

2026

# Canadian In-House Lawyer Salary Report

Presented By

Counselwell ZSA



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# Introduction



**Counselwell** and **ZSA Legal Recruitment** are pleased to present the 2026 Canada In-House Lawyer Salary Report. This report is designed to provide clear, practical compensation benchmarks for the Canadian in-house legal community. The findings are based on a limited data set and should be used as a guideline only, as individual compensation may also be influenced by factors not captured in this survey, such as role scope, performance, and organizational context.

## About Counselwell

**Counselwell** is a professional community for in-house lawyers focused on career growth, connection, and practical support. Members have access to in-person events across Canada and the United States, live and on-demand programming, CPD opportunities, peer and mentorship groups, curated resources, and member benefits.

Visit our [site](#) to learn more about the Counselwell membership.

## About ZSA Legal Recruitment

**ZSA Legal Recruitment** is Canada's largest national legal recruitment firm specializing in the headhunting, recruitment and placement of lawyers, legal support staff and law firm management.

ZSA partners with Canadian and international law firms and organizations of all sizes, serving as their ambassador and trusted advisor and spearheading efforts to recruit top legal talent to fulfill their hiring needs. ZSA's experienced team of highly-skilled recruiters and headhunters work closely with clients to solve complex talent acquisition challenges by utilizing industry-leading techniques to source, headhunt and proactively search the market for top-notch legal professionals.

Visit [zsa.ca](#) to learn more.



# Summary & Key Findings

The 2026 Canada In-House Lawyer Salary Report is based on 780 responses from in-house lawyers across Canada and reflects continued upward pressure on compensation alongside growing structural gaps. Base salaries increased across most provinces, seniority levels, and organization types, with the strongest gains concentrated in senior leadership roles. Compensation outcomes remain closely tied to seniority, scope, workload, and organizational context.

Several themes emerge from this year's data. While most in-house lawyers report feeling reasonably compensated relative to colleagues within their own organizations, a significant portion perceive their pay as less competitive when compared to peers in similar roles elsewhere. This disconnect is reflected in elevated mobility risk, with the vast majority of respondents indicating they would consider leaving their role for higher pay. At the same time, pay equity concerns have intensified, with gender and minority pay gaps widening in 2026 and appearing earlier in lawyers' careers than in prior years.

The data also highlights meaningful trade-offs in in-house careers. The highest compensation levels are associated with senior roles that carry broader scope, longer working hours, and, increasingly, hybrid or fully on-site expectations. Expanded responsibilities below the General Counsel level do not consistently translate into higher base pay, suggesting that additional scope is often absorbed without commensurate compensation until roles reach the executive level. Overall, the findings point to a market in which compensation is rising, but pressure around equity, sustainability, and retention continues to build.

- Median base salaries increased year over year in most major provinces, rising from \$185,000 to \$195,000 in Ontario, \$175,000 to \$181,000 in Alberta, and \$191,000 to \$206,000 in British Columbia, while Quebec saw a decline from \$156,000 to \$150,000.
- The strongest gains observed in base salaries are concentrated among senior leadership roles. Nationwide average base salary reached approximately \$261,000 for lawyers admitted to the Bar between 1980-1999, compared to \$138,000 for those admitted between 2020-2025.
- General Counsel roles have the greatest compensation upside beyond base salary, with a larger proportion of total compensation delivered through bonuses and equity compared to other in-house positions.
- While 70% of respondents report that their compensation is reasonable and 81% feel they are paid fairly within their own legal department, 40% do not believe they are paid fairly compared to peers in similar roles elsewhere.
- Mobility risk remains high, with 90% of respondents indicating they would consider leaving their current role for higher pay, including 37% who would do so definitively.



RESPONDENTS



BASE SALARY INCREASES



WOULD LEAVE FOR HIGHER PAY

# Summary & Key Findings

- The overall gender pay gap widened to 13% in 2026, with average base salaries of approximately \$209,000 for men compared to \$185,000 for women. Notably, a comparable 12% gap now appears among lawyers in their first five years of practice.
- Respondents who self-identified as members of a visible minority reported an average base salary of approximately \$182,000, compared to \$203,000 for non-minority respondents, reflecting a persistent 12% gap.
- Work arrangement alone does not determine compensation, but at senior levels the highest pay is more commonly observed in hybrid and fully on-site roles. Among lawyers admitted to the Bar between 1980-1999, average base salary ranged from approximately \$208,000 in remote roles to over \$304,000 in fully on-site positions, as the share of overall on-site roles increased to 16% in 2026.
- Private practice experience is associated with higher in-house compensation. Respondents with prior private practice experience reported an average base salary of approximately \$202,000, compared to \$173,000 for those without such experience.
- Across bar-admission cohorts, the highest average base salaries are generally observed among lawyers with 5-9 years of prior private practice experience. Among respondents admitted between 1980-1999, this group reported average base salaries of approximately \$295,000, compared to roughly \$221,000 for those with 1-4 years of prior private practice experience and \$256,000 for those with 10+ years.
- Longer tenure at a single organization is associated with higher compensation, with average base salary increasing from approximately \$185,000 for those in their first four years to \$244,000 for those with 10-14 years in role. The highest reported salaries among those with 20+ years at the same organization likely reflect a small group of highly senior roles.
- Expanded job scope below the General Counsel level does not consistently translate into higher base pay. For example, Legal Counsel roles with strictly legal responsibilities average approximately \$148,000, compared to \$133,000-\$143,000 for Legal Counsel roles with additional non-legal functions.
- A meaningful compensation premium for expanded scope emerges primarily at the General Counsel level, where roles encompassing governance, compliance, ESG, or risk management report average base salaries approaching or exceeding \$290,000, compared to approximately \$252,000 for GC roles focused solely on legal work.



GENDER  
PAY GAP



MINORITY  
PAY GAP



EXPERIENCE &  
TENURE BOOST PAY

# Survey Design & Data Methodology

Counselwell and ZSA Legal Recruitment conducted an online survey throughout December 2025 - January 2026. We sent the survey to our email lists, posted about it on LinkedIn, and ran advertisements in the Ontario Reports.

In total, we received 780 responses from Canada-based in-house lawyers, representing a 3% increase from last year's 759 responses.

Our survey asked approximately 36 questions collecting data points such as job title, years of experience, province and city of work, base salary, bonus, stock options, other benefits, and compensation satisfaction. We provided the option for respondents to enter their emails if they wanted to receive a copy on the date of publication of this report. All personal information collected by Counselwell and ZSA is kept strictly confidential.

The report utilizes average as the main method of standardization for the data, although we use median where appropriate (for example, if an outlier skews the results). We round up or down to the nearest percentage point, which means that sometimes the totals don't equal 100%.

