

About the Program

The Community Visitors Program is managed by the Office of the Public Advocate.

The program provides volunteers with comprehensive training and support.

Experienced staff coordinate the activities of each Community Visitor stream. Elected boards, chaired by the Public Advocate, manage and support the activities of Community Visitors.

Community Visitors are required to sign a Code of Conduct, and complete a police check. They are given clear protocols about how they work and report in accordance with legislation.

"My involvement with the Community Visitors Program for the last six years has been rewarding and I would recommend it to interested people who can commit to a few hours a week to maintain the rights and dignity of Victorians with a disability."

Robert, Community Visitor, Disability Services

How do you become a Community Visitor?

To obtain further information about the Community Visitors Program, please contact the Office of the Public Advocate on 1300 309 337 (local call cost) or email opavolunteers@justice.vic.gov.au, and leave your name and postal address.

Notes:

04/09



Office of the Public Advocate

"I love it when we arrive at a facility and someone's face lights up when they see us, and they say: 'I was hoping to talk to you about something that's concerning me.' It makes it all worthwhile."

Sophy, Community Visitor, Mental Health Stream

"Being a Community Visitor for the past ten years has been a valuable and rewarding experience. A real privilege."

Carol, Community Visitor, Health Services Stream

"I enjoy the benefits my actions as a Community Visitor bring to vulnerable people, and the feeling of occasionally being able to make a difference."

Max, Community Visitor, Mental Health Stream



Become a Community Visitor
and help protect the rights of people
with a disability

Office of the Public Advocate

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Who are Community Visitors?

Community Visitors are volunteers who work with the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) to protect and advocate for the rights of people with a disability.

The volunteers are people of all ages, and come from a wide range of background and professions. Some are retired professionals who want to give something back to the community. Some have had personal experience of how important it is to protect the rights of people with a disability. Others want to make a difference to the most vulnerable members of our community.

Appointed by the Victorian Governor in Council, Community Visitors are created under three Acts of Parliament: the *Mental Health Act 1986*, the *Health Services Act 1988*, and the *Disability Act 2006*.

Community Visitors visit:

- community residential units (CRUs) for people with intellectual and/or physical disabilities
- supported residential services (SRSs)
- mental health facilities with 24-hour nursing care.

At the conclusion of each visit, Community Visitors prepare a report, which ultimately informs the Community Visitors Annual Report presented to Parliament each year.

There are nearly 500 Community Visitors working throughout Victoria.

"Being a Community Visitor has intrigued, amazed, saddened, enraged, inspired, amused, frustrated, and engaged me. I am constantly learning. This is the best non-paying job I've had."

Chris, Community Visitor, Health Services Stream

What exactly do Community Visitors do?

Community Visitors are empowered by law to visit Victorian accommodation facilities for people with a disability at any time, unannounced, and monitor and report on the adequacy of services provided, in the interests of residents and patients.

Community Visitors talk to residents/patients to identify issues of concern. Community Visitors then liaise with staff and management to resolve these issues. Broader or more serious issues are referred to OPA.

Activities carried out by Community Visitors include:

- enquiring into the quality of services and care provided to residents/patients
- talking with residents/patients and staff to identify problems
- ensuring that the treatment and service given to residents/patients maintains their dignity and respect
- assessing the opportunities available to residents/patients to participate in recreational and educational activities
- assessing whether residents/patients are at risk from their living environment
- following up on complaints and concerns raised by residents/patients.

Community Visitors work in pairs, and are organised regionally across the state.

Community Visitors spend between 10 to 15 hours a month visiting facilities.



"Community Visitors play a vital role in working towards a Victorian society that is just, celebrates diversity and in which the human rights, dignity and safety of people with a disability are promoted and protected."

Colleen Pearce, Public Advocate

Who can become a Community Visitor?

Anyone with good communication skills and the determination to make a difference and stand up for the rights of people with a disability is welcome to apply to become a Community Visitor.

"Community Visitors can't do anything about the past, but we can make a difference to the future of people with a disability. It's important to be passionate about people's rights, and to listen. And if we can help, we will."

Kathy, Community Visitor, Disability Services Stream

