



AUSTRALIAN
PRO BONO CENTRE

MEDIA RELEASE

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LARGE LAW FIRMS LAY OUT THE BUSINESS CASE FOR PRO BONO

The Australian Pro Bono Centre is pleased to release the results of the 8th National Law Firm Pro Bono Survey (the Survey), which demonstrate that the Australian legal pro bono community has continued to mature and grow in the last two years. The Survey signals broad recognition by the nation's largest law firms that pro bono legal work has benefits over and above providing opportunities for lawyers to fulfil their professional obligation to help satisfy unmet legal need.

The Survey has been conducted every two years since 2008, and forms part of a longitudinal study of pro bono legal work performed by Australian firms with 50 or more lawyers. Forty-seven firms responded to the 2022 Survey, collectively employing more than 15,000 full-time lawyers (the largest numbers on record).

Three results stand out from the 2022 Survey:

- Highest number of pro bono hours on record:** Law firms reported the highest total number of pro bono hours on record (564,530.7 hours, being a striking 23.5% more than the figure reported in 2020), and the highest number of average pro bono hours per lawyer on record (36.4 hours per lawyer, up from an average of 35.5 hours in 2020).
- More dedicated pro bono staff than ever before:** In 2022, 81% of responding firms indicated that they had at least one dedicated pro bono manager, being someone whose primary responsibility it was to coordinate their firm's pro bono legal work. Among the 10 largest firms, this figure was 100%. In total, firms reported employing 140.7 full-time equivalent dedicated pro bono staff, more than double the number reported in 2020.
- Increased recognition of the positive impacts of pro bono work:** A very significant majority of firms reported enjoying a wide range of positive impacts as a result of their pro bono practices, including opportunities for staff to develop additional skills (96% of responding firms), increased pride in the firm (91% of responding firms), increased staff satisfaction (83% of responding firms) and increased ability to attract new staff to the firm (74% of responding firms).

Despite these pleasing results, the 2022 Survey indicates that there is still room for growth within the pro bono practices of large firms. Most significantly, the average pro bono participation rate by staff at responding firms was reported at only 57%, having decreased marginally since 2020. This suggests that there are many individual practitioners in large law firms who are currently doing no pro bono legal work and who could benefit from more opportunities, encouragement, and incentives to do so.

"The 2022 Survey results highlight how institutionalised pro bono involvement has become in Australia's largest firms," Gabriela Christian-Hare, CEO of the Australian Pro Bono Centre, commented. *"Over 85% of Survey firms were on government panels with pro bono requirements and over 87% were asked to respond to questions about their pro bono practices when tendering to be on a corporate panel. Pro bono participation is also increasingly expected of individual lawyers, with 85% of firms recognising pro bono work*

in performance appraisals. Firms are looking to lawyers' pro bono participation when considering promotions, calculating bonuses and reviewing salaries," she remarked.

"We have seen record pro bono hours this year. In this unprecedented time in human history, firms are increasingly seeing the benefits of expanding their dedicated pro bono teams and providing lawyers in their firms with opportunities to use their talents and time to be part of the solution," Gabriela commented.

Significantly, only 26% of responding firms reported that they had worked with in-house counsel of a corporate or government client on a pro bono matter or project during the 2022 FY. This figure has declined since 2016, despite the growing number of in-house lawyers becoming involved in pro bono legal work in a structured way. *"The Centre has been encouraging in-house lawyer participation in pro bono for some years now. Obstacles include nervousness about 'diving in', and concern at the difficulty of sourcing work, so it is time law firms seized the opportunity to bond with their clients by partnering with in-house lawyers on pro bono projects,"* noted the Centre's Chair, Phillip Cornwell.

"The Survey Report provides wonderfully detailed insights into the state of pro bono in Australia and will reward study. Once again, participation rates are shrinking, not growing. It has been a busy time and law firms have cited capacity as a major constraint. Still, given the rewards of pro bono I'd like to see more firms encouraging greater participation," Phillip commented.

"Many thanks go to the Centre's team for a huge effort in conducting the Survey and compiling the Report. I also thank the law firms surveyed for taking the time to respond and for their continuing efforts in the public good," said Phillip.

You can read the 8th National Law Firm Pro Bono Survey Report [here](#).
Highlights from the Survey Report are available [here](#).

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