

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in New Zealand

Introduction

New Zealand's population of approximately 5.3 million¹ residents is served by approximately 17,010 practicing certificate holders, amongst which approximately 15,770 lawyers practice locally, with 1,240 based overseas holding a practicing certificate issued by the New Zealand Law Society ("NZLS").² Two thirds of law firms in New Zealand spend 1 - 5% of practice time on pro bono work, and the value of pro bono work in New Zealand is estimated to be between approximately NZ\$20 million and NZ\$100 million annually.³ Twenty-four Community Law Centres ("CLCs") provide certain categories of legal services at no cost to people who are unable to meet the cost of a private lawyer or do not have access to legal aid.⁴ Direct pro bono work undertaken by CLCs equates to up to NZ\$50 million annually.

At a glance

Minimum pro bono hours requirement for lawyers?	Specific pro bono licence required?	May foreign lawyers practice pro bono?	Insurance required for law firm pro bono?	Insurance required for in-house pro bono?	Rules to limit advertising pro bono work?	Does pro bono work count to CLE credit?	Limitations for in-house lawyers to do pro bono?
No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes

The landscape

Professional regulation	
1. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of legal services, including any licensing required to provide legal services. Please highlight any differences for lawyers working as in-house counsel.	The Lawyers and Conveyancers Act 2006

¹ See <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/national-population-estimates-at-30-june-2024-2018-base> (last visited on January 23, 2025).

² Snapshot of the Profession 2024, available at <https://www.lawsociety.org.nz/news/publications/lawtalk/lawtalk-issue-960/snapshot-of-the-profession-2024> (last visited on January 23, 2025).

³ Profession's Gift to the Community, Law Talk issue #820, page 5.

⁴ See <https://communitylaw.org.nz/our-law-centres/> (last visited on January 23, 2025).

	<p>(“LCA”)⁵, governs the provision of legal services in New Zealand. The NZLS regulates all New Zealand lawyers in the provision of legal services.</p> <p>Criteria for admission is completion of a law degree and a practical legal studies course, in each case approved by the New Zealand Council of Legal Education.⁶</p> <p>All lawyers are required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gain admission to the High Court of New Zealand as both a barrister and a solicitor;⁷ • obtain an annual practicing certificate from the NZLS; and • complete a minimum of ten hours of Continuing Professional Development each year.⁸ <p>An in-house lawyer may only provide legal services to their employer. An in-house lawyer is unable to provide legal services to members of the public, which includes customers or clients of their employer. These requirements are found in section 9 of the LCA (there are certain limited exceptions that are not relevant to the subject of this guidance).⁹</p>
Regulatory landscape for pro bono	
<p>2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>	<p>The same criteria are required, whether providing pro bono legal services or legal services to paying clientele.¹⁰</p> <p>Under the LCA, a lawyer may either be (i) an employed lawyer, i.e., employed by law firm or employed as in-house counsel by an entity that is not a law firm, or (ii) employed on his or her own account.¹¹</p> <p>An employed lawyer may provide legal services to the public through the law firm or own</p>

⁵ See <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2006/0001/latest/DLM364939.html> (last visited on January 23, 2025).

⁶ New Zealand Council of Legal Education, <https://nzcle.org.nz> (last visited on January 23, 2025).

⁷ Section 48(1), Lawyers and Conveyancers Act 2006.

⁸ Section 6, Lawyers and Conveyancers Act (Lawyers: Ongoing Legal Education – Continuing Professional Development) Rules 2013.

⁹ New Zealand Law Society, Guidance for lawyers undertaking pro bono work, available at <https://www.lawsociety.org.nz/professional-practice/practice-briefings/guidance-for-lawyers-undertaking-pro-bono-work/> (last visited on January 23, 2025).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

	<p>practice; an in-house lawyer is limited to the provision of legal services to their employer and cannot extend to the clients of the organization.¹²</p> <p>Thus, an in-house lawyer may not engage in the provision of pro bono legal services but a lawyer working on their own account or for a law firm may, provided the law firm agrees, take on pro bono work.</p> <p>Sections 10(5) and 31(4) of the LCA provide an exception to the restrictions referred to above in relation to the provision of legal services as a “volunteer”. The effect of these provisions is that, outside of employment by a lawyer practicing on his or her own account or in a law firm, an employed lawyer may provide legal services as a volunteer directly to the public through:¹³</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Law Centre (“CLC”); or Citizen’s Advice Bureau (“CAB”).
<p>3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?</p>	<p>Lawyers in New Zealand do not require any other license in addition to the regular license to practice law.</p>
<p>4. Do foreign-qualified lawyers need any additional license to provide pro bono services (beyond their foreign qualification to practice law)?</p>	<p>If you are a lawyer from another jurisdiction, you may provide legal services but generally you may not carry out work in any of the “reserved areas”. Both “legal services” and “reserved areas of work” are defined in section 6 of the LCA. In addition, section 25 of the LCA provides that an overseas lawyer may also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • do any work, or transact any business in New Zealand that concerns the law of another country or international law; or • provide legal services (including appearances) in New Zealand in relation to any proceedings before a court or other body if it is essential for the purposes of the proceedings that you have knowledge of the law of another country or international law.¹⁴ <p>An overseas lawyer practicing in New Zealand may describe themselves using the description</p>

¹² *Ibid*; see also section 9, The Lawyers and Conveyancers Act 2006.

