



ANNUAL REPORT



As the former Executive Director of the Canadian Federation for Sexual Health, I am so proud of who we have become as Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights. I've been on the frontlines for over a decade, including serving as Executive Director of a local Planned Parenthood for 4 years. It's clear to me that joining these national organizations together to form Action Canada has created a much stronger voice for sexual rights, able to do policy research and analysis on a much larger scale, and delivering more direct services, more effectively. We truly are better together.

There have been several times in the last year when this was abundantly clear to me. For instance, our team recently came together to discuss Health Canada's approval of Mifegymiso and its pending (albeit limited) availability in Canada. We shared stories from Access Line callers struggling to access abortion services in their communities, and what this would mean for them; we referred to WHO best practice guidelines and evaluated how Health Canada's approval contradicted WHO guidance; and we identified important allies in the medical community who share our concerns. We discussed other strategies for working with decision makers to increase access and reduce barriers, and finally we were able to consider how we might create educational tools and resources to inform the public about Mife. A comprehensive response like this would have been far out of reach for our predecessor organizations.

This is the best of what we imagined. An organization where domestic and global policy work to inform one another. Where questions around access are informed by a broad network of organizations and allies, as well as individuals. And where all actions are informed by the best evidence available across a wide spectrum. This is the organization we sought to create, and with your support, we did it!

ENDING MATERNAL MORTALITY: an Action Canada Priority



Every day, over 800 women die from pregnancy and childbirth related complications. Another 5 million women experience serious injury and permanent disability every year. Most of this is preventable, but not when more than 222 million women can't access the modern contraception they choose. For many of you this is the reason you started donating to us. We know you share our commitment to family planning and safe abortion worldwide.

Meeting this need globally would cost over 37 billion dollars each year. Even if every Canadian donated to clinics that provide direct family planning services overseas, we couldn't fill that gap alone. But the money is out there. It's in the development budgets of countries like Canada, and the vast resources of global players like the United Nations. That's why we're working in Canada and globally to convince decision makers to help us save women's lives.

For real change to happen we need all donor countries to contribute. That's why we've been working so hard in New York to help shape the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, the agenda that will determine development funding worldwide for the next fifteen years.

We are honoured that our ED is among the 25 experts of the High-Level Task Force (HLTF) for ICPD, an advocacy group credited with the inclusion of access to contraception and safe abortion in the SDGs. In the last year, Sandeep has worked diligently with other HLTF members to ensure that

access to family planning and safe abortion hold a more prominent place in the 2015-2030 global development agenda. Now that the goals and targets are finalized, we are shifting focus to ensure that all targets are reached by 2030 – including an end to maternal mortality.

One of our best tools to do so is the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. Through the UN process, the Council reviews stakeholder reports on each country's human rights record. We fund and support local feminist groups to report on their own countries through this process. We then leverage our presence in Geneva to ensure that recommendations in these reports are raised within the country's review. Such reports lead to recommendations that heavily influence the domestic agendas of the countries reviewed, and the development aid a country receives, providing strong motivation for countries to honour and implement them. We also provide trainings to these groups in advocacy skills to increase the number of voices, both in country and at the UN, holding governments accountable on human rights issues. In the last year alone, we've trained over 110 feminist activists around the world, submitted 17 reports, and ensured that almost 400 of the recommendations provided by the Council relate to realizing reproductive health and rights. In the coming years, we will continue to build our network of feminist groups around the world. With your support, we've already made huge strides this year toward ending maternal mortality.

PROVIDING CRITICAL FRONTLINE SERVICES



Like you, we dream of a world where everyone can exercise their sexual rights – and we’re working hard to realize that dream. With your help, we will get there. Meanwhile, we’ll continue to provide direct services to those who need them right now.

One of our top priorities following the launch of Action Canada was to strengthen Canadians for Choice’s signature programs, the Access Line and the Norma Scarborough Fund. We have since recruited and trained highly skilled volunteers (including a strong network of professional midwives) to bolster the Access Line. We’ve published an updated directory of abortion providers in Canada that our volunteers use every day while answering calls from women struggling to access safe abortions. And we’ve ensured financial stability and new procedures for the Norma Scarborough Access Fund, so that we can continue to help as many women as possible navigate the costly logistical barriers of travelling to access safe abortion services.

We’ve published an updated directory of abortion providers in Canada that our volunteers use every day while answering calls from women struggling to access safe abortions.

We also continue to prioritize sexual health awareness in Canada. Building on the Canadian Federation for Sexual Health’s Sexual and Reproductive Health Awareness Week campaign, we launched Canada’s only fully bilingual and adamantly pro-choice sexual and reproductive health information website. With regular traffic to the website, we are filling the gaps in sexual health knowledge created by poor access to comprehensive sex-ed across Canada.

But information isn’t always enough, and we know that facing barriers to accessing contraceptives is still a reality for many in this country. With your support, over 100,000 condoms were purchased this year through our bulk purchase program. We’re helping non-profit service providers stretch their budgets by offering lower cost condoms to those who may not otherwise be able to afford these critical supplies. Thanks to donors like you, we can continue to help ensure that all people have access to the contraceptives they choose.

A STRONG VOICE FOR SEXUAL RIGHTS



For decades, activists and communities across Canada have been advocating for sexual and reproductive health and rights. From abortion to marriage equality, we’ve made great strides. But what was needed was a national voice to hold our governments accountable.

We’ve made it our priority to point out discrepancies in access to legal abortion services and comprehensive sexuality education in Canada, and have successfully brought attention to these issues both nationally and globally. Because of our work, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights will for the first time in history question Canada on the availability and accessibility of abortion and sex-ed in our country.

We’re regularly holding governments – including Canada – accountable at the United Nations. With representatives in New York and Geneva, we’re working with activists and organizations across the globe. Our work has meant the inclusion of sexual and reproductive health and rights in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and countless recommendations at the UN Human Rights Council that will ensure governments worldwide make good on their commitments to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

At home, we’ve had a busy year mobilizing across the country. From PEI to Ontario, Saskatchewan to Quebec, we’re collaborating with activists on the ground to realize sexual and reproductive health and rights. We worked with the PEI Abortion Rights Network to publish an op-ed in the Huffington Post that led to a toll-free number allowing women from PEI to make an appointment for an abortion at the Moncton, NB hospital — a small but significant step. And we won’t stop here. We’re working hard to hold the government of Canada accountable to the Canada Health Act when it comes to ensuring real access to abortion for all people in Canada, without the serious barriers of having to travel out of province. We’re meeting regularly with MPs and consulting with decision makers on issues like access and conscientious objection. And for the first time in 30 years, because of our work in the Up for Debate campaign, we heard from four of the five federal leaders on women’s rights issues during this past election. The party leaders have made commitments on policy changes we suggested in our Opting for Sexual Health and Rights report – and now it’s time to hold them accountable for those promises. We’re ready.

As secretariat to the Canadian Association for Parliamentarians on Population and Development (CAPPD), we’re confident of our ability to create change on the hill. The CAPPD is a non-partisan forum for Canadian MPs and Senators where our allies in parliament strategize together on the promotion of sexual rights in Canada and abroad. Our work with the CAPPD MPs has helped advance women’s rights in international policy arenas like the G7, as well as here at home. We’re now recognized as experts in the field, with key decision makers seeking our input. For example, this past year the House of Commons committee on foreign affairs asked us to provide testimony on why Canada must support and advance a broad sexual and reproductive rights agenda in its international work. Thanks to your support, we’re able to work with decision makers, hold them accountable, and be the national voice on sexual and reproductive health and rights that our movement needs.