

September 15, 2020

Premier of New Brunswick  
Chancery Place  
Fredericton, NB  
E3B 5H1

Dear Premier Higgs,

On behalf of Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, I would like to welcome your new government in New Brunswick. As you begin your new mandate, we hope you will prioritize the human rights of all people in New Brunswick, improve access to essential health care services in the province, and support the communities hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, including racialized people, immigrants and refugees, Indigenous peoples, women, 2SLGBTQI+ people, and disabled people.

### **Abortion Care**

New Brunswick continues to be a province where essential medical services like abortion care are difficult for many patients to access. The restrictions and impacts of the pandemic have made this even more clear.

Right now, patients pay out of pockets for the one clinic offering abortion care outside of the three designated hospitals, two of which are in Moncton. Abortion care, just like all other services offered in family doctors' offices (including at Clinic 554, the Fredericton clinic that faces imminent closure) and community-based clinics, should be covered by provincial health coverage to ensure equitable access, which also rests of the ability of more health care providers and health care facilities to expand services in more communities.

Regulation 84-20 is an unquestionable violation of the *Canada Health Act* and an ongoing violation of the human rights of the people of New Brunswick. The Government of New Brunswick cannot continue to operate as it has for the past 30 years through this discriminatory regulation— people's lives depend on accessible, timely, and adequate health care in their communities.

Premier Higgs, during the election you suggested that New Brunswickers “challenge” you in court over abortion access in the province. At a time when people across the province, and the country, are facing increased financial precarity and stress, it is unacceptable that the leader of their province would force them into a court case in order to receive adequate health care services. New Brunswick is falling behind every single other province when it comes to abortion access.

Abortion is health care. It is time for your new government to end this discriminatory practice against people who can get pregnant and repeal Regulation 84-20, allowing sexual and reproductive health clinics to provide care to people in their communities.

### **Sexual Health Care and COVID-19**

COVID-19 laid bare the inequalities in health care access across Canada. Clinics have reduced capacity and the closure of borders meant people in New Brunswick could not get abortions after 14 weeks (for a funded procedure), or 16 weeks (individuals pay out-of-pocket at the sole clinic in Fredericton).



Throughout the pandemic, we have heard regularly from abortion and sexual health care providers in New Brunswick on the inadequacy of personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies. This means abortion, contraceptive, STBBI, and gender affirming care was scaled back as providers face a lack of the necessary equipment to provide care in a way that reduces transmission and risk of COVID-19.

With your new government's mandate, you have the opportunity to step up to ensure that sexual and reproductive health care services in New Brunswick are adequately funded, accessible to everyone, and meet the needs of all clients and patients – not just some.

Seeing these increasing challenges across the province, we call on your immediate leadership to take the following recommended steps:

1. **Immediately eliminate Regulation 84-20, preventing funding for abortion care provided outside of hospital settings.**
2. **Ensure timely access to abortion care, by supplying abortion providers in clinics and hospitals. sufficient PPE, as well as infectious disease-controlled spaces and beds that they can operate from.**
3. **Ensure expedited process to cover all expenses associated with travel out of province and out of country for abortion care.**
4. **Create a care pathway for uninsured people in New Brunswick as they have been those most impacted by barriers to sexual and reproductive health care.**
5. **Provide 100% cost coverage for all contraceptive options for everyone residing in New Brunswick, regardless of provincial health care coverage.**
6. **Allow New Brunswick pharmacists to prescribe contraception.**
7. **Ensure that new funding earmarked for public health reach sexual health clinics and outreach workers so that they can continue providing community-based services.**

We further look forward to working with you and your colleagues to implement these important measures as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Frédérique Chabot

Acting Executive Director

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