

# **UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS (SRHR) IN A HOLISTIC WAY: SHARING EXPERIENCES FROM CANADA AND LATIN AMERICA**

## **INTRODUCTION**

During the summer, as part of the *Rights from the Start* project, Action Canada organized a series of webinars called “Understanding Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in a Holistic Way: Sharing Experiences from Canada and Latin America.” Experts and advocates from Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Canada met through three virtual sessions to share experiences about comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), access to sexual and reproductive health, and spaces for SRHR advocacy in their local contexts.

These conversations allowed for collective knowledge-building on:

- Learnings, challenges, and risks around SRHR
- How to create opportunities for allied organizations to learn about the work being done locally on SRHR
- How inter-regional collaboration can promote SRHR advocacy globally and holistically.

The virtual webinars were organized and took place across multiple Indigenous territories in regions known today as Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and Canada. The webinars were grounded in participants’ individual and collective relationships to the territories they joined from and situated SRHR work as a necessary site of active decolonial resistance across Abya Yala/the Americas. The office of Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights is located on unceded, unsundered territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabe nation, whose presence on this land dates from time immemorial. We wish to affirm the inherent rights and treaties of all the Indigenous Peoples of this land and beyond invite all Canadian governments to act on the Calls to Action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The following pages contain written and graphic accounts of the webinar series.

## CHAPTER 1: YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVE ON COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION

The first webinar opened a space for organizations and individual activists to share experiences on comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). In a context where regressive actors are emerging and spreading disinformation about CSE, it is vital to provide young people with knowledge and skills that allow them to make informed

decisions about their sexual health and well-being. Even though our panellists work in different contexts, they share challenges and opportunities. By collectively building knowledge and drawing on experiences in other territories, panellists envision a society in which everybody can enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

### PANEL SPEAKERS

- **Centro Ecuatoriano de la Protección y Atención a la Mujer de Guayaquil (CEPAM-G)**, Ecuadorian Center for Women's Protection and Care) shared learnings from Pasos y Huellas (Steps and Footprints), a group of adolescents and young people who implemented their digital campaign "**Claro que EIS**" seeking to promote CSE among the young people of Guayaquil.
- **Nadine Thornhill** told us about "*Not just the tip!*", a project led by the Canadian Centre for Sexual and Gender Diversity in alliance with Wisdom 2 Action.
- **Fòs Feminista** reminded us that CSE is a strongly political community-teaching tool that allows children, adolescents, and young people to develop their own skills and projects. They presented "**AMAZE**" as a free learning resource, accessible globally, that seeks to provide CSE.

# COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION

## FROM A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE: LATAM & CANADA

**GUARANTEE CSE**

- Constant dialogue
- Territorialization and adapting to communities
- This allows for unlikely alliances
- Latin America is super diverse
- Need to keep fighting for CSE as a human right
- protected by the state
- Human sexuality is not a standard experience
- Often, standardized curriculums replicate colonial perspectives
- Trainings for adult gate-keepers

### CHALLENGES 2 CSE

- Reconciling diverse discourses
- Ancestral knowledge
- power inequality and systemic barriers
- Religious beliefs
- digital divide
- Access to technology
- Cultural diversity

### GOOD PRACTICES

- Remember: it is not the job of adults to mould young people's sexuality
- Youth & adolescents have agency + decision-making skills
- Trust Young People
- validate youth voices
- Support for meaningful youth involvement
- Pay young people

**PASOS Y HUELLAS CEPAM G**

Religion + spirituality can co-exist with human rights

Intersectional approach

Digital campaign "CLARO QUE EIS"

Youth-led working group

visibilize CSE

Ecuador

**AMAZE Project**

Context-adapted sex ed

Free online resources

Youth participation

Tool with reliable information

**IVETT AVENDAÑO FOS FEMINISTA**

**NADINE THORNHILL SEX EDUCATOR**

working in what is known as Canada

**PROJECT 'not just the tip'**

Youth Advisory Council

Provided feedback - they will be the ones impacted

created a skills-based toolkits

providing LGBT+ inclusive sex ed

### OUR SPEAKERS



## HIGHLIGHTS

The panellists discussed how activists, experts, and civil society organizations can continue guaranteeing CSE by applying best practices in Canada and globally.

