



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Your Voice for Choice

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group

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Why Abortion Care Must Be Fully Funded

Anti-choice activists in Canada argue that abortion should be defunded and that women should pay out-of-pocket for abortion care. But that is a right-wing ideological position that ignores evidence and human rights. Defunding abortion would be unconstitutional, discriminatory, and harmful to women. The following 11 points explain why. (Each point is expanded upon here: <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/action/abortion-funding.html> with detailed arguments, evidence, and citations.)

1. Women's lives and health are at stake. Funding abortion is necessary to guarantee women's right to life and security of the person under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The main reason the Supreme Court threw out the old abortion law in 1988 was because it arbitrarily increased the risk to women's health and lives through unnecessary delays and obstructed access. Not funding abortion would have the same effect and the same constitutional problems as the old abortion law, and would put politics and ideology ahead of women's lives and health.
2. Women's liberty and conscience rights under the Charter require abortion to be funded. The government must not interfere with the deeply personal decision to bear a child or not, which is integral to women's autonomy and privacy. Otherwise, the government would be co-opting women's right to choose by funding childbirth but not abortion, and paternalizing women with an official stance of moral disapproval of abortion.
3. Since only women need abortions, funding abortion is necessary to ensure women's legal right to be free from discrimination. Restrictive policies and laws that apply to only one gender violate human rights codes that provide protection on the basis of sex. Further, women's equality rights under the Charter cannot be realized without access to safe, legal, fully funded abortion—otherwise, women would be subordinated to their childbearing role in a way that men are not.
4. Abortion funding is crucial to ensure fairness and equity, without discrimination on the basis of income. We must not compel low-income women and other disadvantaged women to continue an unwanted pregnancy due to lack of funding, or to delay care while they try to raise money. Any delay in abortion care raises the medical risks, especially when it extends into the second trimester. Delays are also a punitive burden that unnecessarily prolong stress and discomfort for women. Best medical practice should ensure that abortion takes place as early as possible in pregnancy, and this requires full funding.

5. Funding abortion is very cost-effective while unwanted pregnancies are costly. The medical costs of childbirth are about four times higher than the medical costs of abortion, and the social costs of forced motherhood and unwanted children are prohibitive. Further, the overall cost of abortion care to the taxpayer is a pittance relative to healthcare costs as a whole.
6. Funding abortion serves to integrate abortion care into the healthcare system in general, and ensure the comprehensiveness of reproductive healthcare programs, which is essential. If abortions were not funded, it would ghettoize abortion care, as well as the women who need it and the healthcare professionals who deliver it. This would likely increase stigma, lead to other restrictions, further marginalize abortion care over time, and increase anti-choice harassment and violence. All of this occurred in the United States after abortion was defunded for poor women by the 1973 Hyde Amendment.
7. Funding abortion is the right thing to do, despite some peoples' belief that abortion takes a life. There is no social consensus on the moral status of the fetus, and our laws do not bestow legal personhood until birth. Regardless, most Canadians believe that the woman's rights are paramount in all or most circumstances, because she is the one taking on the health risks of pregnancy, bearing a child is a major decision with significant lifelong consequences, and a woman should be able to direct her own life and pursue her own aspirations apart from motherhood.
8. Legal abortion is very safe for women and generally beneficial. The alleged medical and psychological "dangers" of abortion to women as described by anti-choice activists are either totally false or grossly overstated. Regardless, such arguments cannot support the defunding of abortion, since pregnancy and childbirth are far more medically risky, and many other funded medical treatments carry substantial risk. Access to legal, safe, fully funded abortion is also beneficial for women and families because it allows them to continue with their lives and plan wanted children later when they are ready to care for them.
9. Opinion polls showing that a majority of voters do not want to pay for abortion are misleading and not pertinent. Voter opinion on this issue has been shaped by anti-choice misinformation, as well as lingering prejudice about women who have abortions. Regardless, voters have no authority to dictate what medical treatments to fund, as this is the role of provinces and professional medical organizations. Women's basic rights and freedoms must not be subject to a majority vote.
10. Abortion must be funded because it is not an elective procedure, any more than childbirth is. Pregnancy outcomes are inescapable, meaning that a pregnant woman cannot simply cancel the outcome—once she is pregnant, she must decide to either give birth or have an abortion. To protect her health and rights, both outcomes need to be recognized as medically necessary and fully funded, on an equal basis.
11. Anti-choice activists often say that "pregnancy is not a disease" and therefore abortion should not be funded. But the same arguments can be made for childbirth, since there are no medical reasons for a woman to get pregnant and have a baby. More importantly, health is much more than the absence of disease – it's about achieving a state of overall health and wellness. Women with unwanted pregnancies are not in a healthy place, so their abortion care should be funded.