

N E X T

THE POWER OF PRO BONO

**EVOLVING PURPOSE,
EXPANDING IMPACT**

Tidal Marks 1 by Marilyn Wallace-Mitchell

PRO BONO IS NOW
FIRMLY RECOGNISED
AS A CORE ELEMENT
OF RESPONSIBLE
LEGAL PRACTICE
- A PRACTICAL
DEMONSTRATION
OF THE LEGAL
PROFESSION'S
COMMITMENT TO THE
RULE OF LAW, EQUITY,
AND ACCESS TO
JUSTICE.

Its continuing significance is reflected in recent data, with the Australian Pro Bono Centre reporting that in FY2024 Australian law firms delivered over 781,000 hours of pro bono work. This equates to approximately 434 lawyers working full-time to support individuals and communities most in need.¹

AUTHORS



ELISE
PERRY

PRO BONO SENIOR
ASSOCIATE & MANAGER
SYDNEY

¹ 17th Annual Performance Report of the National Pro Bono Target, September 2024. Available online: [17th-National-Pro-Bono-Target-Report-2024.pdf](#)

This level of commitment is unlikely to dissipate in the coming years, with the primary area of focus increasingly on the so-called “missing middle”: individuals and entities who fall outside the eligibility thresholds for legal aid, yet lack the means to secure private legal representation. For many in this cohort, pro bono services constitute the only viable avenue to legal assistance – often making the difference between safety and harm, or stability and crisis.

The pro bono community has moved beyond the question of whether this work is necessary; the focus is now on how to maximise its depth and long-term impact. Increasingly, it is recognised that quantitative metrics—such as total hours—are not sufficient on their own. Leading initiatives are now measuring qualitative outcomes, including:

CLIENT OUTCOMES:

Did the client feel heard, safe and empowered?

COMMUNITY EFFECTS:

Was a harmful policy challenged or law reform advanced?

LAWYER WELLBEING:

Did the work energise and inspire, or contribute to fatigue and burnout?

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Did the work enhance cultural competency or offer systemic insight?

This data does not just justify the work – it shapes and refines it.

Contemporary pro bono efforts also increasingly extend beyond casework, with a growing focus on structural reform. This systemic approach recognises that while individual representation remains vital, lasting impact often requires engagement at the policy and institutional levels. Pro bono efforts are increasingly focused on supporting community partners with law reform submissions and strategic litigation aimed at challenging entrenched inequities. By identifying patterns in casework, such as recurring administrative barriers or discriminatory practices, lawyers can help drive broader legal and regulatory change. In doing so, firms contribute not only to individual justice, but to the transformation of the systems that perpetuate disadvantage.

This is being driven, in part, by a generation of lawyers for whom pro bono is not peripheral but central to their professional identity. For many early-career lawyers, it represents a vital connection to the values that brought them to the profession. Law firms that invest meaningfully in this area not only deliver tangible community benefit, but also foster engagement and retention by aligning with the expectations of purpose-driven legal professionals.

Technology is also reshaping how pro bono services are delivered. The rise of AI tools, digital triage platforms, and online legal resources is creating new opportunities for accessible, efficient service delivery, particularly in rural and regional areas. However, these benefits are not universal. Without sufficient digital literacy and infrastructure, technology risks reinforcing exclusion rather than overcoming it. The most effective initiatives will need to combine innovation with deep community engagement, trauma-informed practice, and culturally safe approaches.

While the practice of pro bono continues to evolve, the foundations of setting up an effective pro bono practice within a firm or in-house team remain consistent. Key enablers include visible senior leadership support, clear and supported pathways for lawyer participation, robust training (particularly in culturally competent and trauma-informed practice), strong partnerships with community organisations, and regular recognition of outcomes and contributions.

For KWM, each hour contributed is not simply a legal service, but a commitment to a fairer society. We are proud that through our pro bono efforts, our firm and practitioners alike are directly contributing to meaningful and lasting social change.



JOIN THE CONVERSATION



SUBSCRIBE TO OUR WECHAT COMMUNITY.
SEARCH: KWM_CHINA

Disclaimer

This publication provides information on and material containing matters of interest produced by King & Wood Mallesons. The material in this publication is provided only for your information and does not constitute legal or other advice on any specific matter. Readers should seek specific legal advice from KWM legal professionals before acting on the information contained in this publication.

Asia Pacific | North America

King & Wood Mallesons refers to the network of firms which are members of the King & Wood Mallesons network. See kwm.com for more information.

www.kwm.com

© 2025 King & Wood Mallesons