



Position Paper #59

The Trudeau Government's Record on Abortion Rights

The Trudeau Government made many strides to improve and protect reproductive rights. While past Liberal leaders and Prime Ministers have been cautiously pro-choice, withholding outspoken support, Justin Trudeau broke this norm and demonstrated his dedication to reproductive rights. Despite his outspokenness however, the Trudeau government failed to act on critical policy and did not enforce reproductive rights equitably across Canada.

From 2015-2025, Trudeau remained consistently pro-choice through statements, federal initiatives, and allocation of funds. While his government made significant progress on abortion rights and reproductive healthcare, it fell short on several fronts, highlighting the need for much improvement to be made in Canada. For example, inaction towards upholding the *Canada Health Act* and not providing sufficient funding resulted in inequality of access for some regions in Canada.

Symbolic Leadership

The way a leader frames an issue plays a consequential role in how that issue is perceived and addressed by the party and the public. As a leader of Canada, the way Trudeau discussed abortion as a vital aspect of healthcare and as a human rights issue affirmed his support and denounced negative narratives surrounding abortion.

For instance, on International Safe Abortion Day, Sept 28, 2024, he stated “We unequivocally reaffirm every woman’s right to make decisions about their body, their life, and their future. We reflect on the freedoms won by women”¹ This statement demonstrated his unequivocal support and commitment towards protecting reproductive rights while in office. While the statement was mainly positive, its gendered language raised the recurring issue of the government’s exclusion of gender diverse people from the narrative of who needs reproductive care. Although Trudeau consistently voiced support for reproductive rights, his government was often slow to implement corresponding policy changes.

¹ “Statement by the Prime Minister on International Safe Abortion Day.” *Prime Minister of Canada*, 28 Sep. 2024, www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2024/09/28/statement-prime-minister-international-safe-abortion-day

Legislative/Political Action

Trudeau's first direct pro-choice action related to the ability of his caucus to vote on the topic of abortion. Before being elected in 2015, Trudeau publicly stated that his sitting caucus members were required to vote in favour of abortion access and against limits on abortion.² This was monumental as it was the first time that MPs were prevented from supporting restrictions against reproductive rights, whether that be voting on anti-choice bills another party has introduced or introducing a private member bill. By requiring all Liberal caucus members to vote pro-choice, Trudeau took a stand against anti-choice legislation.

The government also barred anti-choice groups from being funded by the Canada Summer Jobs program in 2018 because of their mandate against reproductive rights. All applicants were required to promise they would not use funding to undermine reproductive rights including abortion, or to discriminate such as by refusing to hire LGBTQ+ youth.³

Additionally, in 2024, the Liberal party introduced the *Pharmacare Act* to enable the federal government to provide free contraception within provinces and territories.⁴

The government also proposed amendments to the *Income Tax Act* in October 2024, addressing concerns about "crisis pregnancy centres." The legislation would have required registered charities to disclose services that they did or did not provide.⁵ This was significant, as these anti-choice centres spread misinformation and propaganda, misleading individuals and often using shame to dissuade individuals from accessing the reproductive care they seek.

Funding Initiatives

The Trudeau-led government also funded many initiatives that supported reproductive health and abortion access within Canada as well as internationally.

In 2019, Canada launched a 10-year commitment to advance the health and rights of women and girls around the world. Within this commitment, the government spent \$574 million on comprehensive reproductive health and rights, with \$274 million of this towards neglected

² Payton, Laura. "Abortion Position Clarified Again for Liberal MPs." *CBC NEWS*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 18 June 2014, www.cbc.ca/news/politics/justin-trudeau-clarifies-abortion-stance-for-liberal-mps-1.2679783

³ The Canadian Press. "Canada Summer Jobs Change Barring Anti-Abortion Groups Was 'Reasonable': Federal Court." *Global News*, 25 Oct. 2021, globalnews.ca/news/8323742/canada-summer-jobs-anti-abortion-groups/

⁴ "Government of Canada Protecting Reproductive Freedom and Covering Essential Health Care Costs." *Department of Finance Canada*, Government of Canada, 29 Oct. 2024, www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2024/10/government-of-canada-protecting-reproductive-freedom-and-covering-essential-health-care-costs.html

⁵ "Protecting Reproductive Freedom by Preventing Abuse of Charitable Status." *Department of Finance Canada*, Government of Canada, 29 Oct. 2024, www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2024/10/protecting-reproductive-freedom-by-preventing-abuse-of-charitable-status.html

areas.⁶ For example, a project in Bolivia, Indonesia, and Nigeria would increase access to sexual and reproductive health services and promote female autonomy in these countries.⁷

Domestically, the Trudeau Government also created the Sexual and Reproductive Health Fund (SRH Fund), a resource to help underserved communities receive proper health care and access to abortion. This fund began in 2021 with a \$45 million investment and was renewed with a \$36 million investment in 2023.⁸

From the SRH Fund, the National Abortion Federation of Canada received \$1.4 million in funding in 2022 to support resources and training for healthcare professionals who provide abortion services.⁹ while Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights received \$2.1 million in 2022 to strengthen their Access Line capacity and bolster their Norma Scarborough Emergency Fund.¹⁰ In addition, the Faculty of Medicine at UBC received \$3.8 million in 2023 to improve equitable access to abortions by addressing the needs of underserved populations and to improve training resources for healthcare professionals.

