

# Preface

Gender discrimination takes many forms and is present in varying degrees in all societies. In general, it is the females, at all stages in their life course, who experience greater difficulties in their access to information, education, services and care that impact adversely on their health.

Until recently the focus was almost entirely on women's health, and indeed an understanding of the reasons why women experience a greater burden of ill health than men is fundamental to the process of achieving equality for women in all spheres. Discrimination is rooted deeply in the cultural fabric of society and shapes the construction of the beliefs and attitudes that determine each society's gender divisions. The different ways in which women and men experience the world and the impact they have on each other are fundamental to health and health-care.

It is therefore necessary that health workers should be equipped with the training to carry out a gender-based analysis of health issues and to identify and eliminate the stereotypical attitudes, behaviour and approaches that lead to discrimination. Such an approach will lead to the identification of particular health problems that both men and women face and the recognition of ways in which the elimination of gender-based discrimination can improve men's health at the same time that it achieves equality for women.

As a contribution to the important goal of achieving equality for women in the field of health, the Commonwealth Secretariat has initiated a programme for the training of health workers in the gender-based analysis, planning and implementation of health interventions. These curriculum outlines define a comprehensive and fully gendered approach to major health areas which are relevant across the Commonwealth. We hope they will be widely adopted as the basis for training health workers, both through distance education and using face to face methodologies, and will be further extended and refined to meet local circumstances in order to ensure that women and men everywhere enjoy their human rights equally.

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