Job titles are grouped into four categories:

1. Legal Counsel / In-House Counsel / Junior Legal Counsel
2. Senior Legal Counsel
3. Deputy/Associate/Assistant General Counsel, and
4. General Counsel / Chief Legal Officer / VP, Legal

In recognition that job titles are not always applied consistently across organizations, additional filters were applied based on original Bar admission date:

- Senior Legal Counsel: We excluded lawyers originally called to the Bar between 2023-2026
- Deputy General Counsel: We excluded lawyers originally called to the Bar between 2018-2026
- General Counsel: We excluded lawyers originally called to the Bar between 2015-2026

Province-specific compensation insights are provided for Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, and Quebec, where response volumes were sufficient to support reliable analysis. We also include separate compensation insights for the Greater Toronto Area. In all sections labeled "nationwide," compensation data reflects responses from all provinces and territories.



**QUESTIONS**



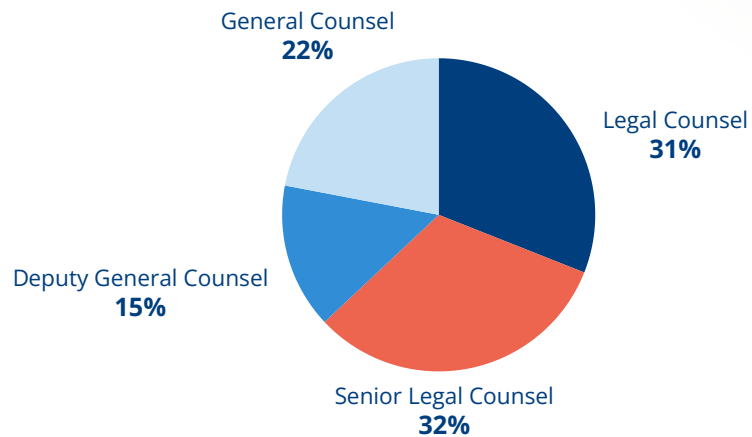
**JOB TITLE BUCKETS**



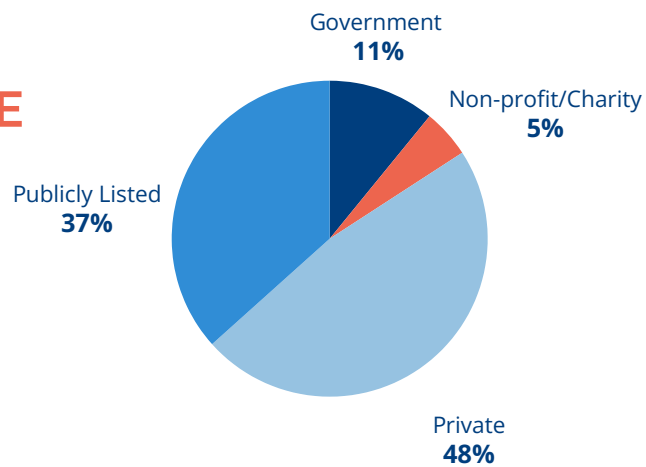
**PROVINCE  
SPECIFIC CHARTS**

# Demographics of Survey Respondents

## RESPONSE BY POSITION

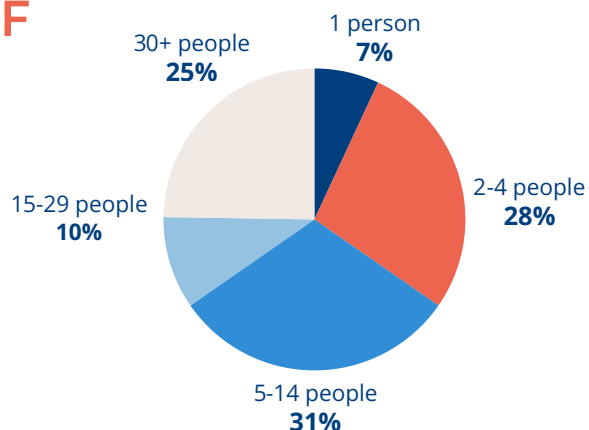


## RESPONSE BY ORGANIZATION TYPE

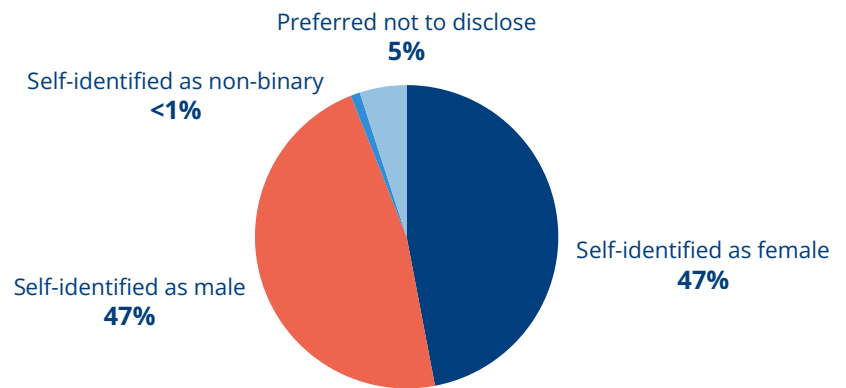


## RESPONSE BY SIZE OF LEGAL DEPARTMENT

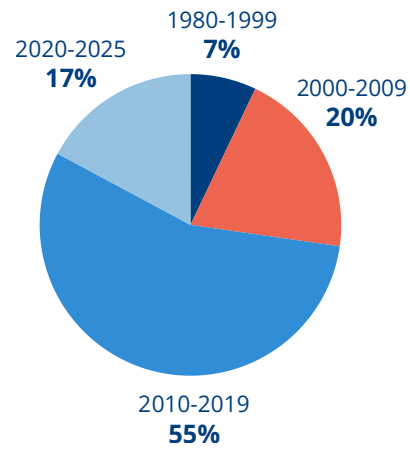
Note: Includes total number of people in the legal department (lawyers, legal ops, clerks, paralegals, students, etc.)



## RESPONSE BY GENDER



## RESPONSE BY ORIGINAL BAR ADMISSION DATE



# Total Compensation by Province (Ontario, Alberta, BC, Quebec only)



## ONTARIO

The median base salary in Ontario is **\$195,000**, up from **\$185,000** in 2025.

