

Together for Sex-Ed

A National Virtual Gathering of Sexual Health Education Champions

Oct 20 - 21, 2020

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights is a Canadian charitable organization that works to protect and promote Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Canada and globally.

In July 2019, we made our way to Saskatoon, where provincial and territorial premiers were meeting during the Council of the Federation, and launched a national campaign called #SexEdSavesLives. Our goal was, and continues to be, to call attention to the right of all young people in Canada to benefit from equal access to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE).

The #SexEdSavesLives campaign builds on the momentum of past actions Action Canada has taken to raise the profile of sex-ed in Canada. These include the publication and dissemination of Beyond the Basics, securing UN recommendations to Canada to strengthen the delivery of sex-ed, the release of a report on the 'State of Sex-Ed in Canada', and hosting roundtables in different parts of the country to hear directly from young people and sexual health educators about their experiences receiving and offering sex-ed.

Despite strong scientific evidence demonstrating the crucial importance of comprehensive sex-ed to achieve better health and social outcomes for young people, the state of sex ed in Canada remains dismal. Governments across the country have failed to take real leadership on the issue. Right now, the sex-ed that most young people in Canada receive does not meet international standards and best practices, nor does it meet the 2019 Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education.

This is an issue that is becoming increasingly salient as the world reckons with two global pandemics with significant impacts on public health: COVID-19 and deep-rooted institutional anti-Black racism. As the world simultaneously ground to a halt and came alive during a watershed moment in Black-led activism, it became essential that we raise the profile of sex-ed on the national stage.

First, school closures mean that a cohort of young people will not have received any sexual health education this year. Schooling went online and teachers had mere days to change their pedagogy, methodology, and content, all the while supporting their students during a pandemic. Community-based sexual health educators saw their offices close, scheduled presentations canceled, and sexual health centers' operations impacted by measures put in place to protect staff and community members. Sex-ed should not be the sole responsibility of parents. The evidence is clear that for sex-ed to be effective, it needs to be a coordinated effort between schools, community-based organizations and parents. The result of school and clinic closures amid COVID is that sex-ed delivery relies solely on parents who are often ill-equipped to have sex positive conversations about sexuality in the best of times, let alone within the context of a pandemic. As schooling might continue to shift and change for the foreseeable future, we must ensure that we proactively avoid such gaps in the delivery of essential health information and services.

Second, sex-ed should and must be used as a tool toward equity. COVID-19 exposed and worsened existing inequalities, including inequalities in health outcomes. Sex-ed is a tool that must be used to teach young people their rights and educate them about systems of privileges and oppressions that shape their lives. The evidence is clear that to address health inequity and to be effective, sex-ed must speak to all young people's realities and equip them with the tools necessary to empower them. As the country grapples with the importance of addressing anti-Black and anti-

Indigenous racism, growing inequalities and, in some cases, the roll back of rights, we must see sex-ed as an essential part of our collective response. It is time to seize the moment and advocate for the kind of sex-ed that can help us create a more just world.

When sex-ed is done right, it can be life changing for people and have significant positive impacts on public health, STI rates, negative health outcomes, gender equality, instances of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, and bullying.

Sex-ed must become a national priority. To this end, Action Canada is seeking the collaboration, expertise, and support of leaders, movement builders, and experts from a diversity of sectors ranging from health care to education to violence prevention. Together, we will work to compel and support governments in Canada to prioritize, protect, and support comprehensive sexuality education through better policies and programs and increased investments.

It is in this spirit and under the banner of our campaign [#SexEdSavesLives](#) that Action Canada is **convening, for the first time ever, leaders and sex-ed champions to take stock of the current state of sex-ed and chart a path of collective action to secure better access to it in Canada.** Originally envisioned as an in-person conference held in Ottawa, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have reimagined the conference to be held virtually, maintaining the diverse range of participants.

Objectives

Over two days, the **National Sex-Ed Gathering** will bring together approximately 60 key stakeholders from across Canada as well as international CSE and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) experts, to:

1. Share our respective knowledge and expertise to make the collective case for sex-ed as a key intervention to achieve better public health outcomes, further gender equality and social justice, reduce stigma around sex and sexuality, address violence and discrimination, and to meet our human rights obligations.
2. Assess the different sectors' needs, experiences, and priorities to find connections and grounds for collaboration so we can advocate together for the kind of changes that could lead to better access to comprehensive sex-ed in Canada.
3. Develop a list of recommendations for the implementation of comprehensive sex-ed to use in advocacy with governments and decision makers.
4. Organize a cross sector movement in support of sexuality education and form a National Sex-Ed Advisory committee to offer guidance for a national campaign demanding better access to comprehensive sex-ed in Canada.

Virtual Event Details

When: October 20 – 21, 2020. The exact timing for each day is forthcoming, but we will be structuring the gathering in a way that is mindful of Zoom fatigue. A meeting for the participants in the Advisory Committee will be scheduled in early November.

Format: Zoom webinar platform. Some speaker panels will be pre-recorded and sent in advance of the gathering to ensure most of our time on Zoom is spent on facilitated collaboration.

We look forward to two days of conversations and collective visioning to ensure all young people, across Canada have access to the very best sex-ed.



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