



Action Canada
for Sexual Health & Rights

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a person with long hair, wearing a yellow shirt, shouting into a large megaphone. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange and purple gradient. The text is placed on white rectangular boxes that are layered over the image.

Advocating for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights:

A Toolkit on Provincial
and Territorial Lobbying
and Advocacy in Canada



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Introduction

Objectives of the Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to support local organizations and activists in advocating for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) policies at the provincial and territorial levels in Canada. By providing practical tips, tools, and strategies, this guide will help organizations effectively engage with policymakers, opposition parties, and government officials to advance SRHR initiatives.

Each province and territory in Canada has unique political structures, legislative processes, and decision-making dynamics. For example, the territorial legislative assemblies in Nunavut and Northwest Territories have no political parties and operate on a consensus style of government, while provinces like Prince Edward Island have political parties. Other differences like the

population of each province and territory, rural vs urban geographies, and size of legislatures and assemblies also shape the context of what advocacy and lobbying may look like in your region.

While this guide provides general advocacy strategies, it is essential to tailor approaches based on the specific legislative structures and political landscape in your jurisdiction.

You can learn more about the structures of your provincial or territorial government on its official website and you can learn more about cultural nuances by speaking to experienced local advocates in your province or territory.



Context Setting

Who to Talk to and When

Understanding jurisdictional authority is crucial when advocating for SRHR policies and funding in Canada. Municipal, provincial, and federal levels of government have different responsibilities, with some areas like child care requiring significant cooperation between provincial and federal governments.

As this is a toolkit on provincial and territorial lobbying and advocacy, we want to equip you to understand who to talk to within your regional political structure. From the Premier to the Cabinet to policymakers to political parties and to elected officials in the Opposition, there are many different roles and responsibilities to navigate – so that you know who to contact.

Canada has Three Levels of Government:*

FEDERAL

The Prime Minister heads the federal government based in Ottawa. It deals with national and international matters, such as:

- Mail
- Taxes
- Money
- Banking
- Shipping
- Railways
- Pipelines
- Telephones
- Criminal law
- Foreign affairs
- National defence
- Employment insurance
- Indigenous lands and rights

PROVINCIAL OR TERRITORIAL

A Premier leads each province and territory. The provincial and territorial governments have the power to change their laws and manage their own public lands. They are in charge of:

- Colleges and universities
- Social services
- Municipal affairs
- Labour standards
- Provincial/territorial law and courts
- Provincial/territorial parks
- Provincial/territorial road maintenance
- Provincial/territorial taxes
- Provincial police (Ontario and Quebec)

MUNICIPAL (CITY, TOWN, VILLAGE, COUNTY, OR REGION)

Mayors lead municipal governments. Municipal governments run cities, towns or districts (municipalities). They are in charge of things, such as:

- Parks
- Parking
- Libraries
- Roadways
- Local police
- Local land use
- Fire protection
- Public transportation
- Community water systems
- Local police

First Nations Governance

Across the country, band councils govern First Nations communities. Band councils are similar to municipal governments. Band members elect the band council, which makes decisions that affect their local community.

Parliamentary Democracy

Parliament has three parts:

- Sovereign (Queen or King)
- Senate
- House of Commons

Canadian citizens elect political representatives at all three levels of government:

- Federal
- Provincial or territorial
- Municipal

Elected representatives hold positions in:

- City councils
- Federal House of Commons
- Provincial and territorial legislatures

Their duties include:

- Passing laws
- Approving and monitoring spending
- Keeping the government accountable

*<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/settle-canada/government.html>

Here's a breakdown of key decision makers and when to engage with them:

