



# Introduction

## **Women in the Workforce**

Prime Minister Abe's administration has made the advancement of women a key element of its economic growth strategy. Compared to other advanced economies, Japan has a significant gap in economic and career advancement opportunities for women versus men. For example, Japan ranked 101 out of 142 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index.<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister Abe himself recognized this gap, noting that "women are Japan's most underutilized resource,"<sup>2</sup> and has cited the enhancement of women's participation and advancement in the workforce as one of the key pillars of Abenomics necessary for the economic revitalization of Japan. Cabinet Office research shows that adding three million women to the workforce would add the equivalent of US\$70 billion in wages alone and result in additional benefits to the economy as well.

In the June 2013 "Japan Revitalization Strategy," Prime Minister Abe and the government of Japan (GOJ) formally recognized the need to correct the disparity in labor participation between men and women in Japan. To achieve its goals, the GOJ has called for a number of reforms, including accelerating the elimination of childcare waitlists, addressing working-style issues, and creating women-friendly workplaces, as part of its stated overall objective of "creating a women-friendly work environment and restoring vitality to society."

The American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) and the European Business Council in Japan (EBC) applaud this bold policy agenda.

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1 World Economic Forum. 2015. Global Gender Gap Report 2015. Accessed November 2015. Retrieved from <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/the-global-gender-gap-index-2015>

2 Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. 2013. Speech on Growth Strategy by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Japan National Press Club, April 19, 2013. Accessed January 2015. Retrieved from [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96\\_abe/statement/201304/19speech\\_e.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201304/19speech_e.html)

## Women's Health

Mirroring the gap in economic opportunities for women, Japan also lags behind other developed countries in the provision of comprehensive measures to prevent and treat female-specific health risks. Ensuring that Japanese women are aware of such risks and have convenient access to screening and treatment is essential to ensure that they stay healthy throughout their working lives. Healthcare-related measures are therefore critical to the attainment of the GOJ's gender equality goals and should go hand-in-hand with structural and social reforms.

Women experience a changing and complex set of health risks throughout their lives, including cervical and breast cancer, as well as later-life conditions such as osteoporosis. Working women also face the challenge of balancing career advancement and reproductive health. Early and proper education, access to oral contraceptives (OCs), and screening for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are all critically important. With Japanese women increasingly waiting until later in life to have children, it is also necessary to have expanded access to assisted reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilization (IVF) and oocyte storage.

Compared with other developed countries, however, Japan has more to do to fully meet the healthcare needs of its female citizens. For example:

- Japan's cervical cancer screening rate of 42.1 percent in 2013 remains low compared to the OECD average and especially when compared to other developed countries which have screening rates of over 80 percent. Meanwhile, the breast cancer screening rate in Japan is 41.0 percent, compared to 80.8 percent in the United States and 67.6 percent in South Korea.<sup>1</sup>

- Japanese women are less likely than those in the United States to have an annual gynecological checkup. Yet the incidence of ovarian cancers in Japanese women is increasing—2.5 times higher compared to 35 years ago.<sup>2</sup> In addition, although more than 70 percent of Japanese women suffer from menstrual problems, which could be indicative of, or lead to, more serious health problems, few consult a gynecologist about their symptoms.<sup>3</sup> Screening for STIs and osteoporosis are additional examples of instances where regular annual gynecological check-ups would help to avoid larger health problems.
- The incidence of osteoporosis dramatically increases in women after they reach the age of 50. The osteoporosis screening rate in Japan hovers around five percent and longer-term impacts can be seen in the increased incidence of bone fractures amid the aging population.<sup>4</sup>
- Education on female healthcare issues has not kept up with the needs of society. Japanese women rank the lowest among very high Human Development Index (HDI) countries in terms of comprehensive fertility knowledge, which makes it difficult to make informed choices about when to try to start a family.<sup>5</sup>
- OCs are not used as widely in Japan as in other countries despite being an effective means of birth control and reducing the risk

1 OECD. 2015. OECD Health Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/els/health-systems/health-data.htm>

2 Matsuda A, Matsuda T, Shibata A, Katanoda K, Sobue T, Nishimoto H, and The Japan Cancer Surveillance Research Group. 2013. Cancer Incidence and Incidence Rates in Japan in 2008: A Study of 25 Population-based Cancer Registries for the Monitoring of Cancer Incidence in Japan (MCIJ) Project. *Japanese Journal of Clinical Oncology*, 44(4): 388-396

3 Tanaka et al. 2013. Burden of menstrual symptoms in Japanese women: results from a survey-based study. *Journal of Medical Economics*, 16(11): 1255-1266

4 Yamauchi H, et al. 2011. Current Status of Osteoporosis Screening (in Japanese). *Nippon Rinsho*, 69: 1300-1304

5 Bunting L, Tsibulsky I, Boivin J. 2013. Fertility knowledge and beliefs about fertility treatment: findings from the International Fertility Decision-making Study. *Human Reproduction*, 28: 385-397

of ovarian and endometrial cancers. The prevalence of OCs is as low as one percent in Japan, compared to 16 to 41 percent in other developed countries.<sup>6</sup>

- One in six Japanese couples face the challenge of infertility, yet there remains a lack of awareness of infertility treatments, as well as stigma and discrimination towards those women who struggle with infertility.<sup>7,8</sup>

Successfully meeting these challenges by improving the prevention and treatment of female-specific health conditions will deliver benefits not only to Japanese women, but also to the nation's economy and society as a whole. For example, the economic burden associated with menstrual symptoms is an estimated JPY680 billion annually, 72 percent of which is associated with a loss of productivity at work<sup>3</sup>. In addition, the correlation between the osteoporosis screening rate and the percentage of the elderly population with nursing care needs suggests that the higher the screening rate, the lower the eventual nursing care needs. This is an important consideration in a country with a rapidly aging population and corresponding increased social security costs.

### Summary of Recommendations

To meet these challenges, GOJ policymakers and businesses need to pursue new approaches. This primer provides a comprehensive set of policy recommendations for both government and business to ensure that Japanese women

have access to world-class healthcare at every stage of their lives.

### Health Literacy and Education

- Educational intervention to improve health literacy and support women's advancement

### Health for Self

- Increase comprehensive screening and access to gynecological care
- Reduce the spread of STIs
- Promote cervical cancer prevention and screening
- Improve the accuracy of breast cancer screening
- Prevent fractures due to osteoporosis

### Reproductive Health

- Improve access to OCs
- Improve access to fertility treatment

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6 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. 2013. World Contraceptive Patterns 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/family/contraceptive-wallchart-2013.shtml>

7 National Institute of Population and Social Security Research. 2011 Study. Secondary Source: The Japan Times. 2015. The true cost of fertility treatment in Japan. Retrieved from <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2015/06/20/lifestyle/true-cost-fertility-treatment-japan/#.VFYxv9Iw9Mt>

8 Japan Fertility Information Network (FINE). 2015. "Questionnaire regarding treatment while working" survey results report. Retrieved from [http://j-fine.jp/prs/prs/fineprs\\_ryoritsu1508.pdf](http://j-fine.jp/prs/prs/fineprs_ryoritsu1508.pdf)