

BRIEFING NOTE FOR THE FINANCE MINISTER OF CANADA
THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTION FOR REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH
ACCESSIBILITY AND FUNDING

ISSUE: Be it resolved that sexual and reproductive health services will be equally accessible in all parts of Canada.

BACKGROUND:

Although abortion has been legalized since 1988, Canadian women have faced restrictions to crucial reproductive health services, education and funding (Shaw & Norman, 2020). Women in need of reproductive health services continue to face obstacles from anti-abortion organizations that provide dishonest counseling to women about their rights and about the options available to them at all stages of the pregnancy (Liberal, 2021). The Liberal Government has stated their commitment to protecting Canadians' sexual and reproductive health rights by providing better access, according to Downie and Norman (2017), regulation as a standard medical procedure has been associated with improved accessibility and fewer, safer abortions.

CURRENT STATUS:

The issue at stake is not the legality of abortion and reproductive health services, but how women, transgender and non-binary people can gain access to resources through appropriate funding in each province. The 2021 budget highlights that "women, youth, LGBTQ2 people, racialized Canadians and Indigenous populations face the highest sexual and reproductive health risks and the greatest barriers to accessing support, information, and services" (Government of Canada, 2021, para. 72). These concerns are especially strong in rural areas around Canada (Fawcett, 2021). The government's 2021 election campaign directly addresses this through their updated budget document stating: "The government is committed to collaboration with provinces

and territories to strengthen our healthcare system, ensuring equitable and appropriate access to a full suite of reproductive and sexual health services, in any upcoming Canada Health Transfer funding discussion" (Government of Canada, 2021, para. 73).

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

With their recent re-election, the Liberal Government's 2021 budget promises to "provide \$45 million over three years, starting in 2021-22, to Health Canada to fund community-based organizations that help make sexual and reproductive health care information and services more accessible for vulnerable populations. These organizations support activities such as producing inclusive training materials for sexual and reproductive health care providers, carrying out public awareness activities, and providing travel and logistical support to individuals who have to go long distances to access abortion care." (Government of Canada, 2021, para. 75). In addition, they promise to "provide \$7.6 million over five years, starting in 2021-22, for Statistics Canada to develop and implement a national survey on sexual and reproductive health that captures data on race, household income, and sexual orientation—information often not captured in existing surveys. Better information will help ensure governments understand the challenges and improve the support they provide." (Government of Canada, 2021, para. 77). While providing the necessary funding for safe abortion access, the Liberal Party will "no longer provide charity status to anti-abortion organizations (for example, Crisis Pregnancy Centres) that provide dishonest counseling to women about their rights and about the options available to them at all stages of the pregnancy" (Liberal, 2021, para. 6).

OPTIONS:

- 1. Fund educational services that provide training for health care workers as well as public awareness on safe sex and available reproductive health services.**

Advantages: Reduce risk of unsafe practices and at-home abortions. Make women feel as though their health is valued and therefore feel comfortable seeking professional help with appropriate services.

Disadvantages: Accommodating enough educational services within the budget. Fighting misinformation from anti-abortion organizations and religious groups.

2. Fund Statistics Canada surveys that collect data on sexual and reproductive health in relation to income, race and orientation.

Advantages: Capture data that is not often represented in existing surveys. Create solutions for those who have limited access to sexual and reproductive services.

Disadvantages: Accommodating research and data collection into the budget. Time consuming to complete.

3. Do nothing and wait.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Liberal Government moves forward with option one to not only educate women on their medical options, but proactively prevent unsafe practices that lead to abortions. Budgeting for educational services creates a safer environment for marginalized groups that have not been represented well in the past. Implementing these changes will make women feel heard, valued and cared for by the healthcare system.