	LEGAL COUNSEL			SENIOR LEGAL COUNSEL		
	2024	2025	2026	2024	2025	2026
Average base salary	\$138,471	\$146,105	<b>\$149,665</b>	\$186,267	\$185,360	<b>\$194,278</b>
Average target bonus	\$29,197	\$26,216	<b>\$25,362</b>	\$42,755	\$41,354	<b>\$42,379</b>
Average value of stock options at time of award	\$29,860	\$35,976		\$83,106	\$48,603	
Average value of vested equity in 2025			<b>\$19,642</b>			<b>\$142,492 or \$63,379</b> if we remove a single outlier
Total realized compensation in 2025			<b>\$164,822</b>			<b>\$260,119 or \$238,868</b> if we remove a single outlier

	DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL			GENERAL COUNSEL		
	2024	2025	2026	2024	2025	2026
Average base salary	\$202,173	\$228,428	<b>\$234,433</b>	\$260,005	\$271,209	<b>\$288,018</b>
Average target bonus	\$52,877	\$72,595	<b>\$68,930</b>	\$105,614	\$123,659	<b>\$115,949</b>
Average value of stock options at time of award	\$54,188	\$59,603		\$297,444	\$272,608	
Average value of vested equity in 2025			<b>\$67,010</b>			<b>\$318,437 or \$191,174</b> if we remove a single outlier
Total realized compensation in 2025			<b>\$317,225</b>			<b>\$444,045 or \$407,253</b> if we remove two outliers



# ALBERTA

The median base salary in Alberta is **\$181,000**, up from **\$175,000** in 2025.

	LEGAL COUNSEL			SENIOR LEGAL COUNSEL		
	2024	2025	2026	2024	2025	2026
Average base salary	\$152,108	\$149,203	<b>\$154,283</b>	\$178,438	\$191,677	<b>\$189,418</b>
Average target bonus	\$26,750	\$29,522	<b>\$44,075</b>	\$33,660	\$45,500	<b>\$43,218</b>
Average value of stock options at time of award	\$43,750	\$28,010		\$28,595	\$26,735	
Average value of vested equity in 2025			<b>\$60,333</b>			Sample size <5
Total realized compensation in 2025			<b>\$185,848</b>			<b>\$229,742</b>

	DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL			GENERAL COUNSEL		
	2024	2025	2026	2024	2025	2026
Average base salary	Sample size <5	\$204,800	<b>\$235,333</b>	\$605,500 or \$314,000 if we remove a single outlier	\$250,286	<b>\$293,333</b>
Average target bonus	Sample size <5	Sample size <5	<b>Sample size &lt;5</b>	\$152,250	Sample size <5	<b>Sample size &lt;5</b>
Average value of stock options at time of award	Sample size <5	Sample size <5		\$2,016,667	Sample size <5	
Average value of vested equity in 2025			<b>Sample size &lt;5</b>			<b>Sample size &lt;5</b>
Total realized compensation in 2025			<b>\$330,500</b>			<b>\$470,094 or \$384,625</b> if we remove a single outlier



# BRITISH COLUMBIA

The median base salary in British Columbia is **\$206,000**, up from **\$191,000** in 2025.

	LEGAL COUNSEL			SENIOR LEGAL COUNSEL		
	2024	2025	2026	2024	2025	2026
Average base salary	\$141,250	\$162,321	<b>\$153,099</b>	\$163,000	\$179,222	<b>\$189,578</b>
Average target bonus	\$20,250	\$33,607	<b>\$23,007</b>	\$60,000	Sample size <5	<b>\$53,750</b>
Average value of stock options at time of award	\$46,375	\$17,400		Sample size <5	Sample size <5	
Average value of vested equity in 2025			Sample size <5			<b>\$22,041</b>
Total realized compensation in 2025			<b>\$171,183</b>			<b>\$213,821</b>

	DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL			GENERAL COUNSEL		
	2024	2025	2026	2024	2025	2026
Average base salary	\$232,157	Sample size <5	<b>\$235,253</b>	\$281,667	\$284,615	<b>\$269,175</b>
Average target bonus	\$63,220	Sample size <5	Sample size <5	\$238,750	\$188,060	<b>\$93,660</b>
Average value of stock options at time of award	\$80,000	Sample size <5		\$331,250	Sample size <5	
Average value of vested equity in 2025			Sample size <5			<b>\$121,000</b>
Total realized compensation in 2025			<b>\$369,000</b>			<b>\$344,697</b>



## QUEBEC

The median base salary in Quebec is **\$150,000**, down from **\$156,000** in 2025.

*\*The decline in Quebec's median base salary reflects respondent mix, with Legal Counsel and Senior Legal Counsel roles accounting for approximately 70% of the 2026 sample, rather than a broad-based reduction in compensation levels.*

	LEGAL COUNSEL			SENIOR LEGAL COUNSEL		
	2024	2025	2026	2024	2025	2026
Average base salary	\$109,901	\$126,176	<b>\$121,213</b>	\$146,267	\$158,142	<b>\$153,696</b>
Average target bonus	\$15,879	\$21,601	<b>\$17,750</b>	\$28,042	\$31,490	<b>\$21,376</b>
Average value of stock options at time of award	\$12,583	\$38,460		\$102,333	\$46,800	
Average value of vested equity in 2025			Sample size <5			<b>\$71,250 or \$7,857</b> if we remove a single outlier
Total realized compensation in 2025			<b>\$131,091</b>			<b>\$178,314</b>

	DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL			GENERAL COUNSEL		
	2024	2025	2026	2024	2025	2026
Average base salary	\$193,631	\$183,781	<b>\$202,250</b>	\$252,778	\$235,222	<b>\$245,500</b>
Average target bonus	\$37,000	\$35,329	<b>\$41,700</b>	\$98,943	\$99,208	<b>\$115,339</b>
Average value of stock options at time of award	\$320,438	\$53,829		\$356,143	\$150,438	
Average value of vested equity in 2025			Sample size <5			<b>\$148,389</b>
Total realized compensation in 2025			<b>\$255,375</b>			<b>\$398,479</b>



# TOTAL COMPENSATION BY CITY (Greater Toronto Area only)

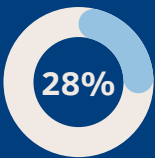
The median base salary in the GTA is **\$200,000**.

