

Government of Alberta's Proposed Policies on Transgender Youth, Gender-Affirming Care and Sexuality Education in Schools

Our Position: The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) has a vision for a world free from violence and abuse. Our organization and our members work every day to create safe and ethical spaces for healing from domestic abuse and to change our culture to end gender-based violence. Through our decades of experience, we know that effective gender-based violence intervention and prevention is rooted in values of equality and inclusivity, and requires open discussion about gender, gender norms and stereotypes, diversity, and consent. We also recognize that current structures often fail to account for the many expressions of gender, and we affirm the importance and the need for resources and supports for gender-diverse people who have experienced violence, as well as safe spaces for them to share and discuss their experiences. These are basic human rights.

One of ACWS' core beliefs is the empowerment of women and the equal worth of all persons. We believe in and pro-actively affirm the dignity of all, regardless of gender, gender identity, gender expression, or sexuality. Human rights should not be up for political debate, whether it is in relation to accessing social support, seeking medical care, participating in sports, or accessing education. We believe that decisions about children's safety should be centered on the best interests of the child, and—in the case of health care—rooted in medical evidence, not on political opinion. In Alberta, these basic human rights are now being threatened. On January 31, 2024, Premier Smith announced policies that if implemented will risk the safety of trans, Two-Spirit, non-binary, and genderqueer people, and especially of trans women and girls. Trans women and girls already experience higher rates of violence than their cisgender counterparts, with 64% having experienced intimate partner violence since the age of 16.¹

The Creator doesn't make mistakes when giving gender identity.

- Metis Elder/Knowledge

As an anti-violence organization, we work to educate and inform the public about gender-based violence. Through this work, we connect with diverse Albertans to explore how each of us can lead from where we stand to address and end gender-based violence. Key aspects of this work include conversations about consent and the dynamics that create the foundations for gender-based violence, which include gender norms and stereotypes, and the valuing of some groups over others. Our work affirms that all people should be afforded the opportunity to develop their own sense of self in healthy and supported contexts

The Premier's proposal would limit the ability of ACWS or any other violence prevention organization to have these conversations in schools, at a time when students are starting to explore relationships. The proposed requirement for parental permission to opt in to classes discussing human sexuality, sexual

¹ <https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/infographics/transwomenandipv/Trans-Women-and-Intimate-Partner-Violence.pdf>

orientation, and gender along with the preapproval by the Ministry of Education of any third party program materials to ensure they are age appropriate, will limit the ability to have meaningful, age-appropriate conversations with students about healthy relationships and consent by obscuring the process with unnecessary bureaucracy and censorship. Indeed, some of our members reported that they have already had to change their presentations on gender-based violence or had their presentations cancelled in some schools in this province.

Per the World Health Organization, “evidence consistently shows that high-quality sexuality education delivers positive health outcomes, with lifelong impacts. Young people are more likely to delay the onset of sexual activity – and when they do have sex, to practice safer sex – when they are better informed about their sexuality, sexual health, and their rights.”²

Approximately half of those served by shelters are children. The proposed policies stand to compound the abuse they experienced at home by subjecting them to further abuse in schools and communities based on their gender identity. Knowing that 3 to 5 children in any classroom have been exposed to violence in their home,³ the need for education on healthy relationships becomes even more clear. And, within that, the need to support each student to understand their own worth to be free from relationship violence, no matter how they express their gender.

This government is a signatory of the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. The National Action Plan asserts that everyone has a right to live free from violence and recognizes that many people experience violence every day because of their sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender.⁴ The proposed policies directly contradict this commitment and the Government’s subsequent statement on May 17, 2024 for the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, claiming they “stand united in our commitment to build a province that celebrates the worth of everyone and rejects all forms of discrimination.”⁵ The proposed policies position the rights of one group over another, based on gender. This attack on transgender rights is an attack on gender equality.

The answer is simple. Gender, gender identity, and gender expression are all protected grounds under the Alberta Human Rights Act.⁵ We call on the provincial government to abandon their proposed policy and align with their stated commitment to the “values of compassion, respect and understanding that define us as a province and as a people”⁷; ensure that women’s shelters and other gender based violence experts can easily access Alberta classrooms and include age appropriate gender based violence courses in the Alberta curriculum for all grades; recognize that trans women are women and commit to the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence to create safety and equality for all Albertans.

² <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/comprehensive-sexuality-education#:~:text=Evidence%20shows%20that%20young%20people,sexual%20relations%20and%20their%20rights.>

³ <https://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/kids-these-days-family-violence-is-everyones-business.pdf>

⁴ <https://femmes-egalite-genres.canada.ca/en/gender-based-violence/intergovernmental-collaboration/national-action-plan-end-gender-based-violence.html>

⁵ <https://albertahumanrights.ab.ca/what-are-human-rights/about-human-rights/protected-grounds/>