- **Premier and Cabinet Ministers:** Responsible for setting government priorities and policies. The Minister of Health or Minister for Women and Gender Equality (if applicable) may be key contacts for SRHR issues. Engaging with the relevant Minister, rather than with the Premier, should be your priority. Ministers will be more reachable than Premiers. However, if you have reason to believe that the Premier is likely to be a champion for your cause, then it may be worth trying to engage with them.
- **Opposition Party Leaders and Critics:** Opposition parties play a crucial role in challenging government policies and can push for changes in legislation or funding commitments. Opposition critics are often referred to as “Shadow Ministers”. You can reach out to the staff of Opposition parties, including both staff supporting leaders and critics.
- **Provincial and Territorial Party Offices:** Engaging with party staff can help influence party stances. It is particularly important in the lead up to an election, as it can influence political platforms.
- **Local Representatives (MLAs/MNAs/MPPs/MHAs):** Contacting your local representative is an asset as they can raise issues in the legislature, introduce motions, or support local advocacy campaigns. If they are in opposition, then they can ask questions about your issue to the government during Question Period. If your representative is in government, then they can champion your issue to the responsible Minister and to their government as a whole.

Did you know that different provinces and territories use different titles for their elected representatives?

- British Columbia - Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)
- Alberta - Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)
- Manitoba - Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)
- Saskatchewan - Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)
- Ontario - Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs)
- Quebec - Members of the National Assembly (MNA)
- New Brunswick - Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)
- Nova Scotia - Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)
- PEI - Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)
- Newfoundland - Members of the House of Assembly (MHAs)
- Nunavut - Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)
- Yukon - Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)
- Northwest Territories - Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)



What Policymakers Want to Hear

When engaging policymakers, it is essential to frame your advocacy ask in a way that aligns with their priorities and mandates.

Here are key elements to consider:

- **Mandate Letters:** In many jurisdictions across Canada, Ministers receive mandate letters outlining their key priorities. Aligning your advocacy with these priorities increases the likelihood of engagement. If your province or territory has mandate letters, then you can find them online, for example on the [BC Government website](#). Not every province and territory has public mandate letters. The decision on whether to publicly publish mandate letters is up to each Premier and cabinet.
- **Evidence-Based Advocacy:** Policymakers are more likely to act if you can provide credible data, expert opinions, and real-life stories demonstrating the impact of your issue. Combine narrative with data together to provide a factual, emotionally compelling argument.
- **Public and Political Support:** If there is public demand for a policy change, politicians may be more willing to act, thus you want to create a public groundswell of support for your cause. Campaigns, media coverage, petitions, letterwriting efforts, and rallies can strengthen your advocacy efforts.

How to Identify Your Advocacy Objective and Create Your Message

How to Identify Your Advocacy Objective

Before engaging with policymakers, you must define your advocacy objective, which is what you want to change.

Ask yourself:

What specific policy, legislation, or funding change are you seeking?

Who has the power to make this change?

What is the clearest and most strategic way to frame your request?



Action Canada has an Advocacy Brief Template that can be found [here](#).

