

ACTUALLY ACCURATE INFORMATION: ABORTION IN CANADA

So you were approached by an anti-choicer. Here's what you need to know.



CLAIM: THERE IS NO LAW IN CANADA ABOUT ABORTION FACT CHECK: ACTUALLY, TRUE

Abortion became legal in Canada in 1969 through the Criminal Law Amendment Act, the same act that legalized homosexuality and contraception. However, abortions were restricted to people who could prove that the pregnancy was life threatening.

In 1988, the Supreme Court ruled in R. v. Morgentaler that restrictions on abortion are unconstitutional because they infringe on a person's right to "security of the person" as protected by s.7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As Chief Justice Dickson put it, "forcing a woman, by threat of criminal sanction, to carry a fetus to term unless she meets certain criteria unrelated to her own priorities and aspirations" infringes upon her rights and freedoms as a Canadian.

**CLAIM: MAKING ABORTION ILLEGAL WOULD STOP
ABORTION IN CANADA**

FACT CHECK: ACTUALLY, FALSE

Before abortion was legal in Canada, it was common for people to perform their own abortions at home, or pay a physician to do it illegally, which was often unsafe and led to infection and death. The former executive director of the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League stated that before legalization, "several hundred women per year died from botched abortions." It is not known exactly how many people were harmed or died from unsafe abortions prior to 1988, but the fact remains that **criminalizing abortion does not stop abortions, it stops safe abortions.**

**ACCESS TO ABORTION AND REPRODUCTIVE/SEXUAL
HEALTH SERVICES ARE STILL LIMITED FOR MANY
CANADIANS**

Despite abortion being fully legalized for over thirty years, many Canadians still struggle to access abortion services.

There is also a growing anti-choice presence in Canada, mirroring the anti-choice movement in the United States. Even in our own community, conservative Niagara West MPP Sam Oosterhoff came out strongly against abortion in 2019.

Check out the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada's website for how to take action to protect abortion rights:

www.arcc-cdac.ca/take_action.html

And email
niagarareproductivejustice@gmail.com for
opportunities to get involved locally!

CLAIM: YOU CAN GET AN ABORTION AT ANY TIME FOR ANY REASON, EVEN AT NINE MONTHS PREGNANT.

FACT CHECK: ACTUALLY, FALSE

When Canada legalized abortion, they shifted responsibility for regulating abortion from the state to physicians. This means that abortion is governed by medical standards instead of politics. Each hospital and clinic has its own standards and policies that guide its decision making. While medical decisions should only concern the patient and their doctor, this has its own downsides too because it means that people needing to access later-term abortions may be denied by their doctor or clinic.

If you see anti-choice activity in Niagara, please let us know and fill out the Anti-Choice Activity in Niagara Reporting form at bit.ly/ReportAntiChoicers.

WHO GETS AN ABORTION AT NINE MONTHS?

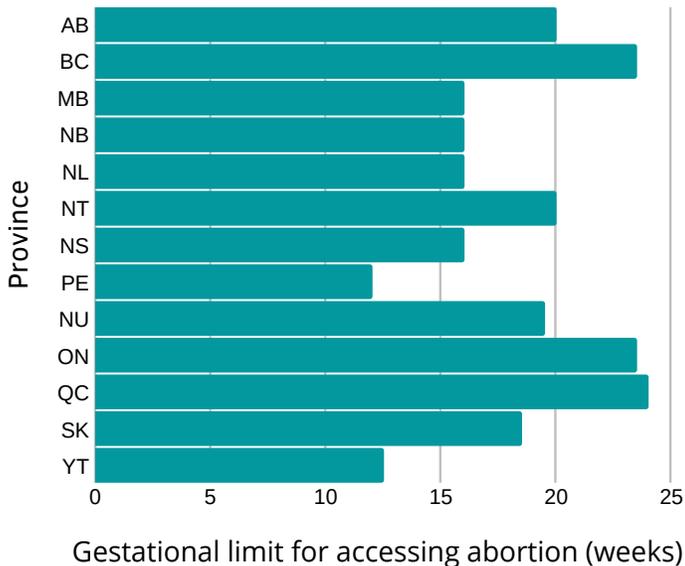
Actually, in 2016 the Canadian Institute for Health Information reported about 2.7% of abortions were performed after 20 weeks gestation. When abortions are performed during the second or third trimester of pregnancy, it is because the fetus or the parent is experiencing life-threatening complications. There are **no reported cases** of someone having an abortion at nine months pregnant. When a fetus is lost at nine months, it is due to medical complications.

WHEN IS IT MOST COMMON TO GET AN ABORTION?

About 90% of abortions take place before 12 weeks gestation. Currently, there are no providers that offer abortion past 23 weeks and 6 days in Canada.

WHAT DOES “LATE TERM” ABORTION MEAN?

You may have heard the phrase “late-term abortion.” This term is incorrectly used to describe people who get an abortion in the third trimester. “Late term” is a phrase used by doctors to describe a pregnancy that is past its due date (40+ weeks). There is no such thing as a “late term” abortion.



CLAIM: FETUSES ARE HUMANS AND DESERVE HUMAN RIGHTS

FACT CHECK: ACTUALLY, FALSE

There are many different opinions about when an embryo or a fetus becomes a baby. Currently, legally and scientifically, a baby is classified as a human only after it is born. Regardless, granting it human rights has a number of consequences.

