



19 February 2008

\$250 million pro bono by Australian solicitors

About \$250 million of work was undertaken on a pro bono basis by Australian solicitors in 2007* and the figure continues to rise. On average, this amounts to every solicitor giving one week per year of their time free of charge to the community.

The figures come from a national survey launched today (19 February 2008), conducted by the National Pro Bono Resource Centre. It covers 887 solicitors from all states and territories, from the big and small end of town, from city to country and remote areas. It includes a range of practice areas, ages and levels of seniority.

Commenting on the legal profession's commitment to pro bono, Director of the Centre, John Corker, noted that the burgeoning support for pro bono can be attributed to the positive impact it has on solicitors as well as the broader community.

“Pro bono makes sense. Not only does it provide disadvantaged individuals and the organisations that support them with access to justice, it can be one of the most rewarding experiences in a solicitor's life. Almost every solicitor undertakes some form of pro bono work.”

Other key findings were:

- 80 percent of respondents conducted pro bono work in the previous 12 months.
- 52 percent reported an increase in pro bono work compared with the previous year.
- Solicitors spent an average of 42.5 hours doing pro bono work in the last year, with 60 percent undertaking more than 35 hours of pro bono work during the past 12 months.
- Solicitors are undertaking significant amounts of pro bono work in their own time as well as with their employer.
- 71 percent of solicitors thought that their law society should issue a policy statement about solicitors' commitment to pro bono. Of those, 87 percent thought that the statement should include a voluntary pro bono goal such as the National Pro Bono Aspirational Target**.

The survey revealed that solicitors are personally and professionally committed to assisting with access to justice. Some 90 percent of those who undertook pro bono work in the past year said they undertook pro bono to help the disadvantaged, followed by 85 percent who worked pro bono out of a sense of professional responsibility.

The main obstacle to delivering pro bono was lack of time, followed by insufficient expertise in relevant areas of law and lack of professional recognition.

Corker is not surprised. “While thousands of solicitors generously give their time, bottom-line business concerns, heavy workloads and personal career considerations force some solicitors to eschew their professional obligation”.

One theme that emerged from the survey is that solicitors undertaking pro bono need better support and recognition. Corker notes that although the support and recognition for pro bono appears to have improved in the past few years, more can be done. Many respondents from large firms called for greater recognition of the valuable contribution of their pro bono work, not just in their performance appraisal, but by giving full credit for pro bono work in relation to their billable and financial targets.

These obstacles have done little to dampen the enthusiasm for pro bono as 94 percent of respondents said that solicitors should undertake pro bono work.

*Based on 1,000,000 hours of pro bono work charged out at an average rate of \$250 per hour.

**In April 2007 the National Pro Bono Resource Centre launched the National Pro Bono Aspirational Target which established an aspirational target figure of at least 35 hours per year per lawyer for pro bono work. Over 3000 lawyers are now covered by this target.

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