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Benchmark Study Will Measure Rate of Female Representation in Court

A survey to help gauge the number of female barristers and advocates appearing in the nation's courts is currently underway around the country.

In conjunction with the Australian Women Lawyers (AWL), the Law Council is undertaking the *Court Appearance Survey* to obtain reliable and robust data on the nature of appearances in Australia's superior courts.

Law Council President John Corcoran said, "In recent years there has been a great deal of concern within the legal profession about the prevalence of inequitable briefing practices."

"Research undertaken by the Victorian Bar Council and AWL supports anecdotal evidence that gender briefing patterns exist in the legal profession. Data suggest there is a difference in the number and complexity of cases in which women lawyers appear, compared to their male counterparts," Mr Corcoran said.

In a bid to address this issue, the Law Council and AWL have commissioned the comprehensive national survey. Information will be collected on the rate at which women advocates appear in superior courts, the types of matters that they are appearing in and the amount of time in court. Data on self-represented litigants will also be collected.

Australian Women Lawyers President Georgia McMaster said, "The survey is an important tool for measuring the success of equal opportunity briefing policies implemented by federal and state governments." She said the Law Council had demonstrated leadership and commitment to addressing issues of gender inequity for women barristers in undertaking this important research.

The High Court, Federal Court, Family Court and the Supreme Courts and Courts of Appeal in each state and territory are taking part in the survey.

"The survey data will provide a better understanding of briefing practices in Australia. It will also assist the Law Council and AWL in determining whether further policies or strategies are needed to ensure equality for female barristers and advocates," Mr Corcoran said.

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