

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**RECORD NUMBER OF PRO BONO HOURS REPORTED**

There is a growing dedication to pro bono by Australian lawyers, according to the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Performance Report on the National Pro Bono Target (**Target**). Australian lawyers have reported a record number of 473,379.4 pro bono hours in the 2019 financial year (**FY2019**), providing disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals with access to justice and vital legal support to the organisations that support them.

This is the highest number of pro bono hours ever reported by signatories to the Target – and is an increase of 14.11% from FY2018. These total hours equate to 263 lawyers working pro bono full-time for one year.<sup>1</sup>

Target signatories reported undertaking an average of 35.83 hours of pro bono legal services per lawyer in FY2019, exceeding the Target of 35 hours. This is up from 34.97 hours in FY2018. Eighteen large law firms (those with 50 or more lawyers) met or exceeded the Target, up from 16 large law firms in FY2018.

Foundation Target signatories – those signatories who committed to the Target before its launch on 26 April 2007 – reported on average 47.79 pro bono hours per lawyer, significantly higher than the overall average.

A record 14,057 full-time equivalent (FTE) lawyers are now covered by the Target. This is a significant increase from last financial year, when 12,051 FTE lawyers were covered by the Target. It is evident through the 2019 Target results that pro bono conditions in Commonwealth government tender arrangements are having an important influence on the growth of the number of signatories.

“This year’s pleasing results demonstrate the Australian legal profession’s growing commitment to pro bono legal work”, said Gabriela Christian-Hare, CEO of the Australian Pro Bono Centre (**Centre**). “Since the Target’s introduction in 2007, we have seen an overall steady increase in the number of pro bono hours reported, and the number of FTE lawyers covered by the Target.”

“We should applaud the work of Australia’s pro bono community for assisting and empowering the most disadvantaged members of our community and supporting the rule of law,” Gabriela observed. “Pro bono legal work is a crucial pillar of access to justice, and an integral part of the professional life of thousands of Australian lawyers.”

Gabriela acknowledges that despite this year’s strong results, there is still work to be done. “Only 45.5% of Target signatories met or exceeded the Target in the 2019 financial year – down by 1.08% since 2018,” she noted. “The Centre aims to assist new signatories to develop their pro bono programs, so they can be in a better position to meet the Target next year.”

Phillip Cornwell, the Centre’s Chair, said: “At a time when the access to justice gap continues to grow, these are encouraging headline numbers. However, they mask a striking disparity of effort, particularly among large firms. We are hoping that the increasing adoption and monitoring of stricter pro bono conditions for

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the assumption of a 37.5 hour working week for 48 weeks in a year.

corporate and government legal panels (as recommended by the Centre) will force those falling well short of the Target to lift their game."

The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Target Performance Report can be downloaded [here](#).

### **Background to the Target**

The National Pro Bono Target is a voluntary target that law firms, incorporated legal practices, solicitors and barristers can adopt by signing a [Statement of Principles](#).

Signatories to the Target agree to use their best efforts to provide at least 35 hours of "pro bono legal services" per lawyer per year. Signatories report annually to the Centre on their performance against the Target.

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