



## Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I write this foreword to *A Profile of Women's Health in Manitoba*. In some ways, it is the last word, as the work of four years, four authors and many, many drafts and edits comes to a close.

Following the 2003 development and release of our small primer on gender-based analysis using health administration data, *Including Gender in Health Planning: A Guide for Regional Health Authorities*, author Lissa Donner and I began to discuss the possibility of a “report card” or profile on women’s health with colleagues at Manitoba Health and Healthy Living as a next step. While many people have been presenting gender-based analysis in a number of formats, the 2003 *Guide* seemed to match what planners and programmers in Manitoba RHAs needed in order to understand how gender-based analysis can help them serve Manitoba men and women better, despite always-constrained resources.

At about the same time as I received word that Manitoba Health and Healthy Living could invest in this *Profile* in 2005, we had the extraordinary opportunity to connect with staff at the World Health Organization Women’s Health Programme in Kobe, Japan. The Women’s Health Programme was seeking pilot test sites for a list of gender-sensitive leading health indicators, and Manitoba proved to be a site that could illustrate the strengths and challenges of the indicators to be tested. Our analysis of those 37 health indicators gave us an opportunity to develop our methods and hone our analyses, as well as to contribute to international discussions of women’s health and women’s health indicators. In 2008 the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health released its report, emphasizing the need for all health administrators and policy makers to look beyond physical and mental illness in understanding real population health. In particular, the WHO report points to the critical need to consider gender and improve women’s health for social justice and health inequities to improve.

These developments situate *A Profile of Women's Health in Manitoba* as part of ground-breaking work in exploring indicators of health status, outcomes and health system performance in the international arena, including appropriate sex disaggregation in collection and reporting of data and the use gender-based analysis. Indeed, in July 2008 we completed two guides for the Pan-American Health Organization that describe our methods.

Our focus in this *Profile*, however, remains on the women of Manitoba. The *Profile* presents and blends current health administrative and surveillance data and up-to-date research literature, with the additional investment of local knowledge about the lives of women in this province. In so doing, I hope we have again achieved our goal and demonstrated how gender-based analysis can make health services in Manitoba more relevant and appropriate to improve women’s health, redress inequities and achieve the consistent high quality of care in the health system we all seek.

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