	LEGAL COUNSEL	SENIOR LEGAL COUNSEL	DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL	GENERAL COUNSEL
Average base salary	\$150,064	\$196,048	\$238,991	\$286,895
Average target bonus	\$26,071	\$43,382	\$72,990	\$118,343
Average value of vested equity in 2025	\$23,018	\$148,178 or \$64,578 if we remove a single outlier	\$71,607	\$334,754 or \$190,880 if we remove a single outlier
Total realized compensation in 2025	\$165,337	\$267,315 or \$243,148 if we remove a single outlier	\$328,283	\$455,849 or \$412,839 if we remove two outliers

## PAY RAISES (NATIONWIDE)



72% of respondents received a raise in 2025



28% of respondents did not receive a raise in 2025

The most common raise was between **3.0% - 5.9%**

Of those who received a raise:

Amount of 2025 Raise	Percentage of Respondents who Received a Raise
0.3% - 2.9%	21%
3.0% - 5.9%	51%
6.0% - 9.9%	11%
10.0% - 14.9%	11%
15.0%+	6%

## BONUSES AND STOCK OPTIONS (Nationwide)

	LEGAL COUNSEL			SENIOR LEGAL COUNSEL		
	2024	2025	2026	2024	2025	2026
% with a <b>target</b> bonus structure	40%	40%	39%	59%	58%	57%
% with a <b>discretionary</b> bonus structure	34%	35%	40%	34%	28%	29%
% with <b>no</b> bonus structure	26%	24%	22%	7%	15%	14%

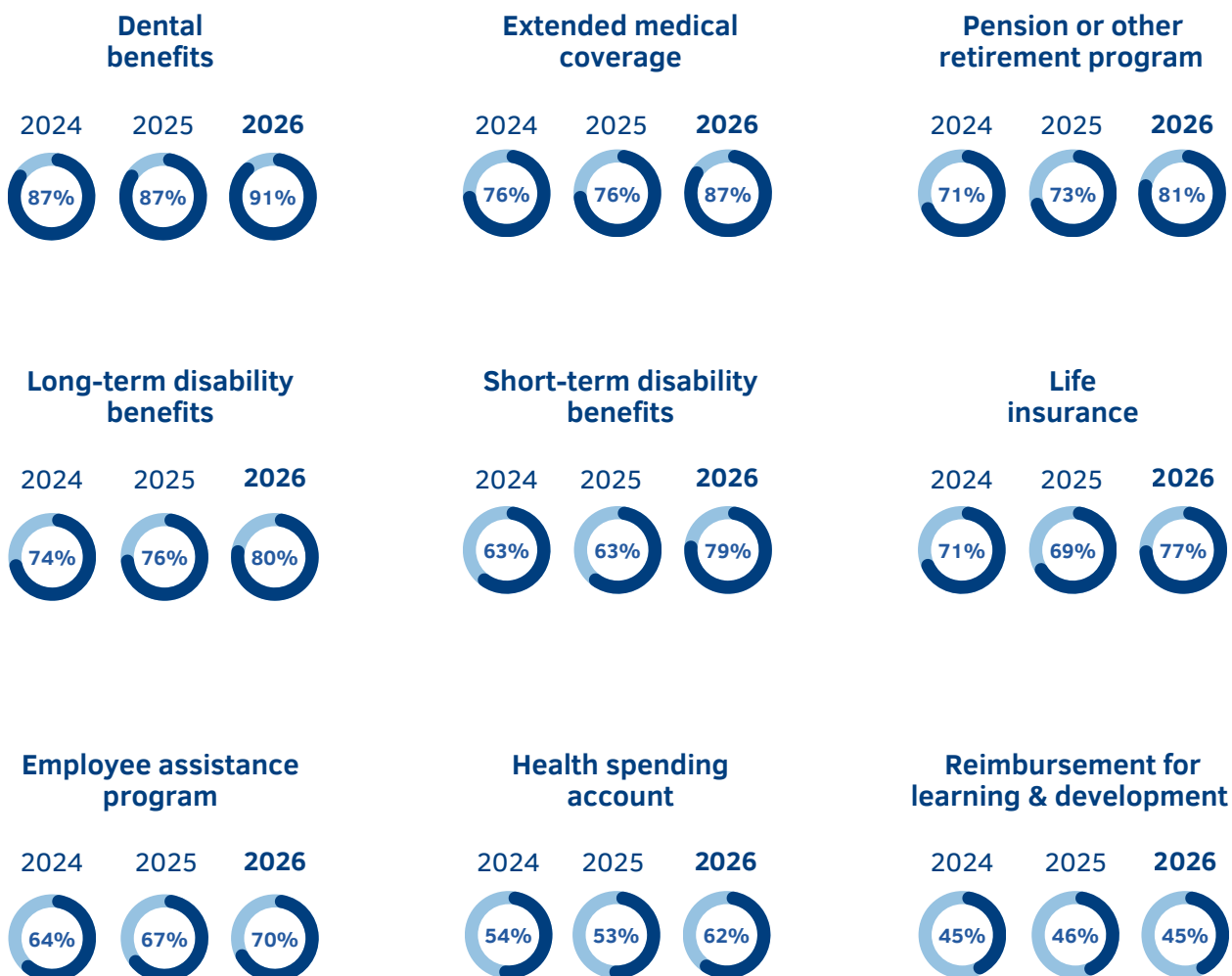
	DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL			GENERAL COUNSEL		
	2024	2025	2026	2024	2025	2026
% with a <b>target</b> bonus structure	68%	81%	70%	75%	66%	65%
% with a <b>discretionary</b> bonus structure	28%	12%	19%	18%	22%	23%
% with <b>no</b> bonus structure	4%	7%	11%	7%	12%	12%

# DETAILS OF OTHER BENEFITS (Nationwide)

(Medical, Dental, Retirement Plan, etc.)

Core benefits offerings among in-house legal teams have expanded steadily since 2024, particularly in health, disability, and retirement coverage. By 2026, extended medical coverage rose from 76% to 87% and pension or retirement programs from 71% to 81%, while newly tracked benefits such as wellness stipends and remote work stipends remain less common and parental leave top-ups have declined modestly over the same period.

Certain benefits were newly introduced as survey questions in 2026 and therefore are not available for comparison to prior years.



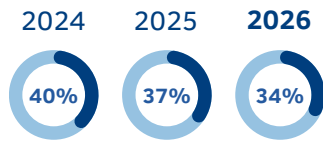
# DETAILS OF OTHER BENEFITS (Nationwide)

(Medical, Dental, Retirement Plan, etc.)

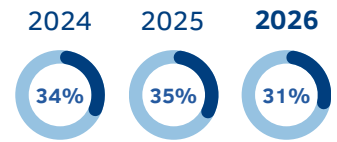
## Wellness/fitness stipend



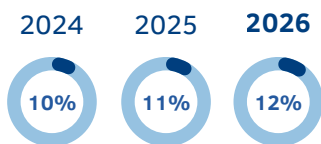
## Parental leave top-up



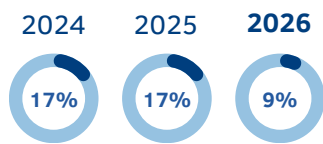
## Employee referral program



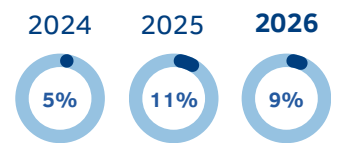
## Parking allowance



## Executive health plan



## Car allowance



## Subsidized meals



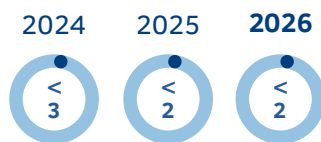
## Moving/relocation expense reimbursement



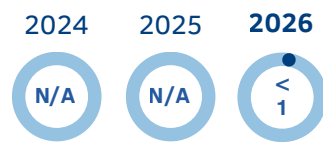
## Remote work stipend



## No benefits at all



## Subsidized childcare



# COMPENSATION SATISFACTION



While most in-house lawyers report feeling reasonably compensated, the data suggests that satisfaction is conditional rather than secure. Seventy percent of respondents indicated that their compensation is reasonable, and a strong majority (81%) feel they are paid fairly relative to others within their legal department. However, perceptions shift when looking beyond the organization: 40% of respondents do not believe they are paid fairly compared to peers in similar roles elsewhere.

