing multiple screening checks, including:

- Working with Children Checks
- NDIS Worker Screening Checks
- Police Checks
- State-specific screening requirements

Organisations similarly identified duplicated administration and lack of portability as major challenges.

A portable national credential was the most frequently proposed reform.

Theme 2: Identity Verification Barriers

Volunteers reported difficulties with:

- Obtaining acceptable identity documents.
- Historical name changes.
- Birth and marriage certificate extracts.
- Mandatory in-person verification requirements.

Organisations reported onboarding delays and increased support requirements arising from these issues.

Theme 3: Digital Exclusion

Digital accessibility emerged as a significant concern.

Volunteers reported challenges with:

- Online platforms.
- Digital identity systems.
- Document uploads.
- Screening portals.

The findings highlighted the need to maintain paper-based, telephone-assisted and face-to-face alternatives alongside any digital solution.

Theme 4: Processing Delays

Volunteers described waiting periods of weeks or months for outcomes, affecting participation and service delivery. Organisations reported similar impacts. The Taskforce acknowledged the need for efficient processing and visibility of timeframes.

Theme 5: Administrative Burden and Costs

Volunteers described screening processes as repetitive, time-consuming and disproportionate to some roles.

Organisations reported substantial resources devoted to:

- Compliance monitoring.
- Renewal tracking.
- Data entry.
- Administrative management.

Some organisations estimated screening administration consumes hundreds of staff hours annually.

Questions and Answers

Differences Between ACT and NSW Screening Systems

Question: Will differences between the ACT Working with Vulnerable People system and NSW Working with Children Check be considered?

Response: Yes. National consistency is a key focus of the project. The Taskforce is examining mutual recognition, single-check models, and solutions for border communities such as the ACT-NSW region, Albury-Wodonga, and the NSW-Queensland border.

Use of Portable Checks Outside Care Sectors

Question: Would volunteers outside the three care industries be able to use transportable checks?

Response: While the project began as a care and support economy initiative, the volume of existing screening credentials suggests broader applicability. The goal is portability across organisations and sectors rather than restricting credentials to a single industry.

Timeline

Question: What is the current timeline?

Response: The project remains in the scoping phase. An initial reform direction is expected to be released for feedback in late 2026 or early 2027, followed by collaboration with states and territories on implementation approaches.

Transition Arrangements

Question: Will there be a phased transition?

Response: Existing screening validity periods would ideally be honoured. For example, individuals with a current credential would retain its validity until its normal expiry date.

Duplication of Aged Care Checks

Question: Aged care providers currently require police checks, Working with Children Checks, statutory declarations and NDIS checks. Could these be streamlined?

Response: The Taskforce is examining how similar screening requirements could be consolidated to reduce duplication while maintaining safety protections

Existing Screening Platforms

Question: Would a national framework replace current screening platforms?

Response: Options are being explored. One possibility is adapting existing systems and recognising credentials across jurisdictions rather than building entirely new platforms.

Survey Terminology

Question: Do references to workers also include volunteers?

Response: Separate surveys were developed for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations. References to workers in the VIO survey generally referred to organisation staff who manage volunteers.

Continuous Monitoring

Question: Could national screening include ongoing monitoring rather than point-in-time checks?

Response: Existing NDIS Worker Screening Checks and Working with Children Checks already include continuous monitoring in issuing jurisdictions. Future reforms will align with the National Continuous Checking Capability, enabling nationwide monitoring arrangements.

Responsible Persons

Question: Will the process consider requirements for responsible persons within organisations?

Response: The project focuses on screening mechanics rather than determining who should be screened. Questions regarding screening thresholds and role-based requirements are expected to be considered separately.

Guidance on Screening Requirements

Question: Will there be greater clarity regarding who requires specific checks?

Response: Decisions regarding screening requirements will remain sector-based. However, the Taskforce intends to provide clearer information explaining the difference between police checks and worker screening checks.

Statutory Declarations in Aged Care

Question: Please consider whether statutory declarations remain necessary for volunteer applications in aged care.

Response: The Taskforce is examining opportunities to align screening processes across Working with Children, NDIS and aged care settings and create consistent approaches across sectors.

Digital Identity

Question: Will Digital ID form part of future reforms?

Response: Digital identity verification is being considered. However, consultation highlighted the need to maintain non-digital alternatives to ensure accessibility for individuals unable or unwilling to use digital identity services.

Volunteer Fees

Question: Will volunteer fees differ under a national framework?

Response: Discussions with jurisdictions will consider existing arrangements. The objective is to preserve low-cost or no-cost screening arrangements currently available to volunteers.

National Training Requirements

Question: Could a national screening model introduce national training requirements?

Response: The long-term objective would be national consistency if training remains part of screening frameworks. An interim period may be required where state-based training arrangements continue while national approaches are developed.

Privacy and Data Storage

Question: How will volunteer information be protected?

Response: Privacy and appropriate data management will be central to system design. Options may include organisational access to government-held records rather than local storage of sensitive information.

Multiple Organisations

Question: Can volunteers nominate multiple organisations?

Response: Yes. Individuals can be linked to multiple organisations, allowing all relevant organisations to receive notifications if a screening clearance changes or is revoked.

Volunteer Subsidies

Question: Will volunteer fee subsidies continue?

Response: The Taskforce will work with states and territories to ensure individuals currently receiving subsidised or free screening are not disadvantaged under any future national model.

Spent Convictions

Question: How would spent convictions be managed?

Response: High-risk screening credentials such as Working with Children Checks and NDIS Worker Screening Checks assess a broader range of information than standard national police checks. Certain offences relevant to vulnerable-person risk assessments may be considered even where they would not appear in a standard police check. Organisations should ensure more intensive screening is applied only where the role's risk profile warrants it.

Surveys

Question: Could you please provide links to surveys?

Survey Instructions

The surveys are open from 8 September 2026 to 25 September 2026.

1. [Volunteers and Care Workers - Survey – Fill out form](#)

- Approximately 5 minutes to complete (22 questions).

- Important: Only Questions 1-6 will initially be visible. Additional questions will appear once Question 6 has been completed.
- Please do not select Submit after Question 6.

2. Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIO) Screening Impact Survey – Fill out form

- Approximately 10 minutes to complete (24 questions).
- Important: Only Questions 1-5 will initially be visible. Additional questions will appear once Question 5 has been completed.
- Please do not select *Submit* after Question 5.

Important Information

- When opening the survey, only a limited number of questions will initially be displayed. Additional questions will become visible as the survey progresses. Please complete the survey in full before selecting *Submit*.
- The "Other" response options provide an opportunity to include additional information through free-text responses.
- If a volunteer or Volunteer Involving Organisation would prefer to provide feedback through a Microsoft Teams interview, this can be arranged by contacting caresectorworkerscreening@finance.gov.au
- Blank surveys will only show a certain number of questions until they are filled out, other questions will then populate as the survey is completed. Do not hit submit until at the end of survey.
- 'Other' responses provide an opportunity to use free text to add more detail if required.
- If the Volunteer or Volunteer Involving Organisation would prefer to do a MS Teams interview this can be arranged by contacting caresectorworkerscreening@finance.gov.au

Conclusion

Consultation consistently demonstrated strong support for a nationally consistent, portable worker screening framework that reduces duplication, administrative burden and processing delays while maintaining robust safeguards for vulnerable Australians. The Taskforce will continue consultation during the scoping phase and develop a proposed reform direction for future stakeholder consideration.