



7TH NATIONAL LAW FIRM PRO BONO SURVEY: What did we learn?

The National Law Firm Pro Bono Survey is a biennial survey of Australian firms with 50 or more full-time equivalent (FTE) lawyers conducted by the Australian Pro Bono Centre.

The Centre conducted the 7th Survey in 2020, and released a report analysing the results in early 2021. Thirty-eight firms responded to the 2020 Survey, collectively employing 12,872 FTE lawyers.

> You can read the full report, available on the Centre's website, [here](#).

Included here is a snapshot of some of the key notable results and trends in pro bono legal practice identified through the 2020 Survey. These results provide the pro bono community with valuable information about the state of pro bono in Australia – where we are excelling, and where there is room for growth.

Overall, firm pro bono programs have weathered a turbulent year and emerged from 2020 with strong pro bono practices that continue to be focused on assisting the most vulnerable members of our society, and the crucial not-for-profit and community organisations that support them. While areas for improvement remain, the impressive quantity and range of pro bono work being undertaken by large Australian firms is cause for optimism for the future of the sector.

PRO BONO HOURS PER LAWYER

The average 'pro bono hours per lawyer' was **35.5 hours**, up from 34.07 hours in 2018.



This is the highest number of average hours per lawyer ever reported by Survey respondents.

TOTAL HOURS OF PRO BONO LEGAL WORK

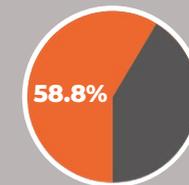
Firms performed a total of **457,216.4** hours of pro bono legal work in the 2020 financial year.



This is the **highest number** of hours reported on record.

PARTICIPATION RATE

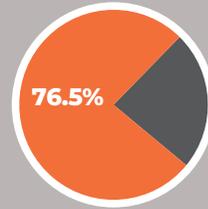
Firms reported an average pro bono participation rate of **58.8%**.



This is slightly down from 2018's results, and the overall participation rate has remained relatively stagnant over time.

BILLABLE HOUR CREDIT

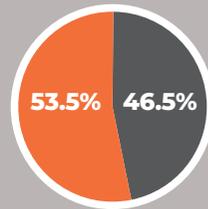
Of the firms that required lawyers to meet billable hour targets in 2020, **76.5%** provided some form of billable hour credit for pro bono work.



These results are a **pleasing recovery** from the significant dip in the proportion of firms providing billable hour credit for pro bono work from 2014 to 2018.

WORK FOR INDIVIDUALS VS ORGANISATIONS

In the 2020 FY, on average firms undertook **46.5%** of their pro bono legal work for individuals, and the remaining **53.5%** for organisations.



PRO BONO COORDINATORS / MANAGERS

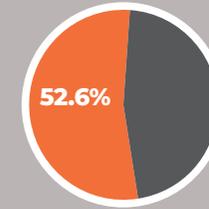
76.3% of firms indicated that they had a dedicated pro bono coordinator or manager in 2020.

Since 2012, there has been a consistent downward trend in the proportion of Survey respondent firms who have one.



OPERATIONAL BUDGETS

In total, only **52.6%** of firms set a budget for their pro bono program in the 2020 FY, despite it being best practice to do so.



CLIENTS

In 2020, the most nominated client groups (individuals) were:



people who are financially vulnerable



refugees and asylum seekers



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS AND KEY CHALLENGES

The top three factors most crucial to the success of a pro bono program were nominated to be:

- management and partner support and leadership
- engagement and willingness of lawyers to participate in a pro bono program
- firm capacity and resources.

The top three challenges were nominated as:

- firm capacity
- concern about conflict of interest with fee paying clients
- insufficient expertise in relevant areas of law.