

MEDIA RELEASE

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TARGET SIGNATORIES REPORT RECORD NUMBER OF PRO BONO HOURS AND EXCEED TARGET

Involvement in pro bono work is part of the “new normal” in the Australian legal landscape, with the 15th Annual Performance Report on the National Pro Bono Target (**Target**) demonstrating another solid year of pro bono effort. Australian lawyers who are signatories to the Centre’s Target completed a record total 645,509 hours of pro bono work, a modest increase of 0.55% from FY2021, consolidating substantial increases over the previous two years.

Target signatories reported undertaking an average of 37 hours of pro bono legal services per lawyer in FY2022, exceeding the Target of 35 hours. This the second highest average reported since FY2011, but lower than the 39.7 hours per lawyer reported in FY2021. This reduction is attributable to the rise in the number of lawyers covered by the Target, from 16,435 in FY2021 to a record 17,463 in FY2022.

Individual solicitors volunteering in a personal capacity and barristers reported an outstanding average of 100.7 pro bono hours in FY2022, significantly higher than the 70.18-hour average reported in FY2021. The average hours per lawyer of small firms (with fewer than 50 lawyers) also continued to grow, reaching 42.3 hours, up from 41.2 hours in FY2021 and 35.7 hours in FY2020. The rate of pro bono participation of lawyers within small firms also increased significantly, with 77.2% of lawyers doing pro bono work during the year, up from 71.8% in FY2021. Forty-three (43) small firms met or exceeded the Target, up from 36 firms in FY2021.

Overall, 47.3% of Target signatories met their respective Targets in FY2022, up from 45.3% in FY2021. This includes the newer category of in-house signatories, introduced 2 years ago, who aspire to a Target of 20 hours per lawyer per year. Total pro bono hours by in-house individuals and teams grew by almost 18% in the second year of reporting, from 981 to 1,156 hours. The Target report also records the first barristers’ chambers to collectively sign up to the Target.

As at 30 June 2022 there were 280 Target signatories compared to 270 signatories as at 30 June 2021. The increase in lawyers covered by the Target and high participation levels indicate that a broader range of lawyers is participating in pro bono activities. Signatories committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals also increased more than 10 percentage points to 22.6% in FY2022, affirming the connection between organisations’ pro bono and broader social impact programs.

“The Target community has continued to broaden and adapt to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable, as well as the community organisations that support them. Amidst climatic and political challenges across the globe, the Centre has seen an outstanding pro bono response. The profession has continued to support a wide range of clients but has dedicated additional time and resources to assist those affected by the pandemic, a range of natural disasters, and to respond to the plight of Afghan refugees and the invasion of Ukraine. As the Centre celebrates 20 years of operation in 2022, the Target results confirm that pro bono is a well-established feature of legal practice, with room to continue to grow,” said Gabriela Christian-Hare, CEO of the Australian Pro Bono Centre.

“As Australia emerges from the pandemic and lawyers seek more meaning from their working lives, the benefits of pro bono involvement cannot be overstated. Law firms and in-house teams are also able to use pro bono work to build their reputations as employers of choice and enhance their ability to attract and retain talented staff. The ‘unstoppable rise of purpose’ has injected new energy into the once fringe view that business has a function beyond generating profits, propelling pro bono up the priority agenda,” Gabriela commented.

Gabriela acknowledges that while there have been outstanding contributions from some large firms, others have fallen behind. “We are very appreciative of the efforts of the large law firms who collectively provide over 90% of total pro bono hours nationally. However, with only 39% of large law firms achieving the Target in FY2022, the Centre is looking to support firms that are lagging behind to catch up. The Centre continues to develop tools to support and encourage pro bono practice.”

Phillip Cornwell, the Centre’s Chair, said: “As we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the launch of the Centre it is gratifying to see continued growth in both total pro bono hours and the number of lawyers covered by the Target. That said, the total pro bono hours would be far higher if all firms at least met the Target. So once again I encourage governments and corporates to actively test just how much of a contribution each of their panel firms is making to the pro bono effort to bridge the yawning access to justice gap.”

The 15th 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, barristers, barristers’ chambers, in-house lawyers and legal teams can adopt by signing a [Statement of Principles](#).

Signatories to the Target agree to use their best efforts to provide the Target amount of “pro bono legal services” per lawyer per year. The Target is set at 35 hours per lawyer per year for most signatories, except in-house lawyers and teams that sign up to a 20-hour Target. Signatories report annually to the Centre on their performance against the Target.

For further information or comment, please contact Australian Pro Bono Centre CEO, Gabriela Christian-Hare, at gabriela@probonocentre.org.au.