



Generosity in Times of Crisis

Australian Helping Behaviours
During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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We are a collaborative research group involving over 50 scholars from more than 20 countries led by Professor Pamala Wiepking from the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy.

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1. Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown the world into a health crisis that has had devastating effects on the global economy and public life in many countries. Little is known about how people have responded to two competing pressures caused by the crisis in many countries: increased community need coupled with decreased financial capacity to help others.

We surveyed 1,007 Australians in August 2020 to understand how their generosity behaviours manifested and changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. By generosity we mean all forms of behaviour that people engage in with the intention of benefiting others (including people, animals, and environments).

Two key findings emerged:

1. Generosity behaviours were very common during the COVID-19 pandemic and manifested in diverse ways, both in Australia and around the world. The most common generosity behaviours were: (a) informal helping of friends and family, and (b) formal helping through established not-for-profits.
2. Changes in people's generosity behaviours were driven primarily by changes in their personal circumstances (e.g. financial insecurity, health threats) and government policies implemented to respond to the crisis (e.g. lockdowns, wage subsidies).

Managerial implications. Not-for-profits may wish to:

- Map needs across the affected communities in which they work, making sure inclusion of underrepresented populations is a priority.
- Provide clear direction and 'asks' by communicating need quickly, precisely, and often to ensure that people know where help is most needed and the best ways to contribute.
- Offer new ways to engage with and support their work, such as promoting online volunteer opportunities when physical volunteering is difficult.

Policy implications. Governments and peak bodies may wish to:

- Stimulate public generosity through private distributions to citizens (e.g., wage subsidies or welfare payments).
- Develop crisis protocols that facilitate cross-sector collaboration (including both the commercial and not-for-profit sectors) to quickly address societal needs.
- Support citizens without close social networks (e.g., elderly and the homeless), because Australians will prioritise offering support to the people closest to them first.
- Provide direct support to the not-for-profit sector if new policies will affect the sector's traditional sources of support.
- Offer seed funding for the development of informal community response initiatives.

2. Introduction: COVID-19 and Public Generosity

In early 2020, the world was thrown into a health crisis that had devastating effects on the global economy and social life in many countries: the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of writing (September 2021), more than 225 million people have contracted the virus globally and over 4.6 million people have died (Worldometer, 2021). By April 2020, more than 3.9 billion people from 90 countries – around half the world’s population – were told by their governments to stay at home to slow the spread of the virus (Sandford, 2020). These restrictions had knock-on effects for people’s social lives, as many people were separated from friends and family for long periods of time. Restricted movement (and associated dampened spending) also devastated many economies, with more than 225 million full-time jobs being lost from the global economy and unemployment rates skyrocketing in many countries (Hassan, 2021). In short, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a global crisis that has severely impacted social and economic life in many countries.

The pandemic has had two competing effects in relation to the provision of social support to communities in need. On the one hand, the crisis amplified need: many more families than usual found themselves in need of support due to sickness or unemployment, especially families from vulnerable communities. On the other hand, because the global economy was straining and many families were facing difficult times, not-for-profits and social programs faced reduced flows of income and support (CAF, 2021). Yet little is known about how people responded to these twin pressures: did the pressures of the pandemic constrain generosity, or were people able to find ways to help each other regardless? The purpose of this report is to answer this overarching question:

How have generosity behaviours manifested and changed during the COVID-19 pandemic?

We define generosity as all forms of behaviour that people engage in with the intention of benefiting others (including people, animals, and environments)¹. Generosity behaviours therefore include both formal and informal support. Examples of formal generosity behaviours are donating money to charities, volunteering for not-for-profit organisations, or giving blood. Informal generosity behaviours include helping people they know, helping strangers, and participating in grassroots community groups.

To answer our research question, we formed a team of researchers working in eleven countries to collect data on the formal and informal generosity practices that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries included in the research project were Australia, Austria, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Sweden and the United States.

Country reports will be available online at www.globalgenerosityresearch.com. This series is part of a broader research initiative from “The Global Generosity Project” led by Professor Pamala Wiepking from the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy in the United States.

In this report, we focus on the Australian context however we include some high-level comparisons with nine other countries where the same data was collected: Austria, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Sweden and the United States.

By understanding generosity responses to this particular crisis, we can learn more about how individuals and societies respond to crises in general. Such knowledge can be used to develop policies and practices that ensure Australia will be able to withstand future shocks while maintaining a thriving and harmonious social fabric. To this end, we include a summary of our key findings and recommendations for both not-for-profits and government.

3. Research Method

3.1 Participants and Procedure

Data were collected in eleven countries during the second half of 2020 and early 2021, with at least 644 participants per country (range 644 – 5900). In many countries, efforts were made to generate a nationally representative sample of participants. However, the sample in Australia was a convenience sample.

