



**AUSTRALIAN  
PRO BONO CENTRE**

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**12 May 2017**

### **NATIONAL PRO BONO DAY WILL CELEBRATE THE DIVERSE PRO BONO CONTRIBUTIONS OF AUSTRALIAN LAWYERS**

Hundreds of Australian lawyers will celebrate National Pro Bono Day next Tuesday 16 May 2017 by walking in their home city early in the morning to raise funds in support of the pro bono clearing houses and referral schemes. Walks will take place in Adelaide, Brisbane, Cairns, Gold Coast, Mackay, Melbourne, Perth, Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba, and Townsville as a key event in National Law Week.

“Any lawyers in these cities who have not done so are encouraged to register to join the walk” said John Corker, CEO of the Australian Pro Bono Centre”. (links in the table below).

“The legal profession through its pro bono efforts makes an important contribution to upholding respect for the rule of law in Australia, a key characteristic that defines us as a society and this is the day of the year to celebrate that contribution”, he said.

Another cause for celebration is the significant diversity in the pro bono work being undertaken as revealed by recent research undertaken by the APBC.

The Centre’s *Report on the Fifth National Law Firm Pro Bono Survey of Australian firms with fifty or more lawyers*, (“**The Report**”) released March 2017, shows that the pro bono work done by firms encompasses areas of law and practice as diverse as animal law, bankruptcy, consumer law, discrimination, succession law, employment, environment, family, and human rights and immigration law; commercial law including transactional, governance and tax matters.

Law firms indicated that they focus on helping groups of disadvantaged people including Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, people suffering homelessness, severe poverty, those affected by a cognitive impairment, mental illness or other disability, those affected by family violence or elder abuse, those lacking access to education, those in regional rural and remote communities, and asylum seekers and refugees. Some prioritised women, youth or charities in their pro bono programs. Others reported new collaborations with other law firms and/or community legal centres.

“The diversity of pro bono work being undertaken by lawyers and firms is impressive. It indicates a profession that is responsive to unmet legal need and with its limited capacity still managing to find time to take on work that makes a difference to those that wouldn’t otherwise get help”, said Corker.

However, the Report indicates that capacity remains an issue for firms. There is commercial pressure in the legal services market and pro bono programs are not immune from this. Corker

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warns against a firm cutting its pro bono program. He says we know from the Australian and the US experience that once you downsize a pro bono program, it is difficult and costly to get it back to its previous levels. It's a false economy to reduce the size of a firm's pro bono program as much of the cost of running it is a below-the-line cost coming from spare capacity within the firm", he said.

"The broad range of pro bono work being done indicates that unmet legal need exists in many parts of society. With 40% of firms now meeting or exceeding the national target of 35 hours per lawyer per annum, and unmet legal need remaining high, it is vital that firms continue to develop their pro bono practices and programs", said Corker.

"When times are tough, this is when pro bono programs should be doing more not less", Corker said.

## Backgrounder

- The Walk for Justice started in Australia in 2008 and in 2016 raised over \$150,000 nationally.
- Forty-one (out of 58 firms in Australia with 50 or more full-time equivalent lawyers) firms responded to the Survey.
- As reported in March, the survey report indicated that there was a 9.7 percent increase since 2014 in the average hours of legal work performed per year per full-time equivalent (FTE) lawyer. In 2016, respondent firms collectively averaged 34.8 hours of pro bono legal work per year per FTE lawyer – just shy of the National Target of 35 hours.
- The Australian Pro Bono Centre is an independent centre of expertise that aims to grow the capacity of the Australian legal profession to provide pro bono legal services that are focused on increasing access to justice for socially disadvantaged and/or marginalised persons, and furthering the public interest.
- Walks for Justice and links to register.

Location/s	Event	Organiser
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adelaide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Walk for Justice 2017</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• JusticeNet SA</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">The Law Access Walk for Justice 2017</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law Access WA</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Melbourne and Geelong</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Walk for Justice 2017</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law Institute of Victoria</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brisbane, Cairns, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba, Townsville and Mackay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Queensland Legal Walk</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LawRight</li> </ul>

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