

2017.02 Mandatory Age Verification Mechanisms for Adult Pornographic Websites

Whereas, in Canada there are no laws requiring mandatory age verification mechanisms for adult pornographic websites; and

Whereas, Canada’s children and adolescents often have unrestricted access to Internet-connected devices, and can easily be exposed to adult content on websites without restriction – whether intentionally or otherwise; and

Whereas, studies show that early exposure to pornography can often lead to distorted views of sexuality and its role in fostering healthy relationships; therefore, be it

Resolved, that national council of The Catholic Women’s League of Canada in 97th annual national convention assembled urge the federal government to enact laws requiring mandatory age verification mechanisms for adult pornographic websites.

20 **BRIEF: Mandatory Age Verification Mechanisms for Adult Pornographic**
21 **Websites**

22 “In Canada, illegal images such as child pornography are already blocked”. There is no filter for
23 adult pornography (CBC News – Jul 23, 2013). With 420 million web pages containing
24 pornographic content and in Canada no national regulatory framework in existence, the Internet
25 has greatly increased the ease of access to sexually explicit material, making pornography
26 accessible to everyone, including children and adolescents (Zacharias).

27 “Kids have never before been so exposed to sexually graphic and harmful material...yet in the
28 online world it is easy to stumble upon.” (Canadian Centre for Child Protection Inc.). Recently, a
29 former United Kingdom prime minister stated that “with the growth of online pornography it is
30 currently all too easy for children to access adult content on websites without restriction –
31 whether intentionally or otherwise” (Gov. for the U.K., Prime Minister’s Office).

32 “Today, Canada’s youth are highly connected, increasingly social online and are embracing
33 online activities at younger ages than ever before...” (*Global News* January 22nd, 2014). Most
34 children and teenagers today are very accustomed to online access through devices that are
35 portable and personal (MediaSmarts). Canadians spend more hours online (36.7 per month) than
36 anyone else in the world with nine per cent of Canadians reporting that they have 10 or more
37 Internet-connected devices in their household, a number that is likely only to rise with the
38 proliferation of smart-home technology and applications (Canadian Internet Registration
39 Authority (CIRA) – Internet Factbook).

40 Today’s youth are exposed to pornography at a much younger age with 11 years of age reported
41 as the average age a child is exposed to pornography. “Oftentimes, first exposure is accidental, as
42 children grow up in the digital world” (Zacharias). A study at the University of Alberta in 2007
43 showed that out of 429 students, 90% of 13 and 14-year-old boys, and 70% of girls of the same
44 age, had viewed online pornography (Covenant Eyes). A study of a North London secondary
45 school showed that nearly a third of respondents had looked at pornographic images online when
46 they were 10 years old or younger (Ibid).

47 Early exposure to pornography can cause lasting damage to sexual development. A 2012 study
48 showed that early exposure to sexual material made viewers more likely to have sex earlier, and
49 to have casual, unprotected sex (Ross). A review of several studies on the effects of Internet
50 pornography and youth concluded that exposure to sexually explicit material resulted in more
51 high-risk sexual behavior (Owens et al). A study at Stanford University in 2007 showed that
52 “Pornography consumption contributed significantly to the prediction of sexual aggression...”
53 (Vega and Malamuth). Young men who view pornography are more likely to see women as sex
54 objects, (Owens) which could affect their future relationships with women.

55 There are ways that adult websites can be made less accessible to children. Some possibilities
56 would be to require sign-up with a credit card or with government issued identification such as
57 social insurance number, driver’s license etc. The government of the United Kingdom has
58 proposed age verification mechanisms for all pornographic websites (Gov. of the U.K, Curbing
59 Access).

60 The children and youth of our nation need to be protected from viewing all pornographic images.
61 We urge the federal government to introduce legislation requiring pornographic websites to
62 introduce a valid mechanism to verify that their users are of legal age to view adult material.

63 **Works Cited:**

- 64 1. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, CBC – Radio Canada *Canadians should have to ‘opt in’*
65 *to internet porn, MP says*. CBC News, 23 July 2013. Television
- 66 2. Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2016, *The Door That’s Not Locked – All web, No net*.
- 67 3. Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA), Internet Factbook 2016, Domain industry
68 data and Canadian Internet Trends, *Internet Use in Canada*
- 69 4. Covenant Eyes. *Pornography Statistics: 250+ facts, quotes and statistics about pornography*
70 *use*. 2015. Covenant Eyes, Inc.
- 71 5. Global News *Canada’s Youth are highly connected, girls face different rules online: study*
72 Toronto, 22 Jan. 2014.
- 73 6. Government of the U.K., Department for Culture Media & Sport. *Child Safety Online: Age*
74 *Verification for Pornography Consultation Response*. July 2016.
- 75 7. Government for the U.K., Prime Minister’s Office. *Curbing Access To Pornographic*
76 *Websites For Under 18s*. 2015. [https://www.gov.uk/government/news/curbing-access-to-](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/curbing-access-to-pornographic-websites-for-under-18s)
77 [pornographic-websites-for-under-18s](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/curbing-access-to-pornographic-websites-for-under-18s) Nov. 25, 2016.
- 78 8. MediaSmart, Young Canadians in a Wired World. Phase III: Life Online. 2014, pp. 2-6,
79 *Young Canadians in a Wired World. Phase III: LifeOnline*
80 mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/publication-report
81
- 82 9. Owens, Eric W., Richard J. Behun, Jill C. Manning, and Rory C. Reid. “The Impact of
83 Internet Pornography on Adolescents: A Review of the Research.” *Sexual Addiction and*
84 *Compulsivity*. Vol. 19, 2012, pp. 99-122.
- 85 10. Ross, Carolyn C., M.D., M.P.H. “Overexposed and Under-Prepared: The Effects of Early
86 Exposure to Sexual Content.” Web blog post *Real Healing*. Psychology Today online,
87 August 13, 2012. [https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/real-healing/201208/overexposed-](https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/real-healing/201208/overexposed-and-under-prepared-the-effects-early-exposure-sexual-content)
88 [and-under-prepared-the-effects-early-exposure-sexual-content](https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/real-healing/201208/overexposed-and-under-prepared-the-effects-early-exposure-sexual-content) February 6, 2017.
- 89 11. Vega, Vanessa, and Neil M. Malamuth. “Predicting Sexual Aggression: the Role of
90 Pornography in the Context of General and Specific Risk Factors.” *Aggressive Behaviour*.
91 Vol. 33, 2007, pp. 104-117
- 92 12. Zacharias, Janet, RN, BN. *Pornography – A Public Health Issue*. Issue brief. N.p.: n.p., 2017

93 **Action Plan:**

- 94 1. Contact Members of Parliament, the Federal Minister of Justice, and the Prime Minister,
95 requesting that legislation be created to ensure that adult websites verify the age of their
96 users.
- 97 2. Encourage members to become educated on internet safety and responsible and appropriate
98 technology use.
- 99 3. Make members aware of the lack of age verification controls on adult websites. Encourage
100 them to speak to family members about the lack of age verification, and its possible effects
101 on younger family members.
- 102 4. Monitor the response of government officials to request for new legislation.