

National Pro Bono Day: Government must fund legal aid to back lawyers who back Australians in need

The Law Council of Australia is marking National Pro Bono Day by calling on the next Federal Government to better support the many lawyers who give up their time to offer help to Australians free of charge.

Law Council of Australia President, Stuart Clark AM, said the pro bono work performed by lawyers was a unique aspect of the profession.

“There is no other profession on earth with such a concerted and collaborative culture of helping others for free,” Mr Clark said.

“Australian lawyers give away literally hundreds of thousands of pro bono work hours every year to those who have no one else to turn to and cannot afford to pay for legal services.

“This equates to roughly one week of unpaid work each year for every lawyer in the country.”

However, Mr Clark warned against a mistaken attitude that pro bono is a substitute for properly funded legal aid services.

“Legal aid services, including Community Legal Centres and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, already significantly rely on pro bono lawyers,” Mr Clark noted.

“Many of those services are in fact predicated on a model which enables legal professionals to work for free. This is one of the reasons government cuts to legal aid, Community Legal Centres, and Indigenous legal services are so broadly damaging.”

The Law Council, along with the support of many legal and community organisations, has launched a campaign this week, calling on the Federal Government to properly fund legal aid.

The [Legal Aid Matters](#) campaign is holding events in every major capital, raising public awareness about the crisis in legal aid and the urgent need for the Federal Government to invest an additional \$350 million to give proper access to justice for ordinary Australians.

“Legal aid is the backbone of a modern, functioning justice system, but its funding is in crisis,” Mr Clark said.

“Pro bono lawyers are at the coalface of this systemic problem and will continue to give all that they can. But it is time for the next Federal Government to back the lawyers who are backing Australians in need.”

National Pro Bono Day will be marked by events held around the country that celebrate the contribution of lawyers and highlight the need for greater recognition and support of their important public service.

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