***“My job (working as an adult sex educator) is not to shape young people into who I believe they must be as sexual beings.”***

– Nadine Thornhill

***“We must advocate for grounding CSE in the territories.”***

– Ivette Avendaño, Fòs Feminista

## HOW TO MOVE FORWARD

- Strategies to promote CSE must centre young people and not see them only as the final audience for the strategies. We must acknowledge that young people have a voice and can offer new solutions to sexual and reproductive health challenges.
- Conversations on CSE must take into account that issues are not static — it is key to ask what needs and concerns move young people and start from there.
- A CSE promotion strategy is successful when linked to building and nurturing trust with young people. There are different existing creative ways to spread information and reach children, adolescents, and young people.

## CHAPTER 2: SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The second webinar focused on a key issue of significant impact on young people's well-being: access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. Acknowledging that SRH is a fundamental human right, the webinar focused on identifying innovative strategies and

good practices for imagining a future where young people can access inclusive SRH services. From this starting point, we learned about the work of Latin American and Canadian organizations that bring these services to young people in a kind and empathic way.

### PANEL SPEAKERS

- **Centro de Investigación, Educación y Servicios (CIES, Research, Education and Services Center)** in Bolivia, told us about the young people's program *Tú Decides* (You Decide), as part of their *Atención Integral y Diferenciada de Adolescentes y Jóvenes* (AIDAJ, Comprehensive Differentiated Care for Adolescents and Young People) module.
- **Planned Parenthood Toronto**, a community health center focusing some of its services on young persons aged 13 to 29. During the webinar, we learned about "*Teen Health Source*," which is designed to provide SRH information to young people.
- **INPPARES** presented its work as part of the *Rights from the Start project*, reminding us that health services must always complement CSE as the latter allows young people to identify when to access SRH services.



# YOUTH-FRIENDLY SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES



## HIGHLIGHTS

The dialogue between the panelists allowed them to share experiences and good practices for working with youth and adolescents. The interventions focused on some of the challenges in the delivery of SRH services, such as the lack of information about sexual health.

***“During and after the pandemic, adolescents themselves have been the most important voices for their peers. This is why we must work - as we are already doing – on CSE training for teachers and health professionals as strategic allies.”***

– Pahola Peñaranda

***“The only reason we see young people believing these things (des/miss information) is because they haven’t been given an alternative that, feels relevant, feels accessible and makes sense to them”.***

– Stuart MacLeod

***“Peer-to-peer education does work. If we have an empowered group of young people, they will invite their peers in and enable access to SRH services.”***

– Carmen Ortiz

## LESSONS LEARNED

- SRH service provision must be strengthened in Latin American as well as in Canadian communities.
- To guarantee SRH for young people, programs must include sensitivity training and capacity building for adults in SRH services.
- Recalling the first webinar in this series, it is particularly important to integrate adults in CSE strategies as they are only effective when a relationship of trust is built that allows for learning without any judgment.
- Strategies based on fear, stigmatization, or punishing specific sexual practices do not work for young people and can even inhibit young people and adolescents from seeking out SRH services.
- Young people need differentiated care. The best way to avoid healthcare staff becoming an obstacle to accessing SRH services is to produce specific materials and integrate young people as active participants in their well-being.

## CHAPTER 3: ADVOCACY — FROM LOCAL TO INTERNATIONAL

The third and last webinar addressed advocacy from the local to the international level. By learning about strategies and good practices adopted by Latin American and Canadian organizations, we discovered a recurring obstacle: in the region, anti-rights groups continue to have a significant presence and seek to gain

ground through misinformation. Given this context, it is vital to learn more about the strategies deployed by feminist and pro-choice organizations when they are doing advocacy at the local, regional, and international levels to improve access to SRHR.