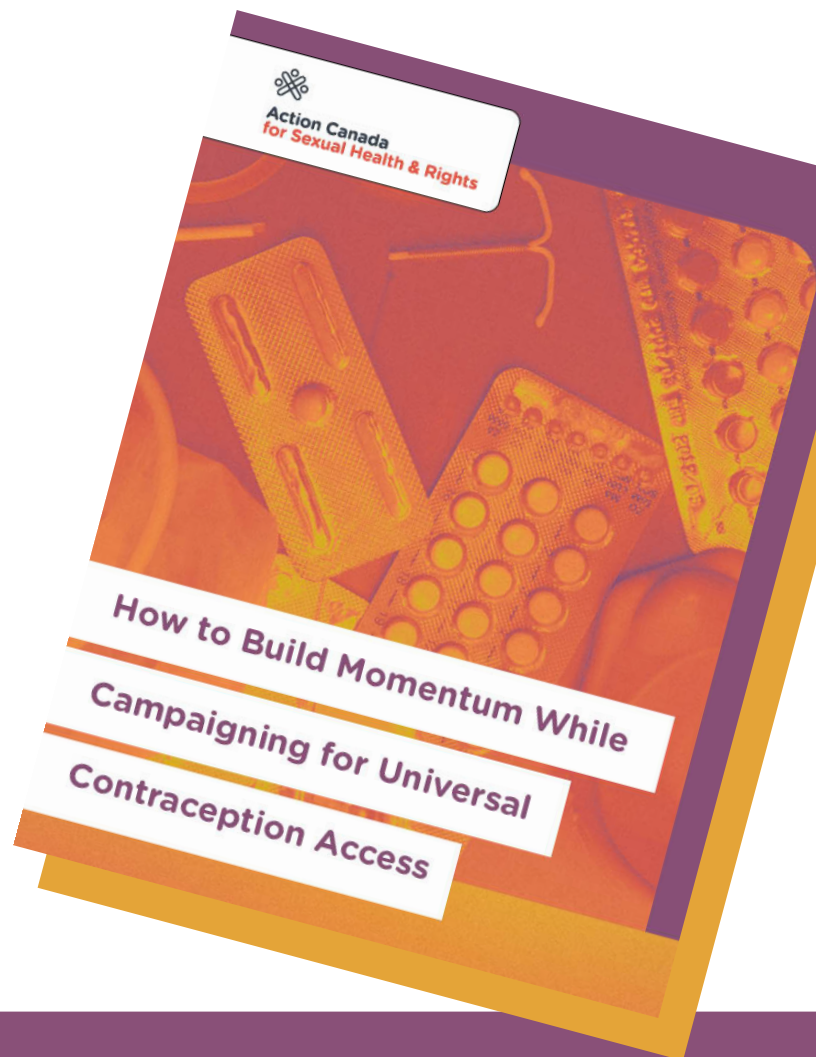
How to Create Your Message

Formula for Persuasive Messaging

1. Open with shared values to welcome people in across the political spectrum.
2. Introduce the problem clearly and simply.
3. Present the solution with a vision for change.
4. Conclude with a call to action.



Learn more on messaging in [Action Canada's message guide on pharmacare](#)



Environmental Scan and Partnerships

Forming partnerships can bring credibility to your advocacy efforts as they entail showing that you are not alone in your desire for a change.

Conducting environmental scans can help you learn what partnership opportunities you can pursue.

Consider the following steps:

- Research existing SRHR campaigns and advocacy efforts in your region.
- Identify potential allies (other organizations, coalitions, unions, student groups, etc.)
- Ensure alignment in messaging and advocacy asks when working with partners. This can entail everyone signing onto one single campaign or it can involve ensuring alignment across multiple campaigns.

Key Engagement Windows

Advocating at the right time can increase your chances of success, as it gives you more leverage as an advocate and helps you to seize opportunities.

Key engagement windows for provincial and territorial include:

Provincial and Territorial Elections

- **Pre-election:** Advocate for SRHR policies to be included in party platforms.
- **During elections:** Engage both local candidates and provincial/territorial leaders and parties to ask their positions and use the election window to launch campaigns that mobilize public and political support for your issue.
- **Post-election:** Follow up with the winning party to ensure campaign promises are implemented. You can ask for something to be included in a mandate letter. For the jurisdictions that have public mandate letters, you can hold Ministers accountable for fulfilling their mandates.

Provincial and Territorial Budgets

- Budgets are a major opportunity for advocacy, but you must engage at the right time – **months** ahead of the budget – to advocate for SRHR funding ahead of budget releases. Provinces and territories typically have formal pre-budget engagement processes, which include surveys or consultations, which often are in full swing many months before the budget is revealed.
- In some jurisdictions, you can submit written briefs to committees.
- This guidance also applies to fall economic statements, which are like mini budgets, for cases when these exist.

Government Strategies and Consultations

- Governments may create policy strategies on a certain issue area such as health, gender equality, or other issues (e.g., the Manitoba Government's MMIWG2S+ Strategy, known as "Mino'Ayaawag Ikwewag: All Women Doing Well").
- While a strategy is being developed, it is a great time to engage with governments during public consultations and make your vision, your strategies, or your community's needs heard. There are opportunities for both public-facing advocacy and behind the scenes lobbying.

Provincial-Territorial Ministers' Meetings

- Provincial-Territorial Ministers' Meetings (or PT meetings for short) are when all of the Ministers (provincial, territorial, and federal) on a certain issue all meet together to discuss key priorities. An example of this would be all Provincial, Territorial, and Federal Ministers of Health meeting together.
- Advocating to your Minister before these meetings can influence discussions.

