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2.86 million pro bono hours: Australian legal profession's unique contribution to the nation

The Law Council of Australia is today celebrating the remarkable achievement of Australian lawyers in the pro bono sphere, with a staggering 2.86 million hours of free legal work provided over the past 10 years.

The Australian Pro Bono Centre has today released its [10th Annual Performance Report](#), showing that 420,195 hours of pro bono legal services were provided last financial year, up from 402,216 hours last year.

Law Council of Australia President, Fiona McLeod SC, said pro bono work by lawyers was a unique aspect of the legal profession.

“There is simply no other profession in the country with such an established culture of helping those who need it for free,” Ms McLeod said.

“Australian lawyers have given away millions of hours in the past decade to those who have no one else to turn to.

“The pro bono work undertaken by Australian lawyers is a matter of enormous pride for our profession.

“The hours our profession invests equates roughly to one week of unpaid work a year for every Australian lawyer. And we know the official numbers will tend to vastly under-represent the actual level of pro bono achieved by private practitioners. That’s a remarkable, and unrivalled, contribution.”

However, Ms McLeod said the pro bono efforts of Australian lawyers needed to be supported by properly funded legal assistance services if the nation’s access to justice crisis was to be addressed.

“The access to justice problem that has been created by the legal assistance funding crisis would be far worse were it not for the culture of pro bono ingrained deep in the Australian profession,” Ms McLeod said.

“Yet remarkable though this contribution is, we know pro bono cannot ever be a substitute for properly funded legal assistance services.

“Indeed, in order for pro bono to be truly effective a strong legal assistance sector is vital, especially the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and Community Legal Centres, both of are in fact predicated on a model which relies upon legal professionals to volunteer their time and their skills for free.

“It’s important the Government backs the lawyers who are backing Australians in need.”

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