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Australian Lawyers Doing More Pro Bono Work, Survey Reveals

All of Australia's largest firms now have a dedicated pro bono manager.

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Pro Bono



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Australian lawyers are working more pro bono hours and firms have increased their dedicated pro bono staff, but there remains room for improvement, according to a biannual survey.

Lawyers at firms worked an average of 36.4 hours pro bono in 2022, up from 35.5 hours two years earlier, according to the National Law Firm Pro Bono Survey of 47 firms by the Australian Pro Bono Centre.

Four out of five firms said they had at least one dedicated pro bono manager—someone whose primary responsibility is to coordinate their firm's pro bono legal work. All of the 10 largest firms in Australia had a dedicated pro bono manager.

In total, firms reported employing 140.7 full-time equivalent dedicated pro bono staff—more than double the number reported in 2020, according to the survey, which has been conducted every two years since 2008.

“Overall, firms have emerged with strong pro bono practices that continue to assist the most vulnerable members of our society and the crucial not-for-profit and community organizations that support them,” the survey stated. “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.”

The average pro bono participation rate by staff at responding firms was reported at only 57%, a slight drop from 2020. This suggests that many individual practitioners at large law firms are currently doing no pro bono legal work and could benefit from more opportunities, encouragement, and incentives to do so, the report states.

Gabriela Christian-Hare, CEO of the Australian Pro Bono Centre, said pro bono participation is increasingly expected of

individual lawyers, with 85% of firms recognizing pro bono work in performance appraisals.

“Firms are looking to lawyers’ pro bono participation when considering promotions, calculating bonuses and reviewing salaries,” she said in a statement.

Only 26% of responding firms reported that they had worked with the in-house counsel of a corporate or government client on a pro bono matter or project during 2022.

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