

Key findings for lawyer wellbeing

Research was conducted in 2024 by a team of researchers from the Australian National University and the University of Melbourne – Vivien Holmes (lead researcher), Julian Webb, Stephen Tang, Susan Ainsworth, and Tony Foley. The research report was published in 2025 and provides a valuable analysis of the wellbeing of lawyers in Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia. Alongside wellbeing, other workplace factors explored include lawyer's experiences of incivility, perceptions of ethical climate, intention to leave and organisational psychosocial supports.

The results:

Core concepts and themes



Ethical Climate

How lawyers perceive the ethical climate of their current workplace



Psychological Distress

Negative mental health states (includes anxiety and depressive symptoms)



Incivility

Low intensity behaviours that are in violation of workplace norms of mutual respect and with unclear intent



Positive Wellbeing

Measuring elements that have been identified as the building blocks of positive wellbeing at work



Psychosocial supports

Provision of organisational psychological and social supports to staff

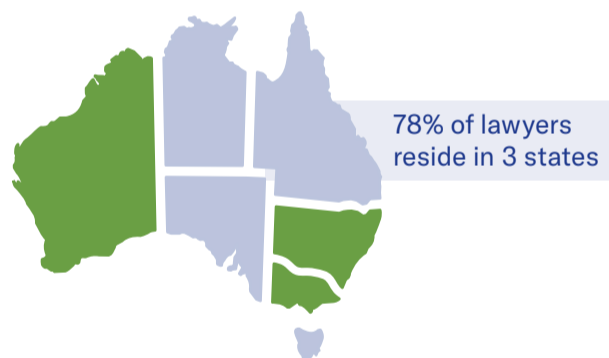


Intention to leave

Intention to leave their current employer or the profession within the next 12 months

New insights and a pathway for action

The results show that there is a need to improve lawyer wellbeing. It also shows that the organisations that do have a positive ethical climate, civil workplace behaviours and effective organisational supports have lawyers who experience less distress and more positive wellbeing.



A shared experience across the legal profession:

Results for all key measures were similar for lawyers across Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia. This highlights the opportunity to work collaboratively for positive wellbeing change across jurisdictions.

The results:

A shared direction forward

Priority areas of focus and reflection for further consideration:

- ✓ Management approach appears to be a key factor in both positive and negative lawyer wellbeing, as well as intention to leave.
- ✓ The first 5 years of practice are a critical period. Wellbeing results are lower for this group, and experiences of incivility are higher.
- ✓ Measuring positive wellbeing provides new data for the legal profession. It can be used to measure, target and evaluate effective actions.
- ✓ Principal practicing certificate holders are also reporting high levels of psychological distress – suggesting that mental health of lawyers requires effective change at the top.
- ✓ Ethically engaged organisational cultures and wellbeing are seen to occur together in this research.

Researcher insight:

“For those interested in the sustainability of the legal workforce, targeted attention to improving lawyers’ experiences of the first 5 years of practice, as well as (or indeed through) the quality of management should be a priority.” (page 41)

Respondent experience:

“More and more is expected each year on year which is leading to proportionately diminishing work-life balance.” (page 33)