

Written submission for the Pre-budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming 2025 Federal Budget



Action Canada
for Sexual Health & Rights



Recommendations

1. Make the Sexual and Reproductive Health Fund permanent - \$90 million over six years starting in 2024–25, including \$20 million in ongoing annual base funding.
2. Allocate resources to secure Pharmacare agreements with all provinces and territories to ensure universal access to contraception.
3. Allocate \$3 million to expand the current national sexual health survey, \$8 million to repeat it every four years, and fund its scope expansion to capture diverse Canadian experiences.
4. Fund a cross-government review to address AI and platform-based disinformation on SRHR and gender.
5. Resource federal departments to coordinate national access to comprehensive sexuality education.
6. Use spending powers to ensure sustainable funding for community-based sexual health centres.
7. Reaffirm Canada's 10-Year Commitment to Global Health and Rights of \$700 million/year for SRHR

Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights is a charitable human rights organization advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Canada and globally through policy advocacy, research, and health promotion.



Today's government is navigating a complex landscape shaped by the long shadow of the 2008 financial crisis, the economic fallout of COVID-19, rising debt, a volatile global economy, and an increasingly unpredictable U.S. administration. Meanwhile, more people across Canada are facing deepening economic insecurity, struggling to meet basic needs and losing trust in institutions.

In this context, programs advancing gender justice, human rights, and health equity are not secondary, they are essential to building inclusive, resilient systems that support participation in economic and social life. Strategic investments in these sectors yield long-term returns by ensuring the necessary stability for a healthy society, strengthening the labour force, and reducing public costs.

When people can't access childcare, safe housing from violence, contraception, or hormone therapy, or when policy and legal efforts to address systemic barriers are defunded, their ability to pursue education, stay in the workforce, and contribute to the economy is compromised. These barriers disproportionately affect women, youth, and 2SLGBTIQ+ people and have ripple effects on health care costs, social services, and productivity.

Investing in gender-responsive, rights-based policies is not only a matter of equity, but also a practical strategy to strengthen Canada's resilience. Gender justice and health programs are high-impact levers for sustainable, inclusive growth, supporting healthier communities, a stronger economy, and a more democratic future. Meaningful support for gender justice and health equality, and the sectors supporting these efforts, is not fat; it's key to addressing head-on the challenges we face as a country.

In Budget 2025, we recommend that Canada prioritize strategic investments that will deliver long-term social and economic returns by:

Ensuring Equitable Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services for All

Ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care is preventative care, one of the most cost-effective strategies in any health system. SRH is an area that remains chronically under-resourced, despite its outsized impact on people's ability to make decisions about their bodies, futures, and economic participation. Gaps in access not only contribute to preventable health issues but also deepen inequities across regions and populations. While health service delivery is a provincial responsibility, the federal government plays a vital role in addressing these discrepancies by setting national priorities, closing data gaps, supporting public health infrastructure, and coordinating action across stakeholders and jurisdictions.

Sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs), unintended pregnancy, and sexual assaults cost Canada over \$6 billion¹ annually. Investments in preventative and rights-based interventions can significantly reduce these costs and have a profound impact on Canadians' health and well-being.

The Government of Canada must move forward with its promise to make Canada's Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Fund permanent, with \$90 million committed over six years starting in 2024–25, and \$20 million in ongoing annual base funding.

This shift reflects how permanent, A-based funding model is essential to sustain and scale impactful, evidence-informed SRH programming across Canada. This can build capacity and protect continuity beyond election cycles, and safeguard improvements for marginalized communities often disconnected from health care systems.



By transitioning to stable, long-term base funding, the federal government can institutionalize SRH as a core priority within Health Canada, ensuring flow-through coordination with other departments, and civil society partners. This guarantees coherent, enduring investments in reproductive health equity and human rights across the country.

Universal contraceptive coverage is a proven, evidence-based investment that supports better family planning, reduces unintended pregnancies, and improves people's social and economic outcomes. Currently, approximately 46%² of pregnancies in Canada are unintended, a clear indicator of access gaps that disproportionately affect young people, low-income populations, and marginalized communities.

Cost modelling shows that universal contraceptive coverage in British Columbia alone would result in health system cost savings within just four years³. The same logic applies nationally. Beyond long-term cost savings, universal access to contraception immediately removes barriers to pursuing an education and participating fully in economic life.

With pharmacare implementation agreements currently in place in only four jurisdictions, **Budget 2025 must commit the necessary resources to secure pharmacare agreements with all provinces and territories, and to ensure those agreements include universal access to contraception.** This is a high-return investment and a critical step toward a truly national pharmacare system that leaves no one behind and allows Canada to fully realize the social and economic benefits of universal, publicly funded drug coverage.

Investing in robust data and evidence to inform effective interventions and policy

Canada is the only high-income country without a recurring national sexual health survey, a major gap in the design of effective, evidence-based health policies and programs. Budget 2021 made a critical first step, but that investment must be expanded and sustained. To fully realize the potential of this initiative, **Budget 2025 must provide an additional \$3 million to increase the sample size for the current cycle and commit \$8 million to ensure the survey is repeated every four years. Resources must also go toward expanding the scope of the survey beyond its current focus to better capture the full range of Canadians' sexual and reproductive health experiences and needs.**

This would deliver the high-quality, disaggregated data needed to design coordinated, responsive, and forward-looking policies and programs. Investing in consistent national data collection is essential to tracking progress, identifying inequities, and ensuring resources are allocated where they will have the greatest impact on health outcomes across the country.