Federal Funding and Committee Meetings

- In a provincial or territorial legislature, committees meet to discuss issues in greater depth than what debates in the legislative chamber allow due to time restrictions and other constraints. Sometimes committees invite residents or experts to participate in the legislative process by testifying at committee.
- You can learn about committees for your province or territory on the official government website for your jurisdiction. You can learn details such as what committees exist; when they meet; and broad updates on what they are discussing.
- You can track what relevant legislation is being considered at committee meetings.
- In order to increase your chance of being invited to testify at committee meetings, you can build relationships with the committee members, i.e. the provincial elected officials (i.e. MLAs/MPPs/MHAs).
- Finance committees are often tasked with pre-budget engagement ahead of provincial and territorial budgets.
- In some jurisdictions, finance committees are tasked with pre-budget engagement ahead of provincial and territorial budgets.

How to Book a Meeting with an Elected Official or Policymaker:

How to Find Contact Information

- Contact details for MLAs/MNAs/MPPs/MHAs and Ministers are usually available on government websites.
- Party websites typically also provide contact information relating to contacting a political party.
- Contact information for policymakers can sometimes be more difficult to find. You may sometimes need to contact a more general email for a department

and hope that they will connect you with the more specialized unit. You can also ask your colleagues at other organizations if they have a direct email address for a policymaker at a certain government unit. When you do find policymaker emails, your organization should save them to keep this as institutional memory, even when you may experience staff turnover.

Sample Email to Request a Meeting

Subject: Meeting Request – [Your Organization Name] on [Insert Topic]

Dear [Elected Official's Name],

I am [Your Name], [Your Position] at [Organization Name]. We advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights in [Province/Territory]. We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss [specific policy issue].

We are available on [list dates and times] and can adjust to your availability. Please let us know if you would be open to this discussion.

[Insert 2 sentences on why this is particularly important right now]

Best regards,

[Your Name]

[Your Organization]

How to Prepare for a Meeting

To make sure your efforts lead to the best outcome possible, adequately preparing yourself and your team for a meeting with a government official is crucial.

Developing an Advocacy Brief

An advocacy brief serves as a summary of your issue and the ask(s) you will make during this meeting. It helps you to be strategic and can also be given to the official during or after your meeting. An advocacy brief should include:

- A one-page summary of your issue
- Data and evidence supporting your ask
- Motivation on why it is aligned with the government's (or if applicable, opposition party's) interests
- A clear call to action and specific ask

Action Canada has an Advocacy Brief Template that can be found [here](#).

Anticipating Questions and Rebuttals

You want to be as ready as possible to answer questions; tactfully refute counter arguments; and pivot back to your core messaging during your meeting.

- Develop your advocacy objective, key messaging, and advocacy brief. Then, set aside time to “role play” with a colleague who can consider potential counterarguments and prepare responses that certain your own narrative and key messages.
- Be ready to address financial concerns, feasibility, and opposition perspectives.

Preparing Your Elevator Pitch

Meetings with elected officials can be short and fast-paced. Preparing an elevator pitch helps you get your point across with as few words as possible.

- Start with the emotional connection (i.e. everyone deserves to be able to make decisions about whether and when they have children – which is why contraception must be universally accessible and affordable)
- Build up the problem (i.e. the lack of access to affordable contraception is a major issue in our province)
- Present the solution and vision (we are calling on the government to fund universal contraception)
- Make the ask (will you support this specific initiative and call for funding to be committed to it in the upcoming budget?)

Bring Constituents to Meetings

Elected officials are more responsive to concerns from their constituents, so bring local supporters if possible.

How to Monitor Provincial Governments and Legislation

Tracking Policy Changes

There are many ways for you to track policy changes, including:

- Signing up for government newsletters and party press releases.
- Setting up Google Alerts for key issues and policymakers.
- Using media monitoring tools like Meltwater to track news and legislative updates.