In Australia, 1007 people completed a 5-minute survey about their generosity behaviours since the start of the pandemic (see full questionnaire online at <https://osf.io/mznqu/>). The survey was voluntary, and participants were compensated \$1.20 AUD for their time via the Prolific website. Prolific is a crowdsourcing platform used for participant recruitment for online surveys and market research (<https://www.prolific.co/>). The sample consisted of 497 men, 494 women, 5 nonbinary people, 2 genderfluid people, 1 agender person, and 1 queer person, as well as 3 people who preferred not to disclose their gender. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 80 years ($M = 31.14$, $SD = 11.11$); 51.4% were single and 27.7% had children under 18 years old living at home. Approximately three-quarters (73.5%) said their household was able to make ends meet between “fairly” and “very easily”. More information on the participant demographics can be found in the Appendix (section 8.2).

3.2 Timing and COVID-19 Context

The Australian survey was active from 4-9 August 2020. At that time in Australia, the worst of the early phase of the pandemic (e.g., lockdowns, growing infections, and economic impacts) had passed for most of the nation. The first confirmed case in Australia was on 25 January 2020. Borders were closed to non-residents on 20 March, with returning residents required to enter a mandatory 14-day quarantine on arrival. Internally, many states also had closed borders and restricted interstate travel. Lockdowns, social distancing, and closure of “non-essential” services were implemented in many states from March. Almost a million jobs were lost by July 2020 (ABS, 2020a).

By mid-year, the virus seemed to be mostly contained due to these strong responses. Then, in early July 2020, a new wave of infections spread rapidly, leading the state of Victoria to enter a strict lockdown that lasted almost 4 months.

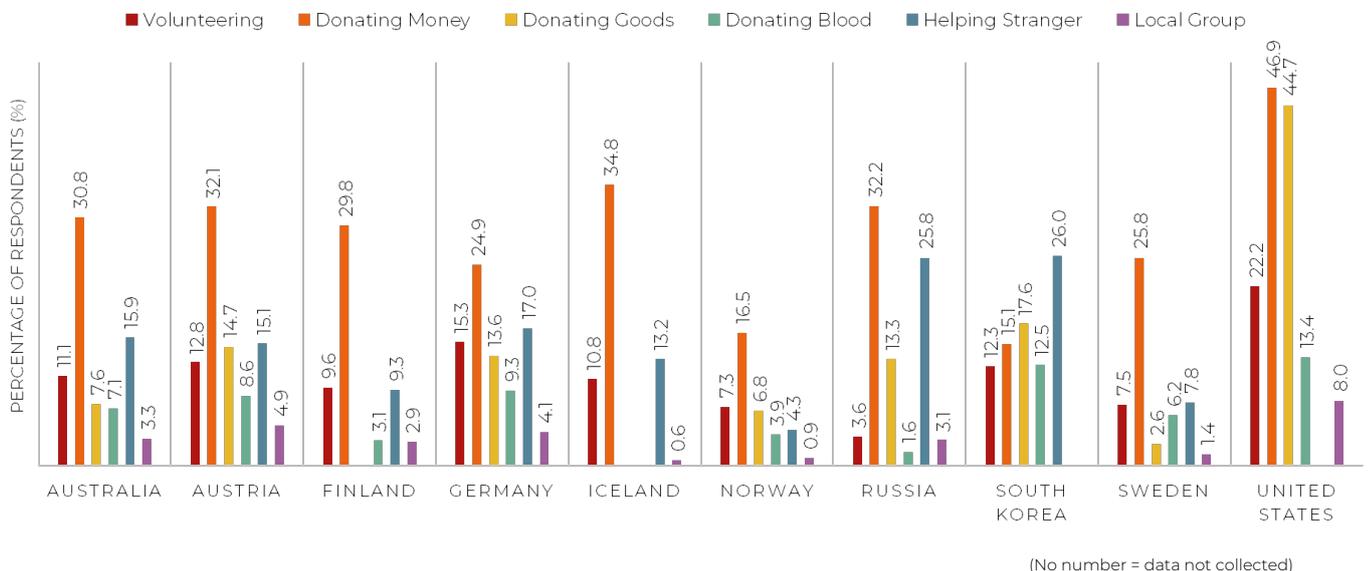
At the time of data collection, Victoria was reaching the peak of this second wave, with more than 700 new cases and dozens dying daily (Mercer, 2020). Outside of Victoria, however, Australia was seeing very few cases of community transmission, a slow return to social life, and early signs of rebounding employment rates (ABS, 2020b). Therefore, there is likely to be a large variation in how the crisis affected people in Australia depending on whether they resided inside or outside of the state of Victoria. Finally, the JobKeeper program (a wage subsidy designed to support employees of businesses and not-for-profits adversely affected by the crisis) was still in place, likely buffering citizens from the worst economic fallout of the pandemic.

4. Global Comparison

As seen in Figure 1, manifestations of generosity behaviours varied across national contexts. We asked participants which generosity behaviours they had engaged in since the beginning of the pandemic. Some countries did not ask about all behaviours. In most countries, donating money was the most common generosity behaviour reported.

Australians showed similar patterns of generosity to respondents in many countries. Australians were most likely to donate money, followed by a tendency to help strangers, and to join or form local groups to deliver care. In comparison to other countries, Russians and South Koreans were more likely to help strangers, and Americans were more likely to donate money, goods and volunteer time.