This tension is reflected in mobility risk. Despite generally positive views of internal fairness, 90% of respondents indicated they would consider leaving their current role for higher pay, including 37% who would do so definitively. Taken together, the results suggest that while internal equity may be holding, external competitiveness remains a concern, leaving many in-house legal teams vulnerable to attrition in a more competitive market.

**Do you feel that your compensation is reasonable?**



SAID YES



SAID NO

**Would you leave your company if another role paid more?**



SAID YES



SAID MAYBE



SAID NO

**Do you feel you are paid fairly compared to peers in similar roles?**



SAID YES



SAID NO

**Do you feel you are paid fairly compared to others in your legal department?**



SAID YES



SAID NO

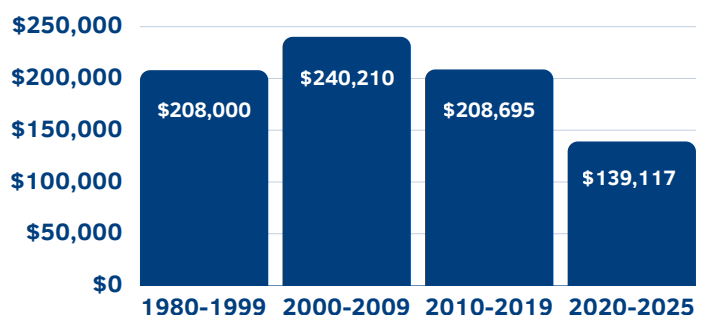
# REMOTE/HYBRID/ON-SITE AND EFFECTS ON COMPENSATION

Work arrangement alone does not appear to be a primary driver of compensation for in-house lawyers; seniority plays a far more significant role. While early-career lawyers earn similar base salaries across remote, hybrid, and on-site roles (roughly \$131,000-\$139,000 for those admitted to the Bar between 2020 and 2025), differences become pronounced at senior levels. Among lawyers admitted between 1980 and 1999, average base salary ranges from approximately \$208,000 in remote roles to over \$300,000 in fully on-site positions.

At the same time, the share of respondents reporting fully on-site roles has increased steadily, from 11% in 2024 to 13% in 2025 and 16% in 2026. The data suggests that the highest compensation levels at senior in-house roles are more commonly observed in hybrid and fully on-site positions. As the share of on-site roles continues to increase, access to the highest compensation levels appears more closely associated with hybrid and fully on-site roles.

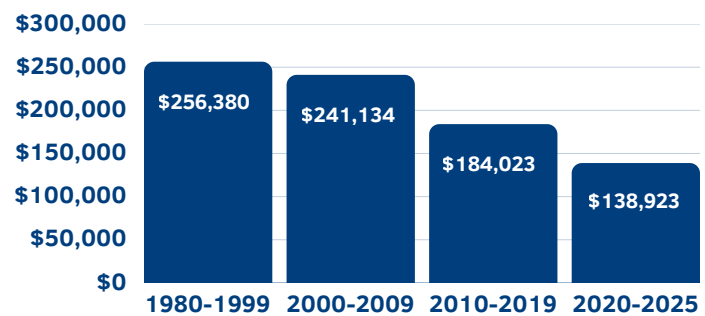
## Average base salary (nationwide) of remote workers: \$202,200

Average base salary (nationwide) of remote workers by Bar admission date:



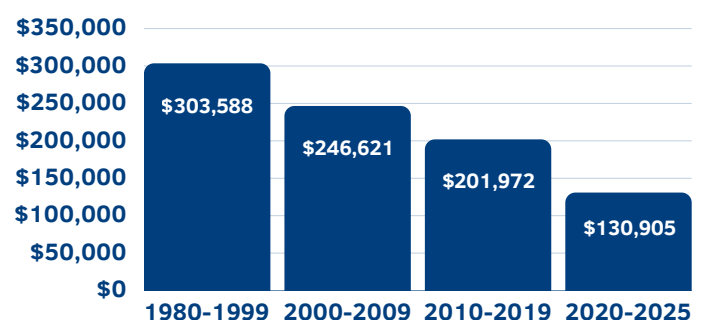
## Average base salary (nationwide) of hybrid workers: \$193,283

Average base salary (nationwide) of hybrid workers by Bar admission date:



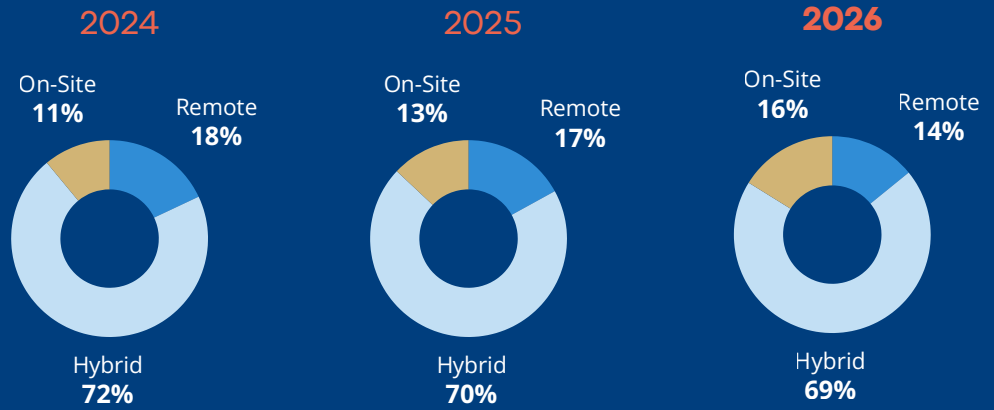
## Average base salary (nationwide) of on-site workers: \$208,909

Average base salary (nationwide) of on-site workers by Bar admission date:





Percentage of respondents who work on-site, remote or hybrid:



## PRIVATE PRACTICE EXPERIENCE AND EFFECTS ON COMPENSATION

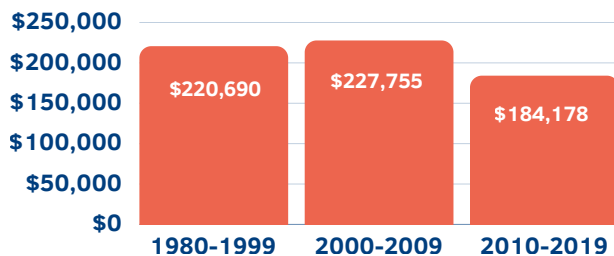
83% of respondents have at least some private practice experience. 17% of respondents do not have any private practice experience. Respondents with private practice experience reported average base salaries approximately 17% higher than those without private practice experience.

