



Comprehensive Sex-Education in Canada

What is the state of sex-ed in Canada?

Sex-ed in Canada varies from community to community. The quality and accessibility of sex-ed depends on which province or territory you live in, your school board, principal, and whether nearby health centres and community groups can offer support. No current provincial or territorial curriculum is sufficient – and none meets the standards laid out by the 2019 Canadian Guidelines on Sexuality Education or other international standards.

There are no systems in place to monitor the delivery and results of sex-ed. Educators receive little to no support to develop their ability to offer accurate, non-stigmatizing and fulsome sex-ed to their students. Community-based sexual health educators are often stretched beyond capacity, offering support where they can. Lessons often overlook the needs and experiences of many of the students, including those who are 2SLGBTQI+, as well as the current realities in which young people navigate sexual decision-making.

The Ministry of Education in each province and territory sets their basic sex-ed curriculum. These curricula differ in a number of ways. Years of publications range from 1995 (Prince Edward Island) to 2020 (British Columbia). Sex-ed can be a stand-alone program or housed within health or physical education programs. The amount of time dedicated to sex-ed lessons also varies, and the topics covered in each province and territory are wide-ranging, creating inconsistency in the sex-ed young people in Canada receive.

Read our report on the [State of Sex-Education in Canada](#) for more information and details about provincial and territorial curricula.

Why is federal leadership on CSE important?

While it is true that education falls under provincial or territorial jurisdiction, there is still a role for the federal government to play. Right now, sex-ed curricula, delivery, and monitoring across the country is insufficient.

Canada is not meeting its human rights obligations on CSE, and federal, provincial, and territorial governments all need to take action. Action Canada has called on the government to take steps towards the harmonization of sex-ed curricula across provinces and territories and for the federal government to hold them accountable for implementing such guidelines or standards.





As seen in the current COVID-19 crisis, while provinces and territories are responsible for healthcare and long-term care, the federal government has a shared responsibility to ensure that standards are upheld and that people across Canada have access to the same level of care. There are a couple of steps that the Government of Canada can take now to meet their obligations to ensure everyone has access to CSE, including:

- Launch a national strategy to equalize access to comprehensive sexuality education across provinces and territories (including a national awareness-raising campaign led by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and the Department of Women and Gender Equality, and funding to support the full implementation of the Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education).
- Allocate funds to the PHAC to invest in the training of professional sexual health educators.
- Allocate funds to the PHAC to conduct regular national monitoring through inter alia broad-based surveys, of a robust set of sexual health indicators disaggregated by relevant factors, including (but not limited to) gender, age, location, and ethnicity.

What does CSE look like in action?

We can see examples of high quality CSE by looking to national and international guidelines.

- In 2019, the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) released the newest edition of the *Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education*, which include new content on the importance of comprehensive sex-ed in Canada, a list of key educators and settings important for access to comprehensive sex-ed, and benchmarks on providing STI prevention education and STI testing in schools.
- In 2018, a number of UN bodies including UNESCO, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the World Health Organization came together to publish the newest edition of the *International technical guidance on sexuality education*. These guidelines provide a look at CSE best practices from around the world.
- Other recent resources include UNFPA's 2015 **global review of CSE practices**, the International Planned Parenthood Federation's (IPPF) reports *From evidence to action* and *Everyone's right to know: delivering comprehensive sexuality education for all young people*, and *We Demand More!* – a CSE advocacy handbook for youth published by IPPF, UNESCO and the PACT.