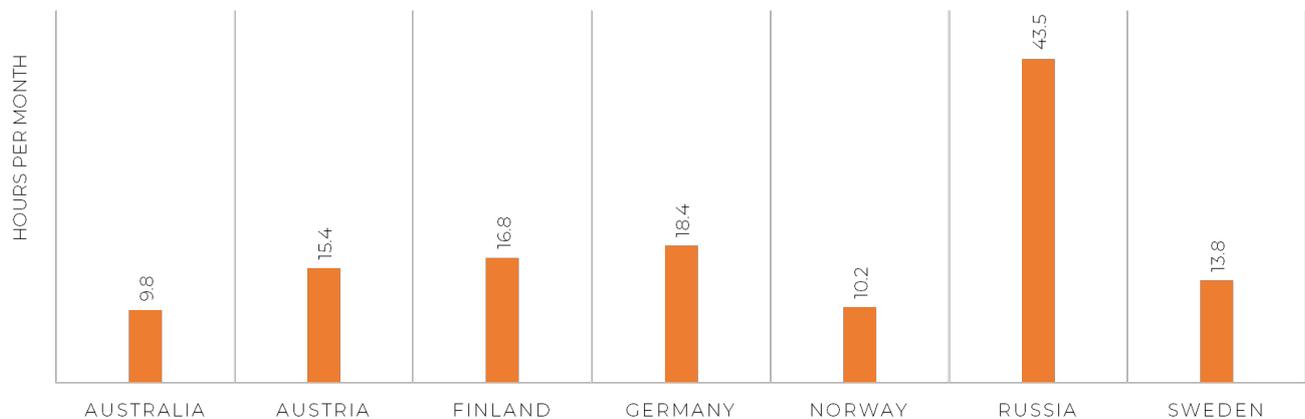
Figure 1. Generosity responses during pandemic



The extent of generosity behaviours varied significantly across nations. Respondents in different countries showed large differences in terms of the number of hours they volunteered each month² (see Figure 2). From Figure 1 we learned that 11.1% of Australians volunteered for an organisation since the start of the pandemic. On average, they volunteered a little under 10 hours per month, roughly half as many hours as the German volunteers and a quarter as many hours as the Russian volunteers. We discuss why Australian volunteering rates may have been lower in the National Findings section below.

Of the hours volunteered per month (Figure 2), Russia stands out with 43.5 hours, about 2.5 times more hours than volunteers in Austria, Finland, Sweden and Germany. Yet Russia also had the lowest percentage of volunteers during the pandemic (Figure 1: 3.6%), compared with 22.2% of Americans, 15.3% of Germans and 12.8% Austrians.

Figure 2. Average number of hours per month spent volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic



5. National Findings

The key purpose of this report is to examine how Australians responded to the COVID-19 crisis; in particular, how individuals came together to help support those directly or indirectly affected by COVID-19. Below we consider the different forms of generosity behaviour that were common in Australia during the pandemic and how these generosity behaviours changed during the pandemic. We then discuss a particular example of how generosity manifested in Australia during the crisis.

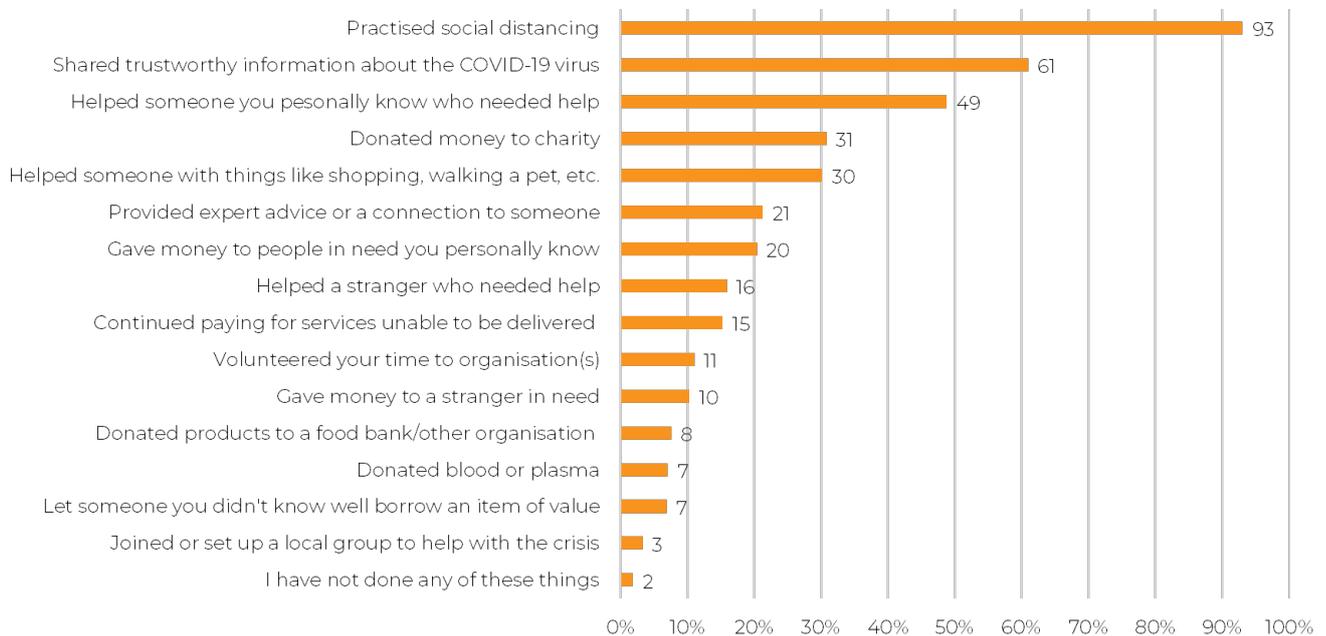
5.1 Generosity During COVID-19

Figure 3 shows the generosity behaviours that were most and least common in Australia during the pandemic. Almost all respondents (93%) said they practised social distancing and more than half (61%) shared trustworthy information about COVID-19.

