



# Introduction

Over the past 30 years, Queensland women have made significant progress in terms of accessing education, and the improved economic, social and personal opportunities that flow on from that. Women's workforce participation has steadily risen since the 1970s and there are more women in business, parliaments and the judiciary. Despite this illusion of progress, the reality is that women are often unable to take up these improved opportunities. Other prevailing patterns have remained the same over the past 30 years, with women continuing to take primary responsibility for caring for the dependent population, and being over-represented in certain occupations and industries. "Women's work" is still "women's work", but the workload has increased.

*Profile Queensland Women* provides a snapshot of the current social, economic and legal situation of Queensland women, with a view to informing public debate, policy directions and service delivery.

Men and women do experience life differently, and the statistics clearly show that the major issue contributing to this difference is women's reproductive role and the associated caring responsibilities and health issues that arise from that. Many government programs and services are in place to address these, as outlined in the *Women in the Smart State Services Directory 2003–2008*.

The Government's plan to address areas where women are still disadvantaged is contained in the document *Women in the Smart State Directions Statement 2003–2008*. Its focus is on women and men having equal access and participation, and partnerships between women and men, to the benefit of all Queenslanders.

*Profile Queensland Women* shows that some women fare worse than others. For example, Indigenous women and women living in remote communities face particular challenges, such as access to appropriate education, employment, health care and other services. This is not new information, and there are a range of strategies in place to address this situation. Through *Meeting Challenges, Making Choices*, the Government is working in partnership with Indigenous communities to reduce the level of violence and alcoholism and create economic and employment opportunities in those communities.

Sole parent households, mostly headed by women, are the most likely of any household type to be living in poverty. The Government has implemented strategies to improve employment prospects, balance work, family and lifestyle and provide support to families: these, and plans for further implementation, are outlined in *Women in the Smart State Directions Statement 2003–2008* and *Women in the Smart State Services Directory 2003–2008*.

Women now have higher education levels and greater workforce participation rates than ever before, which provides an opportunity to improve economic security as well as personal wellbeing. In many cases these achievements have highlighted areas where complementing changes have not yet been made. The most obvious example of this, with the most broad-ranging effects, is the "trade-off" between career and family. Women generally continue to be the primary carers for children and ageing parents. There has been no corresponding trend for men to increase their responsibilities in this domain, in tandem with women's increasing workforce participation.

Globally, as women's education levels and workforce participation levels rise, fertility rates are falling. In Australia, one woman in four will never have children. Having children has direct and immediate implications for women's workforce participation and income, and thus their social and economic status (and, in the context of increasing numbers of sole parent families, their children's social and economic status).

The Government's *Balancing Work, Family and Lifestyle* strategy aims to improve opportunities for men and women to have equal opportunities to participate in the paid workforce, and care for children or other family members.

There have been significant improvements on such measures as women's representation in positions of public office and leadership, and this trend is continuing. However, women are not well represented in senior positions in any industry, particularly not in those that contribute the most to our economy (and which have the greatest financial reward) or in those with the greatest influence in our society. Men are paid more than women, even taking part-time work out of the equation. Women are significantly under-represented in the mining, construction and technology industries, and over-represented in teaching, child care and nursing. The Directions Statement outlines strategies designed to address these issues, such as the *Smart Women – Smart State* initiatives, *Balancing Work, Family and Lifestyle*, *Smart Women on the Move* and *Women's Business*.

Violence against women remains a significant social problem. Women continue to experience acts of violence from members of their own family at far greater rates than do men, and with deadlier results. Education, income and availability of resources all play a part in a woman's ability to escape violence, and potentially death. The Government has implemented new legislation which extends protection from abuse and violence in domestic relationships and is implementing additional counselling and support services to respond to the greater number of protected people. As well, continuing public education will reinforce the message that violence against women is unacceptable.

Screening for cervical and breast cancers in Queensland has significantly reduced death rates in recent years. But women now face new risks, largely influenced by changing socio-economic status and lifestyle choices such as smoking, binge drinking, unhealthy eating and sedentary lifestyles. The Government has developed strategies to target these health risks.

No single aspect of life stands alone: socio-economic, biomedical and environmental factors need to be considered individually, but also in terms of their interactions with each other, in policy and program decision-making.

To have large numbers of people in our society living in a situation of relative disadvantage does not make for a healthy society. Improving the situation in terms of women's relative disadvantage, and giving women and men equal opportunities to achieve economic security, good health and wellbeing, and leadership and decision-making power, will benefit all Queenslanders.