¹³ New Zealand Law Society, Guidance for lawyers undertaking pro bono work, available at <https://www.lawsociety.org.nz/professional-practice/practice-briefings/guidance-for-lawyers-undertaking-pro-bono-work/> (last visited on January 23, 2025).

¹⁴ New Zealand Law Society, Overseas lawyers working in New Zealand, available at <https://www.lawsociety.org.nz/professional-practice/practice-briefings/overseas-lawyers-working-in-new-zealand/> (last visited on January 23, 2025).

	used in their home jurisdiction, subject to certain constraints. ¹⁵
5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?	Lawyers in New Zealand are not required to work a minimum number of pro bono hours.
6. Are aspiring lawyers required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers?	Aspiring lawyers in New Zealand are not required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services in order to become a licensed lawyer.
7. Aside from mandatory targets (if any), are there aspirational pro bono hours targets for lawyers set by the local bar association, regulatory body or other body?	<p>In a groundbreaking initiative, a number of New Zealand's law firms came together in 2024 to launch the Framework for Collaborative Pro Bono in Aotearoa. This first-of-its-kind national network aims to enhance access to justice for all New Zealanders by fostering collaboration and supporting pro bono culture across the country. The Collaborative Framework is a strategic network led by Te Ara Ture, the nation's first pro bono clearinghouse which is part of Community Law Centres Aotearoa, in collaboration with Buddle Findlay, DLA Piper, Gilbert Walker, Holland Beckett, Luke Cunningham Clere, Russell McVeagh and Simpson Grierson. Inspired by successful models such as the Australian Pro Bono Centre and the UK Collaborative Plan, the Collaborative Framework seeks to centralize pro bono efforts.</p> <p>Key objectives of the Collaborative Framework include:¹⁶</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration to motivate more pro bono work in New Zealand: The Collaborative Framework will create a cooperative approach to pro bono work and culture, with participating firms sharing ideas, goals and learnings and coordinating efforts to maximize impact; • Increased access to justice: Participating law firms will promote access to justice for low income and vulnerable people. By promoting pro bono through a New Zealand-specific

¹⁵ *Ibid*, see also section 25(2) of the LCA.

¹⁶ Launch of New Zealand's first national pro bono legal framework, accessed from <https://www.dlapiper.com/en/news/2024/11/launch-of-new-zealands-first-national-pro-bono-legal-framework> (last visited at January 23, 2025)

	<p>Framework, law firms can scale up pro bono services to address gaps in legal aid, provide representation and empower those who cannot afford legal assistance;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targets and benchmarking: Each participating law firm will agree to a voluntary aspirational pro bono target of at least 25 hours of pro bono legal work per full-time employee lawyer each year. Participating law firms will report against this target annually in an anonymous and de-identified format, allowing for benchmarking and guidance for the development of a strong pro bono ecosystem; and • Advocacy and education: Beyond individual cases, the network will advocate for systemic change and legal reform. Educational initiatives will raise awareness about pro bono work and encourage more lawyers to participate.
<p>8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?</p>	<p>Lawyers in New Zealand do not receive any “Continuing Legal Education” or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked.</p>
Insurance and advertising	
<p>9. Do lawyers need professional indemnity legal insurance cover for pro bono legal services they provide? Does the requirement differ for in-house lawyers?</p> <p>If insurance is required, can lawyers meet the requirement by working under the cover of another pro bono provider, e.g. in partnership with a private law firm or organization working on the same pro bono project?</p>	<p>In New Zealand, professional indemnity legal insurance cover is advised but not required when representing pro bono clients.¹⁷ A lawyer providing pro bono legal services in New Zealand should ensure that a limited retainer outlining the scope of their work is in place.¹⁸ This will inform the duty of care required in each pro bono case and ensure that the lawyer is not held responsible for issues arising outside the specified scope.¹⁹</p>

¹⁷ New Zealand Law Society, Guidance for lawyers undertaking pro bono work, available at <https://www.lawsociety.org.nz/professional-practice/practice-briefings/guidance-for-lawyers-undertaking-pro-bono-work/> (last visited on January 23, 2025).

