

Introduction


In the 150 years since Queensland became an independent state, Queensland women's status and role in society has evolved and changed. As Queensland celebrates its 150th birthday in 2009, it is pertinent to examine the current status of our state's women. Queensland women have made significant and positive progress in educational, economic, social and personal spheres. Women's workforce participation has steadily risen since the 1970s and there are more women in business, parliament and the judiciary. However, other prevailing patterns have remained the same: the gender pay gap is unyielding, women continue to take primary responsibility for caring for the dependent population, and women remain underrepresented at the higher levels of organisations and within certain industries and occupations.

Profile: Queensland Women 2009 provides an overview of the current social, economic and legal status of Queensland women, with a view to informing public debate, policy directions and service delivery. *Profile 2009* is the second edition of this publication (the first was released in 2004) and explores trends, patterns and progress made and areas of continuing inequality.

Profile 2009 illustrates that some women fare worse than others. For example, Indigenous women face particular challenges, such as access to appropriate education, employment, housing, health care and other services. Sole parent households, the majority of which are headed by women, are the most likely of any household type to be living in poverty. Women with disabilities are also at risk of poverty, being less likely than their able counterparts to participate in the workforce or have adequate access to housing. Women who are unpaid carers for the elderly or disabled often have limited capacity to earn an income yet may bear extra costs. Some women living in rural and remote communities, and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including migrant and refugee women, also face barriers to full participation in some aspects of society.

In 2007 Queensland recorded the highest fertility rates since 1977. In the same year female workforce participation rates were at an all time high. This highlights more than ever, the importance of supporting working mothers via flexible work arrangements, including maternity leave. At present, close to half of Australian working women have access to some type of paid parental leave. After returning to work many women try to balance their paid work and family responsibilities by opting for part time and casual positions, at a cost to their earning capacity, career progression and superannuation accumulation and growth.

Overall, Queensland women's labour force participation is lower than that of their male counterparts, and gender representation across all levels of an organisation tends to be unequal. There have been slight improvements in measures such as women's representation in positions of public office and leadership, but no significant increases can be seen since 2004. Women are still not well represented in senior positions in any industry, particularly in those which have the greatest financial reward or in those with the greatest influence in our society. On average, men are still paid more than women. Women remain underrepresented in the high paid mining, construction and technology industries, and overrepresented in lower paid fields such as teaching, child care and nursing.



Violence against women remains a significant social and economic problem. Women continue to experience acts of violence from members of their own family, especially intimate partners, at far greater rates than do men, and with more fatal results. Education, income and availability of and access to community resources all play a part in a woman's ability to escape violence.

Screening for cervical and breast cancers in Queensland has significantly reduced death rates in recent years. Recent medical advances such as the introduction of a vaccine against some types of the human papillomavirus, promise great future health benefits for women. But women, like men, continue to face health risks largely associated with changing socioeconomic status and lifestyle choices such as smoking, binge drinking, unhealthy eating and inactivity, with young women being particularly at risk.

Statistics in this publication are drawn from a wide variety of sources, and care has been taken to use the most recent, reliable and relevant statistics available. Much of the data is sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics data sets, and many statistics date from the most recent 2006 Australian Census. Data taken prior to 2006 are generally the most recent data available in the field or subject matter. Additionally, some data included in *Profile 2009* has been drawn from one off surveys, reports and investigations.

The Indigenous information included in this document is limited, as there are particular difficulties associated with accessing reliable and recent Indigenous statistics. This is due to challenges in collecting statistics about Indigenous populations, including: high levels of mobility of Indigenous populations, remoteness of many Indigenous people, language difficulties as English may not be the first language spoken; and the oral based communication heritage of Indigenous peoples, which does not include the use of paper based forms.

The collation of current data, from a wide range of sources, provides a comprehensive insight into the common life experiences of, and challenges and inequalities faced by, Queensland women. Improving those areas where women still face disadvantage, and affording women and men equal opportunities to achieve economic security, good health and wellbeing, and leadership and decision-making power, will benefit all Queenslanders.