Negatives

While the Trudeau Government was outspoken in its support for reproductive rights and demonstrated it for the most part, they lacked action in some areas and took too long to complete their promises. The Trudeau government failed to adequately enforce the *Canada Health Act*, which emphasizes the universality of healthcare, including abortion access. Many provinces and territories in Canada still severely lack abortion access, and the federal government did not take sufficient action to ensure consistent access to abortion throughout the country.

For instance, the abortion clinic in Fredericton, Clinic 554, had to close in 2024 due to financial strain and unwillingness from the province to fund clinic-based abortions.¹¹ The federal government responded by withholding \$444,000 in Health Transfer funds from the province

⁶ "Canada's 10-Year Commitment to Global Health and Rights: Measuring the Progress." *Global Affairs Canada*, Government of Canada, 6 Dec. 2024, www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/global-health-sante-mondiale/index.aspx?lang=eng

⁷ "Canada Announces Funding for Projects to Advance Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), and Gender Equality Internationally" *Global Affairs Canada*, Government of Canada, 20 July 2023, www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2023/07/canada-announces-funding-for-projects-to-advance-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-srhr-and-gender-equality-internationally.html

⁸ "Government of Canada." *Health Canada*, Government of Canada, 26 Sept. 2024, www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/funding/sexual-reproductive-health-fund.html

⁹ Zimonjic, Peter. "Federal Government Announces Funding to Expand Access to Abortion Services." *CBC NEWS*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 11 May 2022, www.cbc.ca/news/politics/abortion-funding-expanded-roe-v-wade-1.6449487

¹⁰ www.actioncanadashr.org/news/2022-05-11-action-canada-receives-2-million-health-canada-strengthen-srhr-services

¹¹ Cox, Aiden. "Clinic 554 to Close, Bringing Clinic-Based Abortions to End in Fredericton Area." *CBC News*, CBC/Radio-Canada, 31 Jan. 2024, www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/clinic-554-fredericton-abortion-1.7100433

between 2020 and 2022.¹² However, the province still refused to fund the clinic and the Liberals took no further action.

In addition, Abortion Care Canada was denied funding from the SRH Fund in early 2025. Funding for Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights was also reduced by nearly 40%,¹³ although was later mostly restored.

Finally, the Trudeau government delayed taking action on the amendments to the *Income Tax Act*, which died when Parliament was prorogued in January 2025. The amendments were never followed through with.¹⁴

Further Steps

The Trudeau Government made several steps in the right direction; however, abortion access continues to be very limited in many parts of the country, with many barriers still existing. Individuals who reside in rural parts of Canada often must travel to access abortion services, which is costly and difficult. According to Action Canada's Abortion Access Tracker,¹⁵ 18.1% of people with child-bearing capacity live over 100 km away from an abortion clinic, signifying the need to expand access to more rural destinations.

Additionally, anti-choice charities continue to spread misinformation and attempt to undermine abortion rights and access, which can prevent individuals from making informed decisions about their reproductive health.

Systemic injustices are also a significant obstacle surrounding reproductive care, as many marginalized groups do not receive proper medical care and are mistreated by health professionals. This continuous mistreatment has reinforced distrust of the medical system by many racialized groups and cultures. Until this distrust and the systemic barriers are addressed, abortion access will remain difficult for these communities.

While the successive Trudeau governments from 2015 and 2025 made meaningful efforts to expand abortion rights and advance reproductive healthcare in Canada, the Liberal party often lacked timely efforts in areas that needed improvement. Recognizing that significant gaps remain in abortion and reproductive healthcare access, it is essential to hold current and future Liberal governments accountable and push for meaningful progress. Advocates must continue pushing for a better system and access to reproductive healthcare and hold governments to account in improving abortion rights in Canada.

¹² Canada Health Act Annual Report 2023-2024, www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/health-system-services/canada-health-act-annual-report-2023-2024.html#toc197090488

¹³ The Canadian Press. "Canadian Abortion Group Says It May Have to Shutter after Losing Government Funding." CTV News, 28 Jan. 2025, www.ctvnews.ca/canada/article/canadian-abortion-group-says-it-may-have-to-shutter-after-losing-government-funding/

¹⁴ "What Has Each Party Done for Reproductive Rights?" *Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada*, April 2025, www.arcc-cdac.ca/party-records-repro-rights

¹⁵ Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, <https://www.abortionaccesstracker.ca/>