

Pro bono behind the scenes on the National Ventilator Project

 By [Shan Raddiffe](#)

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As doctors, nurses and other hospital staff work tirelessly on the frontlines of the war against Covid-19, R&D teams and legal experts band together to aid the fight in their own way.



Robert Appelbaum and team - Leanne Mostert, Megan Jarvis and Cameron MacKenzie

We speak to Robert Appelbaum, partner at Webber Wentzel, about the work he and his team - comprising Megan Jarvis, Leanne Mostert and Cameron MacKenzie - carried out on the National Ventilator Project.

■ **What is the National Ventilator Project?**

Robert Appelbaum: The project has entailed designing and building three local prototypes of non-invasive ventilators for mass local production. Non-invasive ventilators are desperately needed to treat most hospitalised Covid-19 patients with a mixture of pure oxygen and air delivered through a well-sealed mask or hood. The NVP will build 1,000 non-invasive ventilators a week to an initial target of 20,000.

■ **What was the role of your team on such an initiative?**

Appelbaum: Webber Wentzel advised Business for South Africa, the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition and the South African Radio Astronomy Observatory (SARAO) on a pro bono basis. They provided hundreds of hours of time, giving advice on the choice of outside experts, drafting, negotiation and settlement of the prototype and manufacturing agreements required for the NVP. In addition to this, Webber Wentzel assisted in ensuring the non-invasive ventilators were registered by the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA).

■ **Your team collectively spent hundreds of hours on this project at no charge... Why offer your services pro bono for such a huge endeavour?**

Appelbaum: Webber Wentzel donated its time and expertise in the conviction that its efforts will ultimately be for the benefit of hundreds of thousands of people that may be affected by Covid-19 before this crisis is over, and will help to save the lives of our fellow South Africans. Our firm is deeply committed to South Africa and to making a positive difference. We do a lot of incredible work like this on a pro basis, owning our part of working towards a better life for all. This is one of many projects we have worked on related to Covid-19 – another one has been helping the rising people who have been illegally evicted over this time. [Read more...](#)



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■ *Tell us a bit about your own experience on the project and what it means to you?*

Appelbaum: This was one of the most stressful engagements I have been involved in given the urgency of the matter, but it has also been one of the most gratifying. This work will directly help and support our essential services teams, our valued doctors and nurses, to save lives.

■ *How do you believe we, as South Africans, can stay united in the face of the pandemic?*

Appelbaum: We can stay united by working together to find new and innovative solutions to fight the pandemic, to build the economy and to curb negative stigmatism which people who have tested Covid-19 positive may face. In this case, business (through Business for South Africa) worked with government (the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition) to jointly find solutions to sort out South Africa's local manufacturing of pretty much everything South Africa will require to fight the pandemic. This saves lives, creates jobs and stimulates the local economy.

ABOUT SHAN RADCLIFFE

Shan Radcliffe is the editor of Bizcommunity HR, Education and Legal.

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