

WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S PRO BONO LEGAL SERVICE LAUNCHES FIRST IMPACT REPORT AND A NEW ACCESSIBLE WEBSITE

The Hon. Justice Jennifer Smith of the Supreme Court of Western Australia launched the first Law Access Impact Report (**attached**) at a function hosted by law firm MinterEllison on 2 December 2019.

The Report illustrates the vital and growing role that Law Access has in the WA justice system.

Funded legal assistance in WA is provided by Legal Aid, Aboriginal Legal Service and community legal centres, but those bodies never have sufficient funds to provide legal assistance for all those in need. They are obliged to “ration” supply. That leaves a gap. Some persons who cannot afford legal assistance, but have a meritorious case, would be compelled to either abandon their legal rights or attempt to act for themselves, often with very unfortunate outcomes, both for themselves and the courts.

Law Access was established by the WA Law Society in December 2014 in an endeavour to bridge that gap. It assesses applications for legal assistance and matches successful applicants with lawyers having the relevant skills and experience who are prepared to act pro bono (for no fee).

Those lawyers may work in civil, criminal or family law. They come from large and small firms as well as from the Bar. They generously volunteer their knowledge, skills and time because of their strong belief that no-one should be denied access to justice due to their lack of means.

The Honourable Malcolm McCusker AC, QC, Chairman of Law Access said on the occasion of the launch *“This impact model demonstrates the difference that pro bono lawyers make to the lives of vulnerable West Australians, and the important role they play within the justice system. Pro bono lawyers who have accepted referrals from Law Access have delivered, in the 2019 Financial Year, an estimated 4,650 hours or \$1.86m worth of pro bono legal assistance.”*

In addition to this important referral service, Law Access provides training, support and volunteer initiatives for lawyers and law students, and advocacy for law reform.

The new Lotterywest funded Law Access website lawaccess.org.au was launched at the same event. This website will make it easier for applicants to seek pro bono legal help, for lawyers to volunteer their services pro bono, and for service providers to refer their clients to Law Access.

Mr McCusker said: *“On behalf of Law Access, I thank all pro bono lawyers, and Law Access donors and sponsors, in particular the Western Australian Government, for their absolutely crucial support”.*

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