

2007 Pro Bono Workshop

Reporting Session

Wednesday 17 October 2007

Parliament House

OUTCOMES REPORT



Introduction

The 2007 Pro Bono Workshop participants considered both current and future challenges to the provision of pro bono legal services.

Changes to the pro bono and public interest landscape over the past 10 years have been significant, with a wide range of advances contributing to better access to justice. Participants reviewed progress since the 2005 Pro Bono Workshop. They acknowledged the developments since that time and again affirmed that access to justice is a shared responsibility of both legal professionals and government. They noted that effective pro bono delivery requires adequate provision of resources from government-funded legal services.

The participants commended the Attorney-General and the Victorian Government for:

- supporting and institutionalising pro bono through the Legal Services Panel and the Community Law Partnership program;
- providing ongoing funding to the Human Rights Law Resource Centre; and
- supporting and resourcing the establishment of a specialist older persons' legal service. Also commended was the support provided by Victoria Legal Aid.

Further, participants considered that as a means of raising awareness of pro bono in the legal sector, the Law Institute of Victoria and The Victorian Bar consider amending their Continuing Professional Development (CPD) rules to mandate that one CPD point per year be undertaken on access to justice issues.

Resolutions of participants

The workshop participants resolved to undertake the following projects over the next two years:

1. review the role of the Pro Bono Secretariat of the Victoria Law Foundation to ensure that it is meeting its identified objectives and explore the feasibility of developing this forum to improve communication between key stakeholders;
2. develop a knowledge-sharing resource through the National Pro Bono Resource Centre, in collaboration with the pro bono and community legal sectors;

3. that the Federation of Community Legal Centres Inc (Vic), as part of the Community Law Partnerships program, develop a mechanism for documenting and marketing effective pro bono partnership case studies in and beyond the community legal sector to raise awareness of the impact of pro bono work; and
4. that participants investigate ways to encourage and support lawyers to undertake pro bono work in areas other than case work, including policy and education.

Recommendations to the Attorney-General

In order to promote and enhance access to justice, the workshop participants also recommend to the Attorney-General the following, that:

1. the Victorian Government, including the Department of Justice, supports and resources the establishment of a 'not for profit' legal service;
2. the Victorian Government, including the Department of Justice, supports and resources a prisoners' legal service, and consults with the pro bono and community sectors about further resources for other areas of specific unmet need (for example, appearances before the Mental Health Review Board);
3. the Victorian Government increases funding to Victoria Legal Aid to enable effective funding of civil law matters;
4. the Victorian Attorney-General works with the pro bono and community sectors to explore opportunities to remove financial barriers to pro bono casework including: court fees, access to interpreters, access to expert witnesses and adverse cost orders; and
5. the Victorian Government implements similar access to justice provisions in its procurement contracts with non-legal service providers to those in the Legal Services Panel.