Average base salary (nationwide) of those who have experience in private practice: **\$201,979**

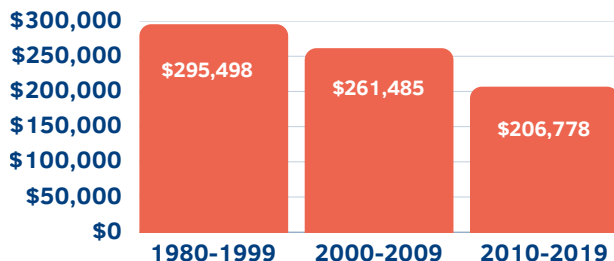
Average base salary (nationwide) of those who have no experience in private practice: **\$172,941**

Across bar-admission cohorts, in-house lawyers with 5-9 years of prior private practice experience tend to earn the highest average base salaries, particularly among respondents admitted to the Bar before 2010. For more recently admitted cohorts, compensation levels for those with 5-9 and 10+ years of private practice experience are largely comparable.

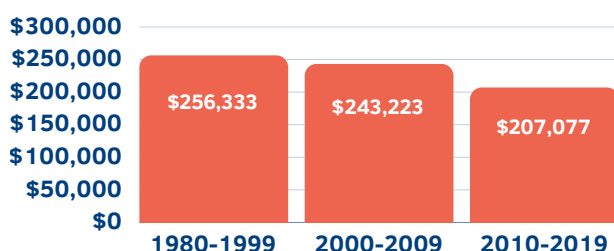
Respondents who have **1-4 years** of private practice experience, based on Bar admission date:



Respondents who have **5-9 years** of private practice experience, based on Bar admission date:

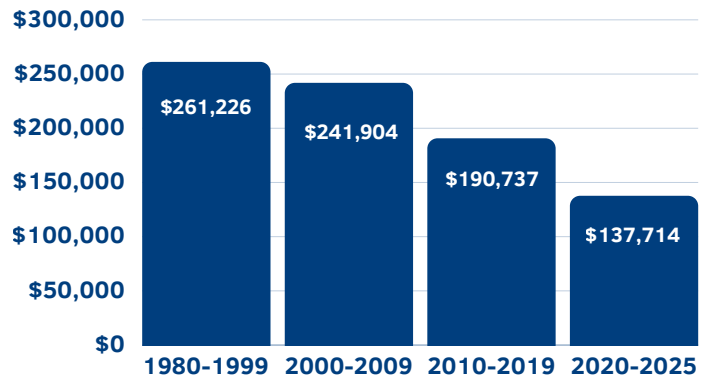


Respondents who have **10+ years** of private practice experience, based on Bar admission date:



# YEARS OF TOTAL PRACTICE AND EFFECTS ON COMPENSATION

Average base salary (nationwide) by Bar admission date:



# YEARS AT CURRENT COMPANY AND EFFECTS ON COMPENSATION

Longer tenure at a single organization is generally associated with higher compensation, particularly through the first 10-14 years in role. However, the relationship is not linear: salaries appear to plateau for some long-tenured respondents, while the highest compensation levels among those with 20+ years at the same company likely reflect a small group of highly senior roles rather than a typical tenure outcome.

## Years at current position:

- Respondents who have been at their current position for **0-4 years** reported an average salary (nationwide) of: **\$185,264**

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- Respondents who have been at their current position for **5-9 years** reported an average salary (nationwide) of: **\$208,727**

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- Respondents who have been at their current position for **10-14 years** reported an average salary (nationwide) of: **\$243,775**

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- Respondents who have been at their current position for **15-19 years** reported an average salary (nationwide) of: **\$224,889**

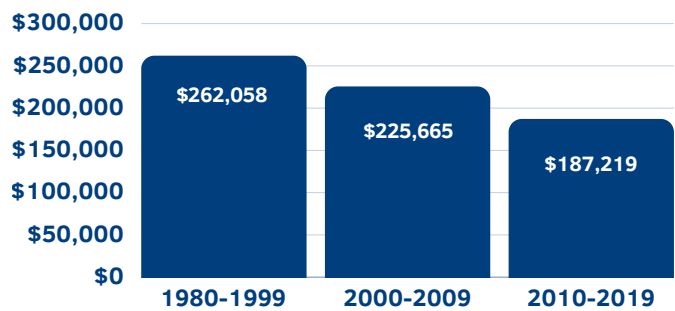
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- Respondents who have been at their current position for **20+ years** reported an average salary (nationwide) of: **\$290,040**

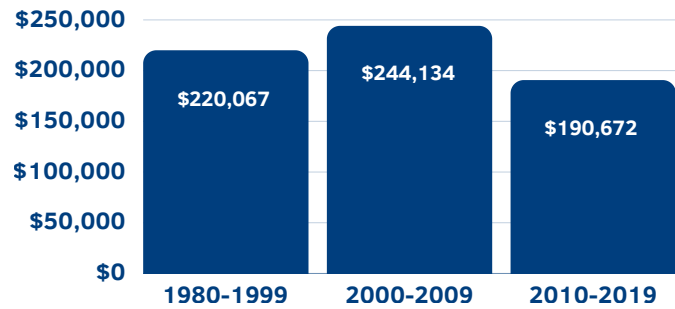
# YEARS AT CURRENT COMPANY AND EFFECTS ON COMPENSATION

When controlling for career stage, the highest average compensation is consistently observed among respondents who have been at their current organization for seven or more years. While recent moves (0-2 years) can be associated with higher pay at the most senior levels, short tenure alone is not consistently linked to better compensation outcomes. Overall, the data suggests that sustained tenure and role evolution, rather than frequent mobility, are more strongly associated with top-end in-house compensation.