When and How to Pair Behind the Scenes Government Relations with Public-Facing Advocacy

Behind the scenes:

Private meetings, policy recommendations, and advisory work.

Public-facing campaigns:

Media advocacy, petitions, social media engagement, and protests.

When to combine both behind the scenes efforts and public facing campaigns:

If private meetings stall, public pressure can increase urgency.

Compliance Obligations

In all levels of government, advocates should be familiar with legal compliance issues related to lobbying. There are different obligations related to lobbying in different jurisdictions. At the federal level, the Lobbying Act is the legislation outlining compliance issues related to lobbying. Each province or territory has their own guidance on lobbying.

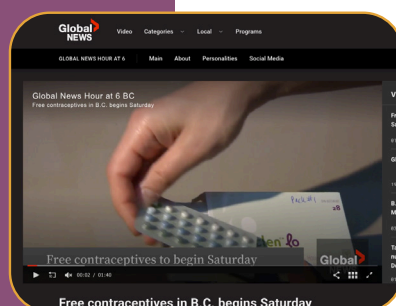
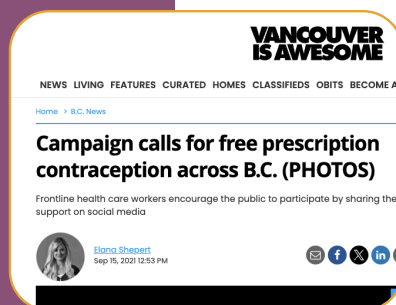
Advocacy vs. Lobbying

- Advocacy is general education and public awareness efforts, such as running a public-facing advocacy campaign.
- Lobbying is direct engagement with policymakers to influence legislation or policy decisions. Lobbying is communicating, with public office holders, for payment with regard to: the making, developing or amending of federal legislative proposals, bills or resolutions, regulations, policies or programs; the awarding of federal grants, contributions or other financial benefits; and the awarding of a federal government contract (for consultant lobbyists only). In the case of consultant lobbyists, the federal Lobbying Act also defines lobbying as arranging a meeting between a public office holder.

Lobbying Registrations and Election Period Restrictions

- Some jurisdictions require organizations to register as lobbyists if they engage in frequent government lobbying.
- During election periods, you must ensure compliance with regulations on political activity and third-party advertising (i.e. running digital ads) as it relates to your jurisdiction.





CASE STUDY:

AccessBC

AccessBC successfully advocated for free prescription contraception in British Columbia through:

- ▶ Writing a clear and effective [policy background](#).
- ▶ Organizing waves of letter-writing campaigns that target key politicians and staffers.
- ▶ Securing targeted meetings with government officials.
- ▶ Media advocacy to increase public awareness by securing hundreds of news stories.
- ▶ A strong municipal endorsement campaign.
- ▶ Participating in municipal and provincial budget consultations.
- ▶ Tabling at events.
- ▶ Using [billboards](#) to raise public awareness.

Their campaign demonstrates how grassroots advocacy, strategic messaging, and political engagement can lead to policy wins that have such an important impact on people's lives and wellbeing.

The campaign took a unique approach to municipal-level advocacy that was powered by campaign volunteers and supporters across the province. It started with volunteers asking their municipalities to back the campaign at municipal council meetings. It also resulted in resolutions supporting our campaign being passed by the Union of BC Municipalities in 2020. 35 individual municipalities endorsed the campaign.

How to Partner with Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights

Action Canada supports local sexual and reproductive health advocates with:

POLICY EXPERTISE

TRAINING

CAPACITY BUILDING

**CONNECTIONS TO NATIONAL SRHR
NETWORKS AND ADJACENT NETWORKS**

To partner with Action Canada on a provincial or territorial policy issue, please email info@actioncanadashr.org.

Conclusion

Advocating for SRHR at the provincial and territorial levels requires strategic engagement, strong messaging, and persistence. By using the tools and strategies outlined in this toolkit, local organizations can influence policy and create meaningful change.

For further guidance, reach out to Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights and join the national movement for sexual and reproductive health and rights in Canada.