Fetal rights treat the fetus as though it is a separate entity from its parent, when it is actually still a part of it. Granting a fetus rights takes away from the pregnant person's rights because it prevents them from exercising bodily autonomy (i.e. having a say in what happens to their body). Women and other people who can get pregnant have long been denied equal rights based on their reproductive capabilities, and it is only recently that their right to control what happens to their own body has been legally recognized. Forcing a person to continue a pregnancy regardless of their own desires or health infringes on their rights.

WHOSE RIGHTS SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED ABOUT?

Many BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), transgender, and disabled people are being denied their rights. For example, Indigenous people and disabled people have been forcibly sterilized in Canada for the past century. Indigenous people have reported having their fallopian tubes tied non-consensually as recently as 2017. Anyone concerned with reproductive justice should direct their efforts toward preventing injustices such as these.

Check out the Native Youth Sexual Health Network for more information on how to get involved and support reproductive justice in Canada.

www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com

CLAIM: ABSTINENCE-ONLY EDUCATION HELPS PREVENT ABORTIONS

FACT CHECK: ACTUALLY, FALSE

Some people believe that one way to prevent abortion is to teach abstinence — that is, teach people not to have sex at all unless they are intending to reproduce. Abstinence-only sex education is frequently taught in schools, churches, and communities in Canada, but it has been proven ineffective. Study after study shows that “increasing emphasis on abstinence education is positively correlated with teenage pregnancy and birth rates.” Telling kids to not have sex, and therefore not teaching them about safe sexual practices, does not stop them from having sex, it just stops them from having **safe sex**.

CLAIM: ABORTION IS DANGEROUS

FACT CHECK: ACTUALLY, SOMETIMES TRUE - BUT ONLY WHEN IT'S BEEN CRIMINALIZED

About 1 in a million people who have an abortion experience life-threatening complications, while 1 in 10,000 people who give birth experience life-threatening complications, making it 100 times more risky to give birth. The decision to undertake the risks associated with abortion or with birth should only be made by the person who is pregnant.

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER MYTHS ABOUT ABORTION?

Some people and organizations who are against abortion will falsely claim that abortion is associated with an increased risk of breast cancer and mental illness. Crisis Pregnancy Centres (CPCs) are anti-abortion, Christian facilities that masquerade as reproductive health clinics and are known for spreading these myths. There are about 200 CPCs in Canada, and there are six here in Niagara.

MORE ABOUT CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTRES

The CPCs in Niagara have been known to tell people that receiving an abortion will be detrimental to their health. They spread misinformation about the risks associated with abortion, claiming that people who receive abortions may suffer afterward from breast cancer, “post-abortion syndrome,” and hemorrhaging leading to death as a result of their abortion.

The myth that abortions cause breast cancer has been debunked by every major medical agency for the past 20 years. “Post-abortion syndrome,” which is described as a decline in mental health, has also been proven false; the most comprehensive study on this topic to date found that 95% of people who have an abortion say that relief is the strongest emotion they feel afterward, and 99% of people do not regret it.

WHAT ARE THE WAYS YOU CAN ACCESS AN ABORTION IN NIAGARA?

The Choice Connect Abortion Referral web app (www.choiceconnect.ca) provides clients with referrals to the nearest abortion provider.

The Action Canada Access line (1-888-642-2725) is a confidential 24-hour Canada-wide toll free number that provides information on reproductive and sexual health, referrals, and financial and travel assistance for people seeking abortion.

For more information on how to access abortion in Niagara, go to niagarareproductivejustice.com/resources.

ORGANIZATIONS AND CAMPAIGNS TO SUPPORT

Local

OPIRG Brock

Niagara Falls Community Health Centre

Quest Community Health Centre

OUTNiagara

Positive Living Niagara and Streetworks

Student Justice Centre at Brock University

Online & National

Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC)

SisterSong: Women of Colour Reproductive

Justice Collective

Native Youth Sexual Health Network

Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights

Maggie's Toronto Sex Workers Action Project

University of Victoria's Anti-Violence Project

For more information and printable resources, go to www.niagarareproductivejustice.com/materials

SOURCES

Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada: www.arcc-cdac.ca/

Access at a Glance: Abortion Services in Canada: www.actioncanadashr.org/resources/factsheets-guidelines/2019-09-19-access-glance-abortion-services-canada

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Kappler, M. (2019). Here's how Canada's abortion policies actually work. *Huffpost*.

Stanger-Hall, K. F., & Hall, D. W. (2011). Abstinence-only education and teen pregnancy rates: Why we need comprehensive sex education in the U.S. *PLoS ONE*, 6(10), e24658.

Rocca, C. H., Samari, G., Foster, D. G., Gould, H., & Kimport, K. (2020). Emotions and decision rightness over five years following an abortion: An examination of decision difficulty and abortion stigma. *Social Science & Medicine*, 112704.

Virdi, J. (2018). The coerced sterilization of Indigenous women. *New Internationalist*.



NRJ is a group of community members in the Niagara Region of Ontario advocating for increased visibility of and access to sexual health resources in Niagara.

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