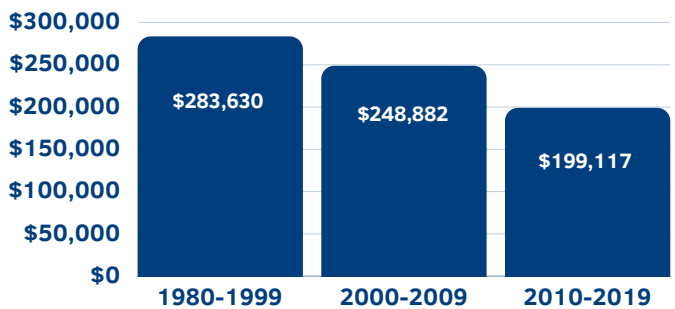
Respondents who have been at their current position for **0-2 years**:



Respondents who have been at their current position for **3-6 years**:



Respondents who have been at their current position for **7+ years**:



## HOURS WORKED PER WEEK AND EFFECTS ON COMPENSATION

Workload and compensation in-house appear to be closely linked, particularly at senior levels. Among respondents working more than 50 hours per week, 67% identify as General Counsel/Chief Legal Officer/VP, Legal or Deputy/Associate/Assistant General Counsel, indicating that extended hours are concentrated in senior leadership roles rather than evenly distributed across in-house positions.

This pattern is reflected in compensation. Average base salary increases meaningfully as reported hours rise, from approximately \$170,000 - \$185,000 among those working 40 hours or fewer per week to nearly \$290,000 for those working more than 60 hours. Taken together, the data suggests that the highest-paying in-house roles are also the most time-intensive, highlighting a clear trade-off between compensation and workload at the upper end of in-house legal careers.

Hours Worked Per Week	Average Base Salary (Nationwide)
<35	\$185,533
35 - 40	\$170,256
41 - 45	\$189,649
46 - 50	\$223,796
51 - 60	\$241,328
60+	\$288,739

# COMPANY HEADQUARTERS AND EFFECTS ON COMPENSATION

Company headquarters location appears to be associated with meaningful differences in compensation for Canadian in-house lawyers. Respondents working for US- and Asia-Pacific-headquartered organizations report significantly higher average base salaries (approximately \$224,000) than those employed by Canadian-headquartered companies (approximately \$194,000), while salaries at UK and European-headquartered organizations trend lower. As all respondents are Canada-based, these differences likely reflect variations in global compensation frameworks and pay philosophies rather than local market conditions.

Company Headquarters of Canada-Based Respondents	Average Base Salary (Nationwide)
Canada	\$193,721
US	\$223,794
Asia-Pacific	\$224,143
Europe (non-UK)	\$186,600
UK	\$188,288

# NUMBER OF DIRECT REPORTS AND EFFECTS ON COMPENSATION

We set out to determine whether those in the same position but with a different number of direct reports are paid differently. Here’s what we found:

Average Base Salary (Nationwide) Based on Number of Direct Reports		
Number of Direct Reports	Deputy/Associate/Assistant General Counsel	General Counsel/Chief Legal Officer/VP, Legal
0	\$213,080	\$243,400
1	\$229,953	\$247,192
2 - 4	\$231,207	\$258,132
5+	\$246,096	\$343,138

# GENERALISTS VS SPECIALISTS AND EFFECTS ON COMPENSATION



GENERALISTS

Average base salary for Generalists (nationwide): **\$203,314**



SPECIALISTS

Average base salary for Specialists (nationwide): **\$182,906**

Average base salary (nationwide) by specialization:

Administrative, Regulatory & Public Law:	<b>\$186,222</b>
Corporate, Commercial & M&A:	<b>\$198,786</b>
Labour & Employment:	<b>\$165,041</b>
Energy, Utilities & Environment:	<b>\$174,944</b>
Financial Services & Banking:	<b>\$202,222</b>
Insurance & Pensions:	<b>\$174,403</b>
Intellectual Property:	<b>\$168,749</b>
Litigation & Dispute Resolution:	<b>\$172,668</b>
Real Estate, Construction & Infrastructure:	<b>\$181,562</b>
Securities, Capital Markets & Investments:	<b>\$189,379</b>
Technology, Data, Privacy & Cybersecurity:	<b>\$188,343</b>

Generalists make 11% more on average than Specialists (same gap as reported in 2025). The specialization that pays the most on average is Financial Services & Banking, and the specialization that pays the least on average is Labour & Employment.

## COMPENSATION BY JOB FUNCTION

When controlling for role seniority, secondary job functions are not consistently associated with higher base compensation for in-house lawyers. Across Legal Counsel, Senior Legal Counsel, and Deputy General Counsel roles, respondents with additional responsibilities (e.g. compliance, privacy, regulatory, or operations) generally report slightly lower average base salaries than peers in strictly legal roles. This pattern suggests that, at junior and mid-senior levels, expanded scope is typically absorbed into the role and is not reflected in higher base compensation.

A meaningful compensation premium for secondary job functions emerges primarily at the General Counsel level. General Counsel roles that encompass broader enterprise responsibilities, including corporate governance, compliance, ESG, or risk management, report materially higher average base salaries than GC roles focused solely on legal work. The data indicates that while expanded scope is common across in-house roles, it is monetized primarily once it fundamentally alters the executive nature of the position, highlighting a structural gap between responsibility and compensation below the most senior levels.

Average Base Salary (Nationwide) Based on Job Function				
Function	Legal Counsel	Senior Legal Counsel	Deputy General Counsel	General Counsel
Only Legal	\$147,954	\$192,050	\$234,413	\$252,188
Compliance	\$142,804	\$175,760	\$228,654	\$284,910
Privacy	\$138,475	\$178,151	\$232,359	\$275,525
Regulatory	\$139,925	\$182,579	\$225,953	\$279,514
Corporate Secretary	\$138,904	\$186,400	\$227,587	\$290,588
Risk Management	\$140,666	\$181,061	\$219,886	\$273,541
ESG/Sustainability	\$132,967	\$180,200	\$228,375	\$290,738
People/HR	\$141,084	\$184,475	\$214,165	\$280,841
Operations	\$136,682	\$177,663	\$227,173	\$273,174
Revenue/Commercial	\$137,254	\$189,389	\$226,618	\$246,625

# COMPENSATION BY INDUSTRY

Below is the average base salary (nationwide) based on industry reported. “N/A” indicates that five or fewer responses were received for that industry.

The highest paying industry in 2026 (measured by average base salaries nationwide) is Automotive (\$228,923), followed by Mining (\$224,927) and Aerospace & Defense (\$214,182). The lowest paying industry (measured by average base salaries nationwide) is Education & Research (166,443), which was the third highest paying industry last year.

These results are not necessarily indicative of broader compensation trends, as some industries may be disproportionately represented by more senior lawyers while others skew more junior.