When it came to more traditional forms of helping, Australians were most likely to help someone they knew personally (49% said they did this), donate money to charity (31%), or help someone with small tasks like shopping (30%). The least common generosity behaviours were donating blood or plasma (7%), lending items to strangers (7%), or joining or instigating a community group (3%). However, it is also possible that these are behaviours that are less common at any time. Only 2% of respondents said they did none of the listed behaviours. Thus, Australians helped one another in diverse ways during the pandemic. Overall, there was a prioritisation of actions related specifically to the crisis, care for close others, and care delivered through formal means (donations to not-for-profits, formal volunteering). Among those who donated money (31% of respondents), the amounts that people donated ranged from less than \$1 to as much as \$25,000.

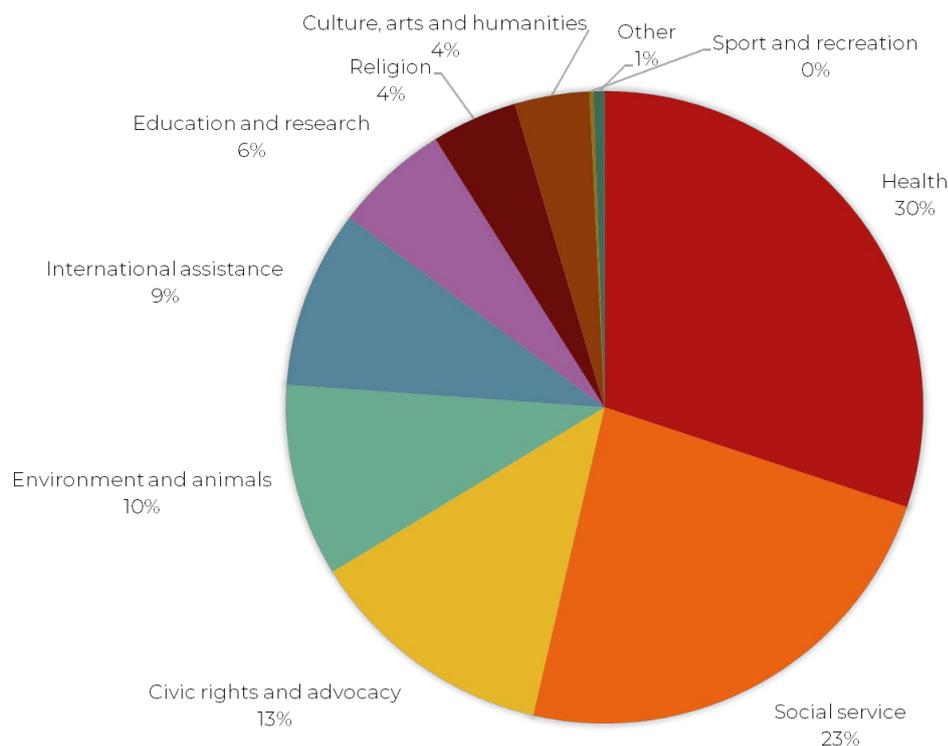
On average, donors gave \$196 to charity during the pandemic. The most common donation amount was \$50.

Figure 3. Manifestations of generosity in Australian during the COVID-19 pandemic (percent of respondents)



As can be seen in Figure 4, more than half of all donations were directed towards not-for-profits working in health and social services³. It is not surprising that health and social services were a priority for donations, given the nature of the crisis: people were sick and also losing their jobs due to the economic slowdown. During the pandemic, there were frequent media reports of lockdowns exacerbating people's mental health issues and causing flare-ups of domestic violence. The shift toward health and social service giving may therefore also reflect the public responding to these heightened needs.

Figure 4. Categories of charity that Australians donated to during the COVID-19 pandemic



A small number of people reported that they joined or started community groups to respond to the pandemic in some way. The missions of these groups were diverse, including (in participants' own words):

"It is a trade union, and during the crisis we have primarily concerned in accessing welfare for migrant workers. We meet on Zoom near-daily, and organise online actions."

"Mutual Aid for people living in my suburb and the surrounding suburbs."

"A group for people to share knowledge and connect virtually."

"I have joined a local group run by people of colour who make masks and donate the profits."