Ensure access to accurate, inclusive sexual health information and education

In an era where artificial intelligence increasingly shapes what we see and believe, the stakes for access to accurate information on sexuality, health, and gender have never been higher. AI-generated content as well as disinformation on social media are proliferating without adequate oversight. Canadian experts, legal analysts, and national SRHR organizations are sounding the alarm on the growing risks of online harm, disinformation, and platform manipulation. Social media platforms increasingly block, distort, or amplify content in ways that not only compromise public health and safety but also undermine democratic engagement and informed decision-making.

Canadians' rights to health, safety, and accurate information are being compromised when influencers promote unreliable fertility-tracking tools in place of proven contraceptive methods or fearmongering about gender-affirming



care, spreading disinformation and weakening trust in healthcare guidance. Generative AI deepfakes that target women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people also pose serious human rights and public health risks, fueling gender-based violence and harassment in ways that current systems fail to meaningfully address. At the same time, platform algorithms continue to reward polarizing or misleading content, eroding the integrity of public discourse and democratic participation.

While Canada has taken initial steps such as enacting the Artificial Intelligence and Data Act and proposing the Online Harms Act, significant regulatory gaps remain, including a comprehensive framework for governing AI-generated content and platform accountability.

Budget 2025 must dedicate funding to launch a coordinated, cross-government review of the public health and democratic risks posed by AI- and platform-based disinformation related to sexuality, sexual health, reproductive health, and gender. This review should involve all relevant ministries and departments, and digital policy leaders, and should aim to identify and address gaps in content governance, algorithmic accountability, platform liability, and AI-generated media labelling. Funding should also support pilot studies to assess the effectiveness of transparency tools, synthetic media labelling, and fact-checking interventions tailored to SRHR content. As AI becomes more embedded in public life, Canada must act decisively to develop an evidence-based, human rights-centred regulatory strategy that protects both individual autonomy and democratic integrity.

Safeguarding the information environments young people navigate every day goes hand in hand with ensuring access to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). CSE is a critical, evidence-based investment in building healthier populations and a more sustainable health care system. It is a preventative measure with long-term impacts like reducing rates of sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs), unintended pregnancies, gender-based violence, and mental health challenges, while also fostering informed, civically engaged communities. CSE is already recognized as a key intervention in major federal strategies, including the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, the Federal STBBI Action Plan, and others. Yet, without consistent implementation across the country, its full potential remains unrealized.

To close this gap, **Budget 2025 must resource departments to coordinate a national approach to CSE, ensuring all young people, regardless of province or territory, have access to education aligned with the Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education and Gender-Based Violence Education.** At the same time, **the federal government must use its spending powers to ensure dedicated, sustainable funding for community-based sexual health centres**, which are essential to delivering this education, training educators, and offering critical access to sexual and reproductive health care. These centres are a key part of Canada's health infrastructure and must be properly supported if national strategies are to succeed.

Strengthen Canada's Global Leadership in Advancing Sexual Health and Rights

Since 2010, Canada has been a global leader in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). With the adoption of the Feminist International Assistance Policy in 2017 and the roll out of the 10 year commitment on health and rights starting in 2020, Canada's investments in SRHR have had a profound impact on the health and lives of the world's most marginalized women, girls and gender diverse people. From providing access to contraceptives, to preventing maternal death and disability, to working with whole communities to build a shared understanding of the importance of SRHR across the life course, Canada's investments in SRHR have changed peoples' lives and have had a measurable impact in achieving Sustainable Development Goals 1 (Poverty), 3 (Health), and 5 (Gender Equality). These



investments have also strengthened health systems, contributed to critical research and evidence on the health, economic and social benefits of rights-based SRHR service delivery, built the capacity of locally-led women's rights organizations to advocate for enabling legal and social environments on SRHR and human rights more broadly, and mobilized multistakeholder support for the health and rights of women and girls. **Canada's investments in SRHR are also one of the most cost-effective and highest yielding development interventions in low- and middle-income countries – for every \$1 invested results in \$8.4 returns through reduced health costs, increased productivity and improved education outcomes⁴.**

In this moment of global instability, the catastrophic impacts of the dismantling of USAID (the world's largest global health and family planning donor) and the intensification of attacks on women's sexual and reproductive rights in all regions of the world, Canada's steadfast political and financial leadership on SRHR is needed now more than ever. As Canada seeks out new alliances for global cooperation, it is essential that Canada bolsters its reputation as a principled and reliable partner. **Action Canada recommends that the Government of Canada reaffirms the 10-Year Commitment to Health and Rights that includes \$700 million/year dedicated to SRHR.** Canadians also want to see their government leading in this area, as 77% of Canadians support Canada's investments in global SRHR and want the Government to continue to prioritize SRHR in its global engagements⁵.

¹ Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN). Questions & Answers: Sexual Health Education in Schools and Other Settings. 2020, p. 38.

https://www.sieccan.org/files/ugd/1332d5_6506a2c46aba4bb2927143fda80caade.pdf

² Bearak J, et al. Country-specific estimates of unintended pregnancy and abortion incidence: a global comparative analysis of levels in 2015 – 2019. *BMJ Global Health*. 2022; 7(3).

³ Norman, W., and B. Stirling. "Contraception Cost-Effectiveness in British Columbia." *The University of British Columbia Contraception Access Research Team* (2018).

⁴ United Nations Population Fund (2022). [Investing in three transformative results: Realizing powerful returns](#), New York

⁵ <https://www.actioncanadashr.org/about-us/media/2023-03-14-new-data-shows-vast-majority-canadians-believe-global-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights>