INDUSTRY	2024	2025	2026
Aerospace & Defense	\$157,400	\$170,000	<b>\$214,182</b>
Agriculture	N/A	N/A	N/A
Automotive	\$206,800	\$177,756	<b>\$228,923</b>
Cannabis	\$126,667	N/A	<b>\$186,453</b>
Construction & Infrastructure	\$193,000	N/A	N/A
Consulting & Professional Services	\$168,438	\$195,254	<b>\$187,551</b>
Education & Research	\$126,500	\$209,773	<b>\$166,443</b>
Energy & Natural Resources	\$241,097	\$199,100	<b>\$191,258</b>
Entertainment & Media	\$179,347	\$178,093	<b>\$163,659</b>
Finance & Banking	\$188,251	\$202,816	<b>\$210,024</b>
Food & Beverage	\$213,385	\$206,463	<b>\$191,071</b>
Gaming	N/A	N/A	<b>\$185,727</b>

## COMPENSATION BY INDUSTRY

INDUSTRY	2024	2025	2026
Government & Public Sector	\$145,731	\$168,322	\$181,378
Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals	\$161,711	\$178,800	\$171,347
Hospitality & Tourism	\$221,667	\$205,600	\$207,000
Insurance	\$167,207	\$176,149	\$192,279
Manufacturing & Industrial	\$174,242	\$215,587	\$201,007
Nonprofit & Charitable Organizations	\$126,129	\$153,330	\$193,909
Mining	N/A	N/A	\$224,927
Private Equity	\$220,000	N/A	N/A
Real Estate & Construction	\$186,236	\$195,834	\$208,976
Retail & Consumer Goods	\$165,285	\$187,059	\$189,122
Technology & IT	\$189,113	\$202,854	
Telecommunications	\$169,675	\$169,558	\$185,974
Transportation & Logistics	\$192,438	\$192,622	\$186,667
Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals	\$161,711	\$178,800	\$171,347

## COMPENSATION BY ORGANIZATION TYPE

While private sector salaries remain higher overall, government and non-profit organizations have made meaningful gains in recent years, with salary growth accelerating at a faster rate and bringing these sectors much closer to private sector compensation levels.

Average base salary (nationwide) by organization type:

ORGANIZATION TYPE	2024	2025	2026
Publicly Listed	\$193,898	\$197,338	<b>\$199,280</b>
Private	\$177,106	\$195,557	<b>\$200,358</b>
Government	\$144,394	\$178,688	<b>\$183,805</b>
Non-profit / Charity	\$142,794	\$160,787	<b>\$177,636</b>

## COMPENSATION BY SIZE OF LEGAL DEPARTMENT

Average base salary (nationwide) by size of legal department (including clerks, legal ops, assistants, paralegals, etc.):

SIZE OF LEGAL DEPARTMENT	2024	2025	2026
1	\$184,565	\$198,699	<b>\$211,950</b>
2-4	\$183,024	\$192,410	<b>\$201,897</b>
5-14	\$179,685	\$196,223	<b>\$190,071</b>
15-29	\$178,515	\$190,674	<b>\$206,301</b>
30+	\$169,860	\$181,148	<b>\$193,274</b>

# GENDER AND EFFECTS ON COMPENSATION

	2024	2025	2026
Average base salary (nationwide) of those who self-identified as <b>male</b>	\$189,317	\$197,883	\$208,696
Average base salary (nationwide) of those who self-identified as <b>female</b>	\$169,494	\$183,290	\$185,096
Gap	12%	8%	13%



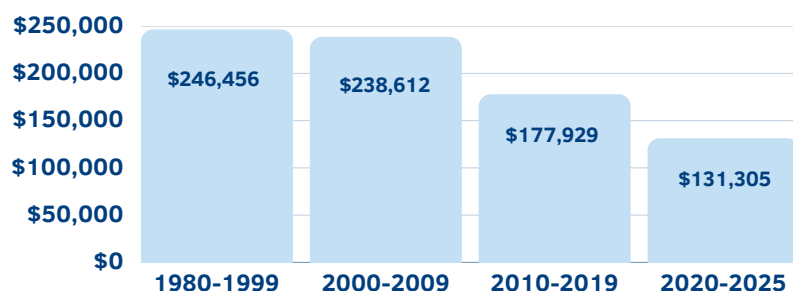
The gender pay gap widened again in 2026 following a period of improvement in 2025. After declining from 12 percent in 2024 to 8 percent in 2025, the overall gap increased to 13 percent in 2026, underscoring the volatility of progress on pay equity and the risk of drawing conclusions from a single year of improvement.

More importantly, the 2026 results suggest that the pay gap is now emerging much earlier in lawyers' careers than it appeared to in 2025. While the 2025 results showed a much narrower 3% pay gap among lawyers in their first five years of practice, suggesting that early-career compensation was becoming more equitable, the 2026 findings tell a different story. This year, a comparable 12% gap now appears even among those in the earliest stages of their in-house careers.

The re-emergence of a significant pay gap within the first five years of practice indicates that gender pay disparities are being created earlier than previously thought, likely at the point of entry or in initial compensation progression. This underscores that progress on pay equity is neither automatic nor permanent, and requires deliberate structural safeguards rather than reliance on generational change alone.

## Average base salary (nationwide) of those who self-identified as **female**: \$185,096

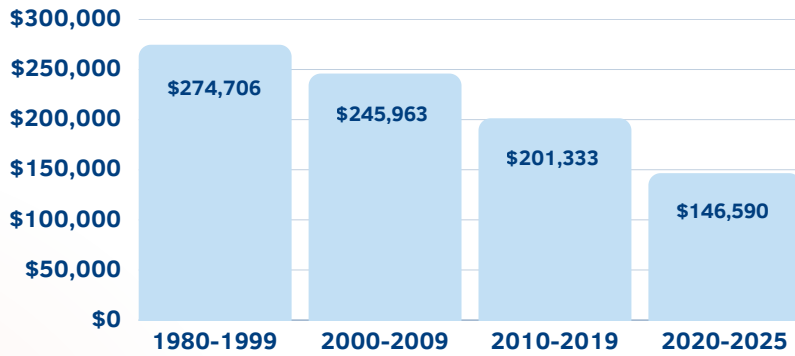
Average base salary (nationwide) of those identifying as **female** by Bar admission date:



# GENDER AND EFFECTS ON COMPENSATION

Average base salary (nationwide) of those who self-identified as male: **\$208,696**

Average base salary (nationwide) of those identifying as **male** by Bar admission date:



# MINORITY AND EFFECTS ON COMPENSATION

Survey respondents who self-identified as a member of visible minority continue to earn significantly less than their peers who self-identify as not a member of visible minority.

	2024	2025	2026
Average base salary (nationwide) of those who reported considering themselves a <u>member of a visible minority</u>	\$164,109	\$175,583	\$181,825
Average base salary (nationwide) of those who reported considering themselves <u>not a member of a visible minority</u>	\$186,903	\$196,897	\$203,490
Gap	14%	12%	12%