



Canada's Missing Abortion Statistics: What Are We Hiding?

In 2010, Statistics Canada transferred responsibility for the analysis and distribution of abortion statistics to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), an independent not-for-profit organization. In December 2010, CIHI released abortion statistics for 2007 and 2008. As with previous years, much of the data concerning tax-funded abortions, especially those performed in clinics, is absent. Of note is the absence of data from some clinics and complete detailed characteristics for both hospital and clinic abortions (e.g., gestational age, numbers of previous abortions, complications).

Total Number of REPORTED Abortions in Canada

	Hospitals	Clinics	Hospitals and Clinics
2006	49,435	41,942	91,377*
2007	47,318 – 47,326	49,691	97,009 – 97,017*
2008	44,416	49,594	94,010*

***Missing data:** For 2006, Statistics Canada failed to give figures for clinic abortions citing unreliable data and it failed to report numbers for some hospital abortions. Similarly, the latest CIHI report states “there is known undercoverage (**extent is unknown**) in Canadian abortion clinics.” In 2007, data was unavailable for all clinics in Manitoba. And for 2008, CIHI notes, “no data were received from clinics in BC and Manitoba that traditionally responded to CIHI.” Once again, counts are not available for medical (pharmaceutical) abortions.

Traditionally Statistics Canada provided the analysis, Data Quality in the Therapeutic Abortion Survey. In 2006, the Data Quality document noted that the absence of abortion data was “definitely a concern”, especially for clinics since the proportion of clinic to total abortions was rising. CIHI currently offers no such analysis.

Teenage Pregnancies

The 2007 and 2008 statistics also provide incomplete data on the ages of women having abortions. In 2008, 5,435 of 44,416 (or 12.3%) hospital abortions were performed on girls under 19 years of age. The total number of abortions performed on teenagers in Canada's clinics is not available according to CIHI; however, both Alberta and Ontario clinics report higher percentages of teen abortions (14.3 and 15.5% respectively.) Statistics are grouped in one <19 years of age category instead of including a sub-grouping for girls under the age of consent as has been done in the past.

Alberta:

Alberta is the only province with relatively reliable tracking data for clinic and hospital abortions, released annually in its Reproductive Health Pregnancy and Births Surveillance Report. The 2009 Report Update continues to show an increasing trend in the total number of abortions in Alberta from 10,103 in 1999 to 12,537 in 2008. (CIHI reports an even higher figure of 13,264 abortions in Alberta in 2008.) When more complete data was available in the past, Alberta abortions represented about 10% of the total number of abortions in Canada. Inconsistencies in reporting, however, make accurate tracking of abortion in Canada impossible.

Late-term Abortions:

CIHI did not report gestational age for almost half of Canada's hospital abortions and for all of clinic abortions. Of the 25,671 hospital abortions that did report gestational age, 3,690 (14%) were after the first trimester, including 556 that were past 21 weeks gestation. The number of late-term abortions appears to be increasing. In 2003, for example, 320 of the 46,205 reported abortions were past 21 weeks gestation. Alberta's Reports also indicate that the number of abortions past 20 weeks gestation has risen from 24 in 1999 to 83 in 2007.

Tables with some provincial information are available on-line at:

http://www.cihi.ca/CIHI-ext-portal/internet/en/document/types+of+care/hospital+care/acute+care/services_tadb