¹⁸ New Zealand Law Society, Guidance to lawyers considering acting under a limited retainer, available at <https://www.lawsociety.org.nz/professional-practice/practice-briefings/guidance-to-lawyers-considering-acting-under-a-limited-retainer/> (last visited on January 23, 2025).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?	There are no rules in New Zealand that prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients.
Pro bono practice and culture	
11. What are the main areas of law which require or present opportunities for pro bono? What are the major unmet legal needs?	<p>The major unmet legal needs in New Zealand continue to be found in high need communities, with 10% of the population found to experience 75% of the volume of unmet legal needs.²⁰ These tend to be civil and administrative issues and often cluster together.</p> <p>In CLCs, the following areas of law are consistently the highest volume: employment, family, tenancy, immigration and consumer.²¹</p>
12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?	<p>The main providers of pro bono legal services in New Zealand are:</p> <p>a) CLCs: independent, either run as charitable trusts or incorporated NGOs.</p> <p>Generally, CLCs provide free legal consultation and representation to everyone, with a focus on individuals with limited financial resources. There are 24 CLCs across New Zealand and 120 outreach locations, covering major city centers as well as rural communities.</p> <p>The estimated value of CLCs value to the New Zealand community is approximately NZ\$30 to NZ\$50 million per annum,²²</p> <p>b) Law Firm Pro Bono Programs: many law firms have developed pro bono programs.²³ For example, Buddle Findlay publishes its To Tatou Tiakitanga (ours to care for all) report annually,²⁴ which highlights (amongst other things) the firm's pro bono practice; and</p> <p>c) Te Ara Ture: a pro bono clearing house that connects volunteer</p>

²⁰ Access to Justice: 2023 Legal Needs Survey, available at <https://www.justice.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Publications/Access-to-Justice-Legal-Needs-Survey-Final-Report-October-2024.pdf> (last visited January 23, 2025)

²¹ Community Law – where rubber meets the road, Law Talk issue #958, page 10

²² New Zealand Institute of Economic Research, NZIER report to Community Law Centres of Aotearoa, The value of investing in Community Law Centres, available at <http://communitylaw.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/The-value-of-investing-in-Community-Law-Centres-An-economic-investigation.pdf> (last visited on January 23, 2025)

²³ The two firms referenced are indicative of what the large firms are doing in the pro bono space.

²⁴ Buddle Findlay, To Tatou Tiakitanga "Ours to care for all", July 2023 – August 2024, available at <https://www.buddlefindlay.com/media/z5xcuhed/buddle-findlay-tiakitanga-report-august-2024.pdf>

	<p>lawyers with disadvantaged New Zealanders to make the justice system fairer and more accessible. Te Ara Ture is a division of Community Law Centres Aotearoa Incorporated.</p> <p>Other Pro Bono Programs:²⁵</p> <p>In the Employment Court in Auckland, there is a limited program that provides free assistance to persons without legal representation with the drafting and preparation of initial Court documents (either a statement of claim or statement of defense).²⁶</p> <p>University Student Legal Support:</p> <p>Various law schools across New Zealand have created their own pro bono legal advisory groups and volunteer committees which create opportunities for students to do pro bono service. An example of one is the “Equal Justice Project,” which provides student support to practitioners, interest organizations, and community groups.²⁷</p>
<p>13. Are there any noteworthy examples of how innovative technology or artificial intelligence is being used to enable access to pro bono or otherwise as part of pro bono cases or matters?</p>	<p>Many law firms have developed their own “chatbots” to assist with research and administrative tasks. For example Buddle Findlay has developed “Budbot”, an AI model developed to assist Buddle Findlay’s lawyers with simple and administrative tasks.</p> <p>It is expected that the development of such chatbots will speed up (and reduce the costs of) the delivery of legal work, with such benefits naturally extending to pro bono legal work.</p>
Sources of Pro Bono Opportunities and Key Contacts	
<p>14. Describe notable sources of pro bono matters or resources in your jurisdiction.</p>	<p>Many of New Zealand’s law firms provide legal advice on a pro bono basis. In addition, the Equal Justice Project pro bono team is a group of law students who provide support to practitioners, interest organizations, and community groups.²⁸</p>

²⁵ There are other programs not referenced here, but these are indicative.

²⁶ Employment Court of New Zealand, Pro Bono Legal Assistance Service (Auckland only), available at <https://www.employmentcourt.govt.nz/info-guidance/professional-help/> (last visited on January 23, 2025).

²⁷ Equal Justice Project, available at <https://www.equaljusticeproject.co.nz> (last visited January 23, 2025).

²⁸ <http://equaljusticeproject.co.nz/pro-bono/> (last visited on January 23, 2025).

15. Is there any public or private organization with which a local or foreign lawyer can register to be made aware of pro bono opportunities?	The pro bono clearing house Te Ara Ture (discussed above) provides a place where lawyers and law firms can register to provide pro bono legal services.
16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?	There is an “Access to Justice Award” issued by LexisNexis in conjunction with the New Zealand Bar Association, which is intended to recognize a New Zealander who has made an outstanding contribution to the promotion of access to justice ²⁹ .

Acknowledgements

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Name of Individual at Local Counsel: Grant Dunn and Josh Hitchcock

Learn more

[Navigate the full Global Pro Bono Guide](#) to explore the global landscape and pro bono practices and opportunities across 100+ jurisdictions.

²⁹ <https://nzbar.org.nz/news/2025-access-to-justice-award-winner> (Last viewed on 27 January 2026).