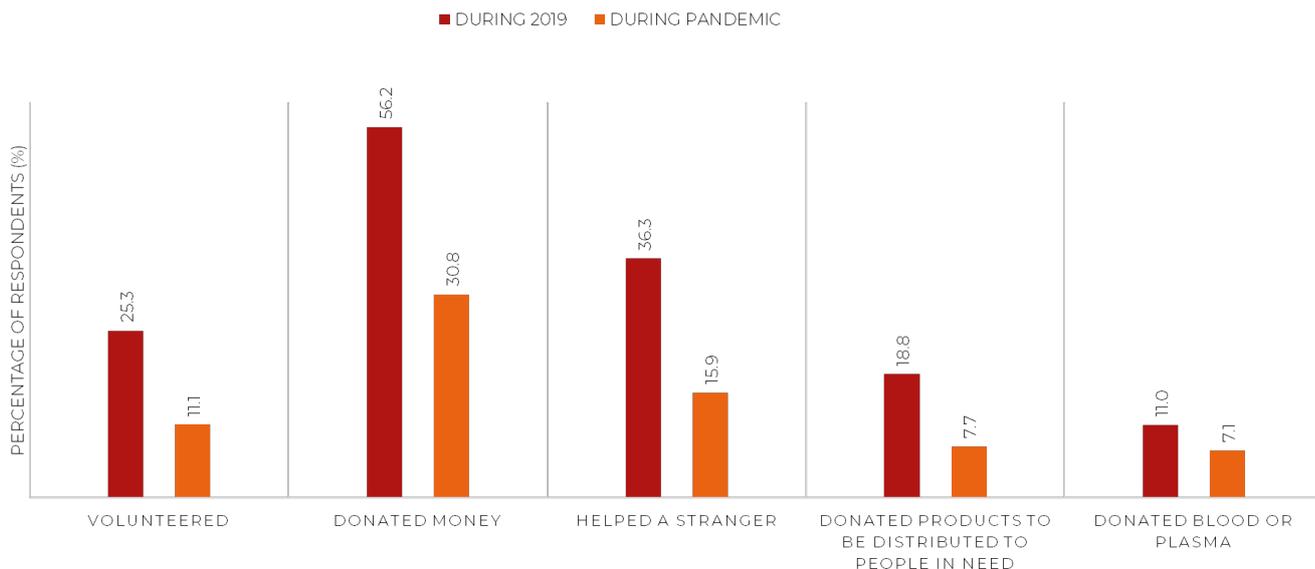
"A crisis group that caters to the elderly, we buy groceries or any immediate supplies they need, sanitize them and deliver all whilst following social distancing."

"It is to help students facing difficulties due to the covid-19, we provide them with free meal once a week."

5.2 Changes in Generosity

Across the board, people reported that they had taken part in fewer generosity behaviours since the pandemic began than during the 2019 calendar year (see Figure 5). However, given that data were collected only 6 months into the pandemic, these drops may reflect the smaller time scale (6 months vs 12 months) more than a meaningful shift in behaviour.

Figure 5. Frequency of generosity behaviours during 2019 compared with 2020



To unpack this, we asked people explicitly whether their giving and volunteering behaviours had changed during the pandemic (see Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 6. Changes in donations of money (charitable giving) during the COVID-19 pandemic

