



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

PO Box 2663, Station Main, Vancouver, BC, V6B 3W3 • info@arcc-cdac.ca • www.arcc-cdac.ca

For immediate release

November 16, 2010

Survey: 64% of Abortion Clinics in Canada Experience Protesters

But most clinics have no bubble zone protection

NATIONAL – A new survey by the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC) reveals that 64% of abortion clinics in Canada currently experience protest activity, while a further 15% have had protesters in the past. But 73% of clinics have no legal protection from picketing.

The survey, conducted by a UBC law student on behalf of ARCC, interviewed staff at all 33 abortion clinics in Canada by phone. In addition to asking about protest activity and history, the survey asked clinics about the effect of protesters on patients and staff, measures taken to protect patients and staff, and the effectiveness of those measures.

- Twenty-six (79%) abortion clinics in Canada have been picketed by protesters, with twenty-one (64%) currently experiencing some degree of protest activity, and five (15%) having had protest activity in the past. Seven clinics (21%) have never had protesters.
- Sixteen clinics (53%) reported that patients and/or staff are negatively affected by the presence of protesters, such as feeling upset, frightened, or bullied.
- Twenty-one clinics (64%) have tried to reduce the impact of protester activity by obtaining private injunctions, recruiting volunteer escorts for the patients and staff, using security guards, calling in local law enforcement, training staff on how to respond to protestors, and other measures.
- Seven clinics (21%) have obtained private court injunctions to protect staff and patients from protesters. Two clinics (6%) are protected by BC's provincial law, the *Access to Abortion Services Act* (which creates protest-free "bubble zones" around clinics, hospitals, and the offices and homes of providers). Twenty-four clinics (73%) in Canada have no legal protection.
- All clinics with injunctions or bubble zones reported heavy and/or aggressive protest activity prior to obtaining their injunction or bubble zone.

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“The court injunctions and BC’s law have been quite successful – they have significantly reduced protest activity at every clinic that uses them, sometimes completely eliminating it,” said Joyce Arthur, Coordinator for ARCC, and co-author of the study. “Women have a right to access necessary health services privately without being bullied, and providers need protection from anti-choice harassment and violence. We hope that the survey data will be helpful for other provinces that may want to pass bubble zone legislation, or for clinics thinking about getting a court injunction.”

Other highlights:

- Every clinic in Canada participated – a total of 33. There are 11 standalone clinics, 12 clinics located in a multi-tenant office or medical building, and 9 clinics associated with a hospital.
- Seventeen clinics (52%) reported that the measures they took to protect providers and staff from protesters were effective or mostly effective. Four clinics (12%) said measures were not effective or only sometimes effective.
- Although protest activity has been relatively low and sporadic at most clinics since the mid-1990’s, it is on the rise again with the anti-choice “40 Days for Life” campaign that stages ongoing “vigils” outside abortion clinics once or twice a year.
- Nineteen clinics (58%) said that bubble zone legislation similar to BC’s would be desirable for their clinic.

The full report is available at <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/presentations/ARCC-survey-protest-activity.pdf> (English only).

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Joyce Arthur	Coordinator / Coordinatrice, ARCC-CDAC, Vancouver	604-351-0867
Lianne McTavish (elle parle français)	ARCC-CDAC, Edmonton	780-453-2455
Dr. Suzanne Newman	Abortion provider / Fournisseur d'avortement, Women's Hospital, Health Sciences Centre, Winnipeg	204-477-1887
Carolyn Egan	Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, Toronto	416-806-7985
Alison Brown	ARCC-CDAC, Toronto	416-907-8051
Peggy Cooke	ARCC-CDAC, Toronto	416-709-1457
Patrice Powers (il parle français)	ARCC-CDAC, Montréal	514-486-6376
Judy Burwell	Morgentaler Clinic, Fredericton	506-470-9049
Christopher Kaposy, PhD	Ethicist, Memorial University / Éthicien, Université Memorial, St. Johns NL	709-777-2338 (w)