



Generative AI Use in the Legal Profession: Findings from the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census

Research Brief

Victorian Legal Services
BOARD + COMMISSIONER

Legal Services
Research Centre

Overview

The 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census was a voluntary online survey distributed to all Victorian lawyers holding practising certificates, with 1,887 lawyers responding. It sought to explore systemic issues affecting the legal profession, including the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI). This brief and accompanying report¹ examines how lawyers use AI, the challenges and risks they associate with it, and what the current patterns of use mean for the profession and those who depend on legal services.

1. For the full report, see Legal Services Research Centre, *Generative AI Use in the Legal Profession: Findings from the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census*. Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, 2026.

Use of AI in legal practice

Just over one third (37%) of respondents reported using AI tools in their legal practice, with over half of these doing so daily or weekly. Use was most common among those aged under 30 (49%) and generally decreased with age and years of practice. Use was also notably higher among those who spoke a language other than English at home (48%).

Adoption varied considerably by practice setting. Barristers (15%) and government legal practitioners (11%) reported markedly lower AI use than other practising certificate types, while those working for non-legal employers (54%), incorporated legal practices (48%) and law firms (46%) reported the highest rates. Sole practitioners, community sector workers and government employees reported far lower rates. Among practice areas, IT/telecommunications, trade practice, intellectual property, small business and corporate law all exceeded 50% adoption, while criminal law, administrative law and advocacy sat well below 30%.

AI tools and purpose of use

General-purpose AI tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and Copilot were by far the most widely used (65%), with commercially available legal AI tools attracting far lower rates of use. AI tools were most commonly used for background research on non-legal issues, legal research and case analysis, and client communication, followed by document review, transcription and contract drafting. The most common forms of use were therefore in information-gathering, drafting and administration, rather than legal decision-making or the production of court documents.

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Barriers to adoption and quality assurance

Almost half of non-users cited data, privacy and security concerns as their primary reason for not using AI, followed by the absence of clear legal and ethical guidelines. Some noted that their organisation had yet to develop an AI policy or that governance frameworks were still being developed. Others raised concerns about AI hallucinations and poor-quality outputs, environmental costs, or reported that their workplace simply prohibited AI use.

Among those who did use AI, the majority (89%) reported taking steps to ensure accuracy. Cross-checking against other sources was the most common practice, followed by checking specifically for AI hallucinations and consulting colleagues or experts.

Training, guidance and workplace guidelines

Half of all respondents had received AI training in the past year, though rates were much higher among users (72%) than non-users (38%). There was significant demand for further training, with the greatest interest in using AI to enhance workflow and efficiency, and in safe and ethical use. Non-users showed stronger interest in foundational topics such as how AI works, while users were more interested in applied skills such as prompt writing.

Sixty per cent of respondents had not read the Supreme and County Court of Victoria's guidelines on responsible use of AI in litigation or the VLSB+C's Statement on the use of artificial intelligence in Australian legal practice, including close to half of those who were already using AI. Workplace AI guidelines existed for 42% of respondents, and were more common in settings with higher adoption, particularly among in-house counsel and those working for non-legal employers.

Attitudes, risks and benefits

Nearly all respondents agreed (95%) that lawyers have a duty to ensure AI use complies with professional obligations, and most respondents indicated that AI use should be disclosed to clients and in litigation. Just over half agreed that AI is a necessary element of modern legal practice, despite only just over a third currently using it.

Accuracy, privacy and security were the most widely recognised risks, alongside concerns about transparency, intellectual property, copyright and bias. Fears about AI replacing lawyers ranked lowest, with only 33% perceiving it as a risk. Non-users exhibited heightened risk perception across almost all dimensions except inaccuracy, where perceptions were comparable between groups.

Regarding perceived benefits, AI was perceived primarily as a tool for workflow optimisation rather than service improvement. Enhanced efficiency and productivity was the only area of AI benefit for which a majority agreed (71%). Far fewer associated AI with enhancing affordability (46%), accessibility (45%), quality (31%) or client satisfaction (26%). Importantly, exposure to training and workplace guidelines was associated with greater recognition of benefits without a corresponding increase in risk perception. The data also suggest that a threshold of perceived benefit must be met before adoption occurs: risk concerns can be outweighed, but low risk alone is insufficient to drive adoption.

Looking ahead

The findings point to three emerging challenges. First, general-purpose AI use, particularly for tasks extending beyond information-gathering to legal analysis and application, is concentrated among newer entrants to the profession, and while users generally appear aware of quality limitations and report taking mitigation steps, questions remain about the impact on the development and retention of core professional skills.

Second, lawyers working outside traditional legal practice settings (in-house, for non-legal employers or within incorporated practices) may face tensions where enterprise-level AI guidelines are not attuned to legal professional obligations, or prioritise organisational objectives in ways that conflict with them. With awareness of court and regulator guidance comparatively low, lawyers in these settings may be less well placed to identify where workplace policies diverge from their professional obligations.

Third, current adoption patterns suggest AI's benefits are both narrowly conceived and unevenly distributed, with applications that could improve service quality, affordability and accessibility, such as translating complex legal concepts for lay clients, enhancing triage and intake, or enabling service unbundling, remaining largely unexplored. Without deliberate effort to broaden how the benefits of AI are conceived and to whom they flow, current adoption patterns risk embedding existing advantage rather than making legal services more accessible and equitable.