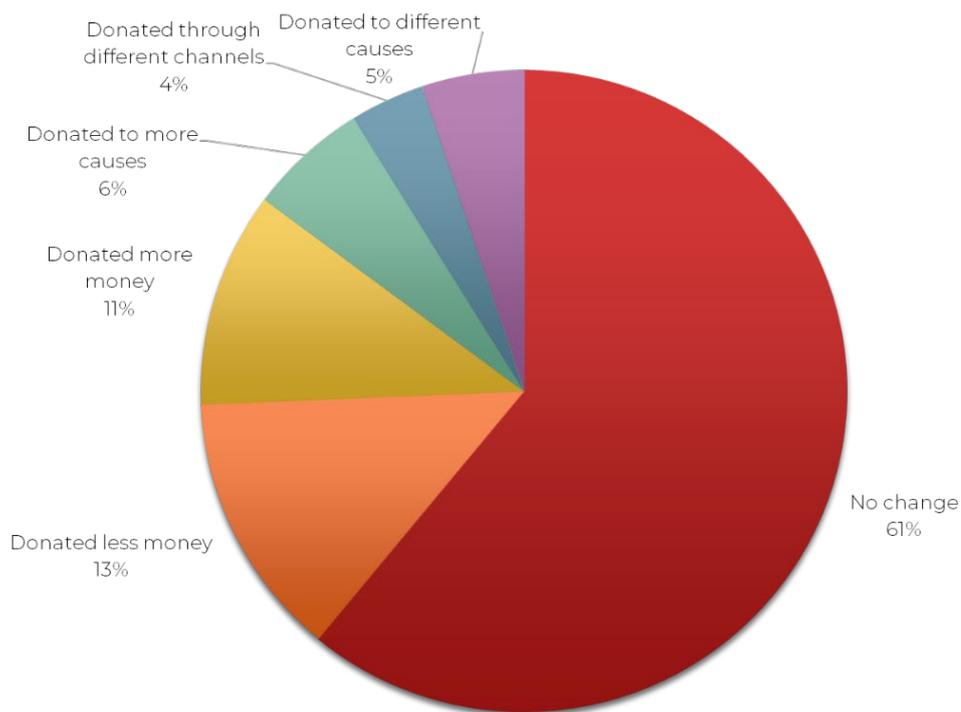
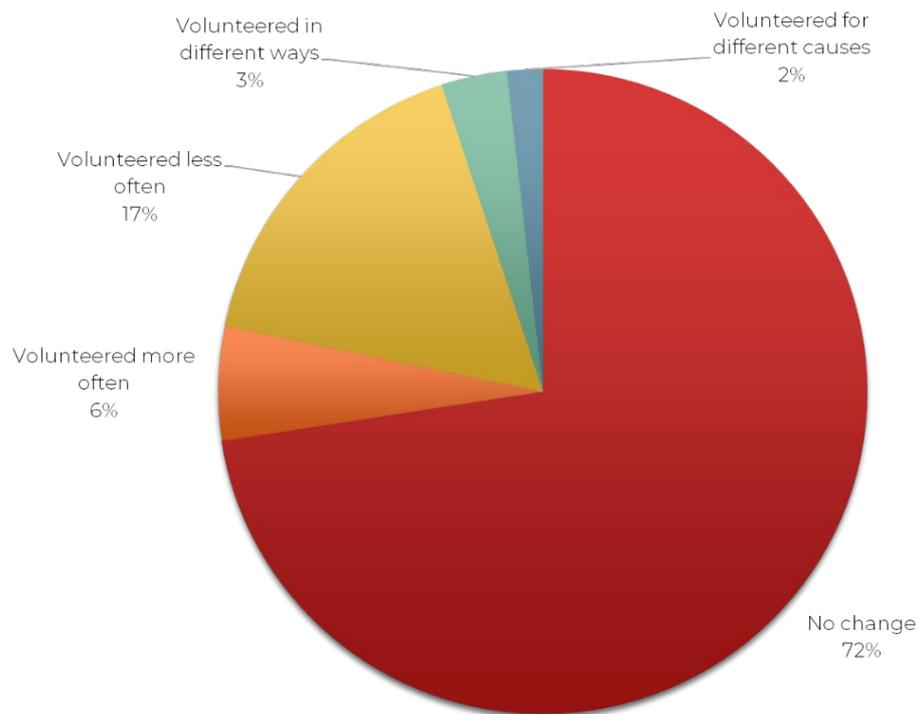


Figure 7. Changes in volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic



Many reported no change. However, those who changed their volunteering behaviour were generally volunteering less often. When asked, people explained this was largely due to fears around viral transmission and restrictions affecting when organisations were open, or when they could leave the house (in participants' own words):

"Can't go out to volunteer due to restrictions."

"I am too scared to volunteer in person due to covid."

"Concern about interacting with vulnerable communities, and being a threat to spreading COVID."

"COVID, so no in-person volunteering anymore. However, I did find lots of new ways to volunteer online."

With charitable giving, those that changed their donation behaviours were equally likely to give more or less, and a number of people reported changes in their patterns of giving during the pandemic. Some explained why they had changed their giving behaviours:

Donated less money:

"I was working as a Full-Time employee but my working hours is now reduced as a result of the pandemic and I am therefore experiencing some pay cuts and I have no choice than to reduce my donations."

"Worried about my own finance."

Donated more money:

"More people need help, and the historical safety of governments are failing to deal with the crisis."

"The pandemic made me realise that even a little bit could go a long way and no donation was too small."

Donated to more causes:

"More people in need than before."

"More people/organisations are in need of financial assistance since the issue is widespread across the world."

Donated to different causes:

"The government's response seems focused on particular sectors and ignoring others (eg. charities, universities and medical research) which affects how I choose an organisation to donate to."

"I changed the recipients of donations based on priorities."

5.3 Case Study

This report has focused primarily on the generosity behaviours of individuals. Indeed, in the early days of the pandemic there was a flood of heart-warming stories about everyday kindness promoted through mainstream media and Facebook groups like “The Kindness Pandemic” (see, for example, Marshall, 2020; Mayoh, 2020). However, organisations also acted in generous ways during the pandemic.

One example of corporate generosity in Australia was seen in the alcohol industry. In particular, local spirits distilleries turned their resources and enterprises to the task of manufacturing hand sanitiser when the country was facing shortages in both the health sector and for private use (House, 2020). Many companies – including Beenleigh Rum Distillery, Bundaberg Rum Distillery, Archie Rose, Manly Spirits, Cape Byron Distillery, Brookie’s Gin, Granddad Jack’s, Husk Distillers, Lord Byron Distillery, Hartshorn Distillery, and Brisbane Distillery Company – stepped up to focus on the production of hand sanitiser to meet local demand. The Bundaberg distillery in Queensland donated enough alcohol to make half a million bottles of hand sanitiser.



Image: Traveloscopy (CC BY-ND 2.0)

Bundaberg Rum (pictured above) also made a significant donation of 100,000 litres of ethanol to the Queensland government: enough to manufacture half a million bottles of hand sanitiser (House, 2020). This was part of a broader corporate generosity initiative from their parent company, Diageo, which donated enough ethanol worldwide to produce 8 million bottles of hand sanitiser. This is a great example of industry and government coming together to help protect the community during the crisis.

