



AUSTRALIAN PRO BONO CENTRE

MEDIA RELEASE

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MID SIZE FIRMS LEAD PRO BONO GROWTH

Sixty percent of mid-size Australian law firms (201 - 449 lawyers) reported more than 20% growth in the number of pro bono hours per lawyer for the 2014/2015 year, according to the Eighth Annual Performance Report on the National Pro Bono Aspirational Target (“**Target**”)¹, released today.

However, the report confirms that firms with 450 or more lawyers continue to be the strongest pro bono performers, with seven of the nine largest firms in Australia having met or exceeded the Target this year. Only three out of the ten mid-size reporting firms met or exceeded the Target, and two mid-size firms decreased their performance by more than 20%.

The report, prepared by the Australian Pro Bono Centre, provides a snapshot of pro bono legal work in Australia in the 2014/2015 financial year. The report is based on data provided by law firms, solicitors and barristers who have agreed to use their best efforts to achieve a target of 35 hours of pro bono legal work per lawyer, per year, and includes 19 of Australia’s 20 largest firms.²

“Pro bono performance in the large firms is stable, with a few exceptions. In a tightening legal services market, it is a tribute to the dedication of these firms that they have maintained and grown their pro bono programs despite today’s competitive challenges”, said John Corker, Director of the Australian Pro Bono Centre.

“There continues to be an extraordinary range of pro bono work done to meet the legal needs of victims of domestic violence, the homeless, asylum seekers and refugees, newly arrived migrants, those with a disability, and many other marginalised groups, and to assist the organisations that support them. Importantly, much of this work would not be possible without strong partnerships with well-run community organisations, in particular Community Legal Centres,” said Corker.

The report indicates that over 11,000 Australian legal professionals are now covered by the Target (up 3% on last year). Those who reported (84%) performed a total of 372,602 hours of pro bono legal work, which equates to 207 lawyers working pro bono full-time for one year, or an average overall of 33.2 pro bono hours per lawyer per year. This was down slightly on the overall average of 34.2 pro bono hours per lawyer per year reported in 2013/2014. In law firms, the average participation rate of lawyers in pro bono legal work remained steady at 64.4%.

“With the target now in its ninth year, these results show that its influence as a tool to drive pro bono performance continues to grow. The fact that almost half of the target signatories either met or exceeded it in 2014/2015 demonstrates that the Target remains well-positioned as a benchmark for the conduct of pro bono legal work across the entire Australian legal profession. It provides

¹ Target signatories sign a [Statement of Principles](#) and agree to make their best efforts to ensure that, by no later than 30 June in each year, their firm’s lawyers will undertake an average of a minimum of 35 hours of [pro bono legal services](#) each year.

² By number of FTE lawyers as at 1 July 2015.

firms with a robust and achievable goal, encouraging them to support and develop their pro bono legal culture, practices and programs,” he said.

“It is also heartening to see the dedication of sole practitioners and small firms, who turned in some amazing results this year,” said Corker. “One sole practitioner reported 650 pro bono hours for the year.”

However performance across the 77 reporting firms was still quite uneven. “There is clearly room for growth in pro bono legal work in a number of firms. These results will allow firms to benchmark themselves against their peers”, said Corker.

“In firms that reported a significant drop in their pro bono work this year, the reason appears to be a lack of sustained coordination by a person who is skilled and adequately resourced to undertake the task. Unfortunately, experience shows that it can be quite difficult to rebuild a pro bono program once it’s been let go”, said Corker.

“We encourage firms that are looking to develop their pro bono programs to seek assistance from the Centre, law firms with developed pro bono practices or a pro bono clearing house or referral scheme”, said Corker.

The [report \(with executive summary\) can be downloaded here](#) (23 pages) from the Centre’s website, together with a full list of the [names of Target signatories](#).

The Target was developed by the National Pro Bono Resource Centre (now the Australian Pro Bono Centre) in 2006 and incorporates, in part language developed by the US Pro Bono Institute and utilized in its Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge SM. That language is used with the specific permission of the Institute and cannot be further utilized, copied, disseminated, or adapted, in whole or in part, without prior written permission from the Institute. To request permission please contact the Institute at probono@probonoinst.org.

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