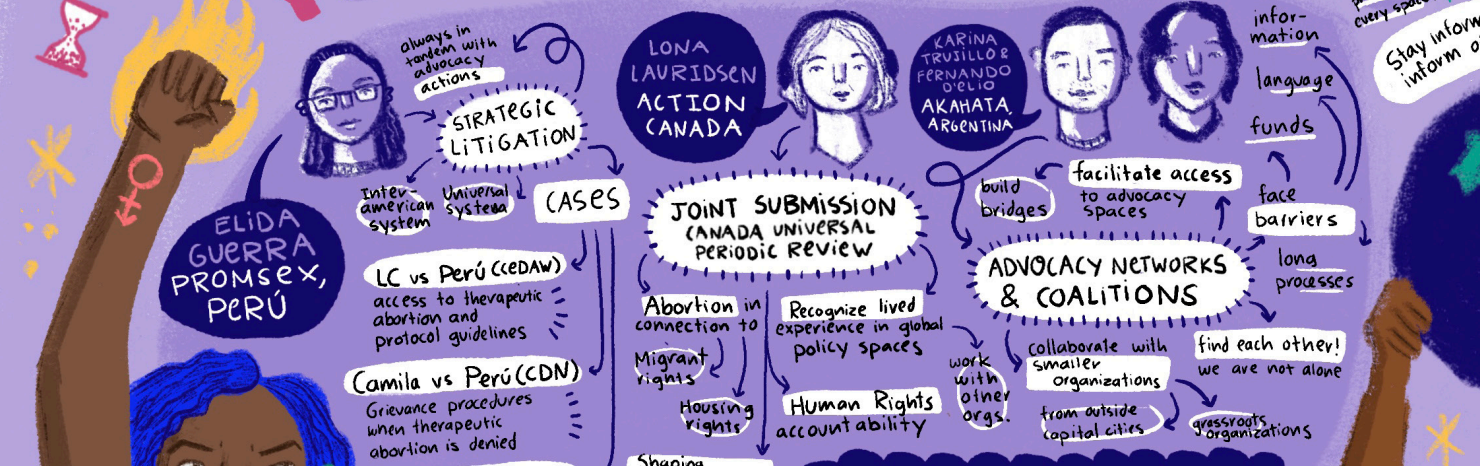
### PANEL SPEAKERS

- **Promsex**, a non-governmental organization based in Peru, has defended SRHR through advocacy and strategic litigation.
- **Action Canada** told us about their joint submission on universal abortion access to Canada's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) conducted at the UN Human Rights Council.
- **AKāHATā** reminded us that even though international advocacy spaces are very valuable, they are not free from institutional barriers.



**STRATEGIES TO FACE ANTI-RIGHTS GROUPS**

**CHALLENGES**



**OUR SPEAKERS**

**SRHR ADVOCACY: FROM LOCAL TO INTERNATIONAL**



## HIGHLIGHTS

During this last seminar those who joined us were able to understand the importance of advocacy in promoting SRHR. The panelists discussed some of the obstacles and strategies they have experienced in their advocacy work.

***“We must remember that in strategic litigation, the life experience of one person stands for those of many others whose rights are also being violated”.***

– Elida Guerra

***“We need to make it visible that often in civil society movements organisations working internationally are removed from grassroots organizations and may even reproduce racist or colonial social dynamics”.***

– Fernando D’Elio

***“Although the recommendations [from UN mechanisms like the Universal Periodic Review] form a really important piece of the advocacy framework, they’re not binding. So there’s no mechanism that holds the State being reviewed accountable to them. And that’s why it’s really important, then, that civil society be very active in advocating for stronger accountability and implementing mechanisms.”***

– Lona Lauridsen Burger

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Keep centering people. Litigation-based advocacy must be approached holistically, prioritizing the people whose rights have been violated. For this reason, strategies must include emotional and not only legal support.
- It may be hard to achieve changes at the international level to be reflected in national laws. That is why advocacy must be complementary. The best road to efficiency lies in building multi-level strategies: local, regional, and international.
- Finally, we must prevent advocacy spaces from becoming echo chambers. Advocacy strategies need to include people with different life experiences to avoid replicating practices rooted in racism, classism, ableism, heterosexism and other systemic factors.