6. Conclusion

In this section we briefly summarise the findings about Australians' generosity behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic and elaborate potential implications both for government policy and not-for-profit management. This information may also be valuable for sectoral funders and peak bodies, many of whom have been active during the pandemic with a range of advocacy and support activities.

6.1 Key Findings

There are two key findings from this report. First, generosity manifested in diverse ways during the COVID-19 pandemic, both in Australia and around the world. An impressive 98% of respondents in Australia reported doing something during the pandemic that was intended to benefit others. The most common manifestations of this generosity were (a) informal helping of friends and family, and (b) formal helping through established not-for-profits.

Second, changes in people's generosity behaviours were driven primarily by changes in their personal circumstances (e.g. financial insecurity, health threats) and government policies implemented to respond to the crisis (e.g. lockdowns, JobKeeper payments). This implies that people were eager to engage in generous action, to the extent that their circumstances allowed. Such a preference for helping others can be nurtured or damaged by the choices that governments and not-for-profits make in terms of strategy and policy.

6.2 Implications for Not-for-profits

Results suggest that people want to engage in generosity behaviours, even during times of crisis. They may seek to care for friends and family first but will also look for formal opportunities to distribute care to others in need. This is where not-for-profits step in.

During times of crisis not-for-profits can:

- Map needs across the affected communities in which they work, making sure inclusion of underrepresented populations is a priority.
- Provide clear direction and 'asks' by communicating need quickly, precisely, and often, to ensure that people know where help is most needed and the best ways to contribute.
- Offer new ways to engage with and support their work, such as promoting online volunteer opportunities when physical volunteering is difficult, or considering in-kind means of support also when financial pressures inhibit monetary donations.

6.3 Implications for Government Policy

Results suggest that government policies – especially around social distancing requirements, lockdowns, and JobKeeper payments – had very real impacts on people's generosity behaviours. For example, people volunteered less because of social distancing requirements and lockdowns. However, several respondents also mentioned donating more because of JobKeeper payments.

During times of crisis governments can:

- Stimulate public generosity through private distributions to citizens (e.g., wage subsidies like JobKeeper). Results indicate that some people who received wage subsidies used them partly to support charities and individuals in need.
- Develop crisis protocols that facilitate cross-sector collaboration (including commercial and not-for-profit sectors) to quickly address societal needs: needs may vary across geographic locations and sub-groups of the community.
- Support citizens without close social networks (e.g., elderly and the homeless), because results show that Australians will rally to support the people closest to them first and potentially neglect some vulnerable communities. Many charities will have local knowledge about which people may 'fall through the cracks', offering potential area for a cross-sector partnership between the public and not-for-profit sectors.
- Promote corporate generosity by highlighting areas of community need and explaining how corporations can help address these.
- Develop incentives and guidelines for workplace giving to develop a sustainable pipeline of support for Australian not-for-profits.
- Provide clear specifications for lockdowns and restrictions to community life. Results show Australians were less likely to volunteer due to uncertainty about whether they were able to leave the house to volunteer, and potential risks of COVID-19 transmission. Future government guidelines could clearly specify the types of volunteering that are deemed safe or permissible.
- Provide direct support to the not-for-profit sector if new circumstances and policies will affect the sector's traditional sources of support.
- Identify informal community initiatives and support with seed funding or resources such as digital templates for establishing online mutual aid communities.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Notes

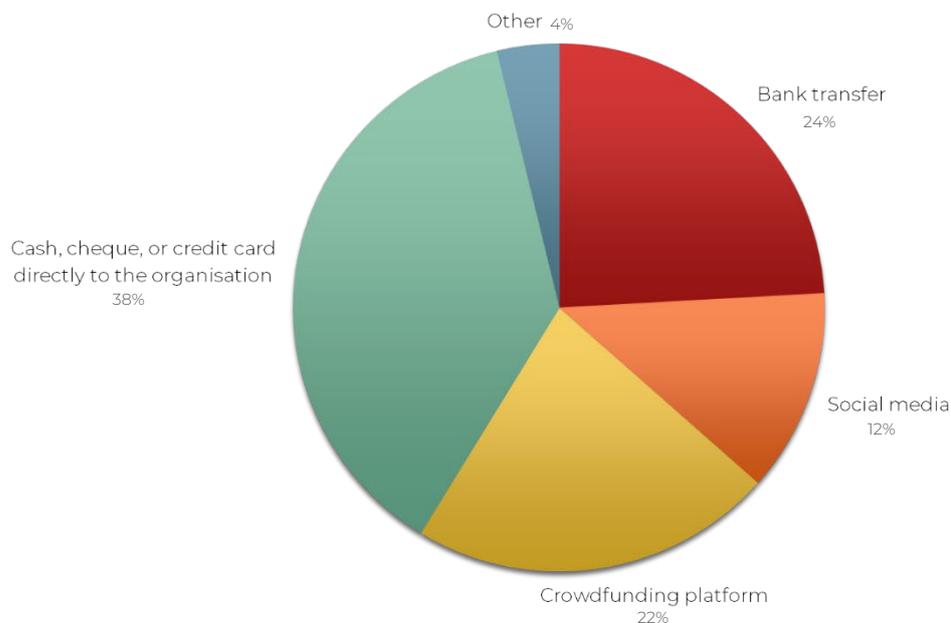
1. A full overview of generosity behaviours can be found on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/mznqu/>).
2. Due to unusual outliers, the data has been winsorised for two countries at the 99th (Australia) or 95th (Russia) percentile.
3. Due to outliers, the Australian giving amounts data has been winsorised at the 95th (religion, international) or 99th percentile (health, service)

