

The Impact of Pro Bono Services

ON PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CANCER

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Health professional



“I see such a change in people’s level of stress and an improvement in their ability to cope – which equates to better health outcomes.”

Client



“It was a great experience and really made me feel that I had someone in my corner.”

“This is an amazing program which really helps people during an extremely difficult time, I’m honoured to be able to help.”



Lawyer

Background

Increasing cancer incidence, decreasing mortality and increasing survival rates mean that more people are now living with, and after, a cancer diagnosis. This places a greater focus on the intense financial, emotional and practical consequences associated with living with cancer. An estimated 60% of people affected by cancer face distress from legal and financial challenges, in addition to health concerns.

Legal and financial needs often arise following a cancer diagnosis, and many people are unable to access professional services due to cost, illness or other barriers. The sequelae of these unmet needs are higher levels of stress and worry, financial burden and poorer wellbeing. In recognition of this, Cancer Council NSW established a National Pro Bono Program, which includes legal, financial, small business and workplace advisory services.

Aim

To investigate the impact of providing pro bono legal, financial and workplace services on the wellbeing of people affected by cancer.

Method

People referred to the service were sent a survey assessing: their pre-and-post understanding of their issues; their level of stress, financial burden and sense of control; whether their issues were resolved; and the main benefits received.

Results

The survey was completed by 205 people affected by cancer who used the service. Most people sought assistance for financial issues (including superannuation) and wills/powers of attorney. Eight in 10 noted that their problem had been resolved to their satisfaction.

After receiving assistance, participants reported statistically significantly lower levels of stress and worry, and less financial burden. They were also significantly more informed about the issues affecting them, had a better understanding of available options, and felt more in control.

Conclusions

The program helps people affected by cancer who would not otherwise be able to afford to access legal and financial services. The survey results demonstrate that:

- the program’s pro bono professionals are able to clarify and resolve many difficulties
- the program provides information, psychological and emotional support, and material benefit to people affected by cancer
- the program has a significant positive impact on users’ levels of distress.

