



Position Paper #100

Why ARCC Supports Reproductive Justice

ARCC supports the concept of Reproductive Justice because we recognize that the sexual and reproductive health and rights of people from many diverse communities are disproportionately affected by marginalization and oppression. These include LGBTIQ2s+ communities, Indigenous communities, racialized communities, youth, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. To ensure justice, fundamental inequalities must be addressed for all.

What is Reproductive Justice?

The concept of Reproductive Justice was developed by women of colour in the United States, who did not believe that the pro-choice movement reflected their different perspectives on how to achieve self-determination for themselves and their communities. They envisioned a broader framework because they saw that a woman's reproductive destiny is inextricably linked to the conditions in her community.

The "SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective" is a grassroots network representing ethnic populations and indigenous nations in the United States, which defines Reproductive Justice as: "...*the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.*"¹

While abortion rights will always remain ARCC's focus, we recognize that abortion is just one aspect of reproductive justice. Sistersong also believes that "*Reproductive Justice is...not just about abortion. Abortion access is critical, and women of color and other marginalized women also often have difficulty accessing: contraception, comprehensive sex education, STI prevention and care, alternative birth options, adequate prenatal and pregnancy care, domestic violence assistance, adequate wages to support our families, safe homes, and so much more.*"

¹ <https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice>

An example in Canada is the fact that many people live far from health care services and have to travel long distances for some sexual and reproductive health care, including abortions or treatment for complicated pregnancies. It is a hardship to be separated from one's family and community, and Indigenous people in particular may not receive culturally appropriate care away from home.²

Further, Canada has an ugly history of sterilization of Indigenous women and tearing families apart by removing children to residential schools. When Indigenous women fought to have and keep their children, it was "as much an act of feminism as any efforts by non-Indigenous women to use birth control."³

The Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) is a peer-based network in Toronto that works with Indigenous peoples across Canada to further reproductive health, rights, and justice in their own communities. NYSHN says that sexual and reproductive justice means:⁴

"...having free, prior and informed consent regarding all decisions made about our bodies. As the legacy of Indigenous and women of color community organizing has taught us, it's about recognizing just how interrelated issues are having to do with our bodies (i.e. domestic violence and higher rates of incarceration for women) and that often we need justice before 'choice' even becomes a possibility."

Reproductive Justice Needs in Canada

From ARCC's perspective, Reproductive Justice needs in Canada cover a broad spectrum. We therefore endorse the following programs or rights (at a minimum) to ensure justice for all women and marginalized groups:

- Leadership and inclusion of diverse groups in decision-making processes that affect them
- Comprehensive supports to enable women and transgender people to bear and rear the children they want, while maintaining their full human rights and dignity under the law
- LGBTIQ2s+ people's right to non-discriminatory access to healthcare and employment
- Sex workers' human and labour rights, full decriminalization of prostitution, harm reduction services, and transition services for those who wish to leave the industry
- Full justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and their families
- The full equality of Indigenous peoples, and an end to discrimination and colonialism
- Better programs to address violence against women and transgender people
- Universal, affordable childcare program

² <https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/broad-vision-reproductive-justice>

³ <https://theconversation.com/canadas-shameful-history-of-sterilizing-indigenous-women-107876>

⁴ <http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/whatwebelievein.html>

- Full funding for contraception in Canada under Medicare
- Foreign aid funding for safe abortion in Canada's maternal health programs, as well as increased funding for family planning programs in developing countries
- The right to medical assistance in dying, with ample safeguards and alternatives in place
- Pay equity legislation
- Funding for women's equality-seeking groups
- A Guaranteed Livable Income for all
- Compensation for unpaid caregiving work
- A national housing strategy
- Maintenance of and adequate funding for the Court Challenges Program to help people claim their Charter rights