8.2 Additional Information About Sample

- All respondents were residing in Australia, and 84% identified as Australian nationals. The remainder came from 38 different countries, the most common being New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and India (2% of the sample from each).
- Sample marital status: 51.4% single, 24.9% married, 20.2% in domestic partnership, 2.1% divorced, and 0.4% widowed.
- The sample was highly educated: 42.8% of participants had a university undergraduate degree and 18.4% had a postgraduate degree.
- The sample was skewed toward the progressive end of the political scale: $M = -1.49$, $SD = 2.40$, where $-5 = \text{left/progressive}$ and $+5 = \text{right/conservative}$.
- Most participants indicated that religion was not very important in their lives: 58.2% saying that it was not at all important, 17.0% saying not too important, 15.4% saying somewhat important, and only 9.4% saying religion was very important.

8.3 Additional Findings

Figure 8. Common methods of donating money during the pandemic



Overall, 12.4% of the sample said that they had personally received help during the pandemic. They also indicated the type of help they had received (Figure 9) and who they had received the help from (Figure 10):

Figure 9. Type of help received

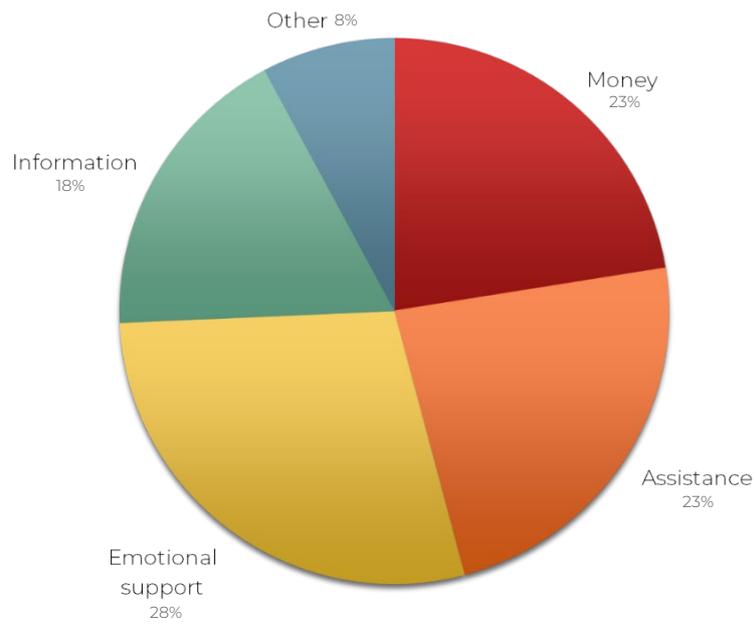
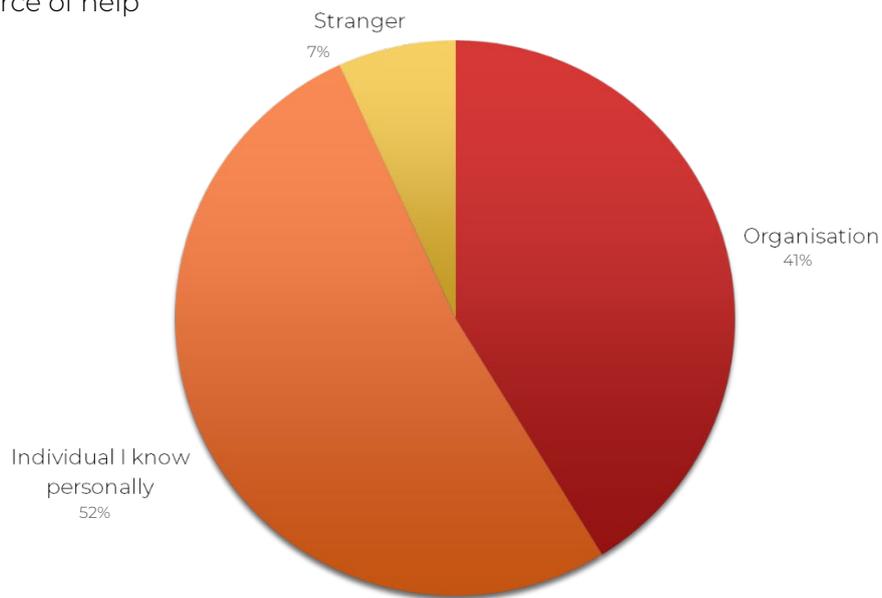


Figure 10. Source of help





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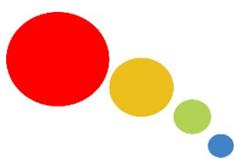
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