



**Submission to Standing Committee on Health,
February 2, 2017**

Dear Mr. Gagnon/Mr. Casey,

The Central Nova Women's Resource Centre is pleased to provide this submission to the Standing Committee on Health on behalf of Women's Centres Connect. Women's Centres Connect unites the nine community-based women's centres in Nova Scotia; it is a strong, supportive, collective feminist voice on issues of concern to women and adolescent girls. Connect provides leadership in the struggle for women's equality and articulates women's concerns to the public and to policy makers.

There are nine Women's Centres which are multi-service centres providing services and programs to women and girls across Nova Scotia. We all strongly support the federal government's commitment to work with feminist organizations toward equity and equality for women including the harmful impacts of pornography on women.

We are pleased to hear that the Standing Committee on Health will soon undertake a study on the public health effects of sexually violent and degrading imagery online. This study is vital because pornography is easily available and portrays extreme and degrading violence against women, which perpetuates the notion that women are sexual objects and that men are entitled to treat women this way. Its ubiquitous nature has normalized hyper-sexualization and violence. Access to online pornography by youth has even more significant consequences. At a time when youth are seeking information about sex, they see violent and degrading images of

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women. Pornography has been linked to increased dating violence and self-destructive behaviour in youth; it is now being recognized as a public health hazard, and several jurisdictions are taking steps to limit youth access to online pornography.

Because access to pornography falls under different jurisdictions and sectors, we emphasize the need for federal leadership, and federal/provincial collaboration to address this issue from a harmonized policy framework. Arguments that blocking pornography would violate free speech laws are simply *excuses* for not making the effort to protect youth from the harm of pornography. When combined with an 'opt-in' option allowing individuals over the age of 18 to assess porn, there is certainly no effective censorship. For example, the UK has taken concrete steps to limit online access to pornography. Internet service providers for 90% of customers in the UK have agreed to filter out porn sites unless specifically asked by a customer to allow access. Proof of age is required for them to opt in. In addition, providers of public wifi have also volunteered to filter porn sites. In the US, it was recently announced that both McDonalds and Starbucks are blocking internet porn on their free wifi. A concerted effort is needed across society to prevent further damage to our youth. The time to act is now.

The Central Nova Women's Resource Centre recognizes the federal government's commitment to invest in the health of Canadians and we believe a direct intervention is needed immediately. We strongly encourage the federal government to adopt the recommendations outlined in this submission as part of our efforts to reduce access and we welcome the opportunity to appear before the committee when the study takes place to share what we have learned in regards to pornography and jurisdictions that have implemented measures to a serious public health issue.

Sincerely,

Julie Crouse

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Executive Director, Central Nova Women's Resource Centre on behalf of:
Women's Centres Connect

GB/jc

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