

# PRIDE HISTORY IN B.C.

This resource focuses on the struggles and progress of the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities within B.C. Understanding history helps us all to understand the challenges faced, and challenges the community still faces, so that we can all find ways to contribute to progress. National and global events have been included when they have had significant impact at the provincial level. This selection of milestones is only a snapshot of queer history. It is important to note that while the fight for rights is relatively recent, queer gender identities and sexual orientations have also existed as part of Indigenous and global cultures for millennia.

When referencing legal and medical contexts the language used from the original source has been maintained. It is important to keep in mind that as history progresses, so does language. For more information on inclusive language see the [Words Matter](#) resource developed by the PSA and linked at the end of this document.

**1949**

Jim Egan, Canada's first gay rights activist, begins writing letters to media, lobbying for legal reform on homosexuality in Canada. At this time same-sex acts



between consenting adults are a criminal offence punishable by life in prison.

**1964**

Association for Social Knowledge (ASK) formed in Vancouver as the first "homophile," or gay rights group in Canada.



**1969**

Canada decriminalizes same-sex acts between consenting adults, passing the Criminal Law Amendment Act. It receives royal assent on June 27, codifying it into Canadian law the day before the Stonewall riots in New York.

**1979**

Robert Douglas Cook becomes the first openly gay electoral candidate in Canada in the B.C. provincial election.

**1978**

The Immigration Act is updated to lift a ban prohibiting homosexual individuals from immigrating to Canada.

**1973**

The Gay Alliance Toward Equity (GATE) organizes a picnic and art exhibit as part of Vancouver's first "Gay Pride Week". Part of a larger movement across Canada, events are held in several cities, representing the shift towards a gay liberation movement.

**1971**

The first gay rights protests are held in Canada, with one taking place in Vancouver and one in Ottawa. These protests advocated to end all forms of discrimination against gay and lesbian people.

**1979**

Vancouver and Montreal host their first Pride marches, and the first two within Canada.



**1981**

"Operation Soap" is one of the largest police raids in Canadian history. Close to 300 men were arrested in a raid of four gay bathhouses in Toronto. Police conduct raids and mass arrests at gathering places for 2SLGBTQIA+ communities across Canada between 1974-2004.

**1981**

First Lesbian Pride march in Canada is held in Vancouver.



**1981**

Vancouver's first official Pride Parade is held. After receiving a city permit, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community faced a significant increase in harassment and threats to frighten people away and cancel the event. Despite the threats, over 1500 people showed up.

**1990**

The term Two Spirit (niizh manidoowag) is coined at the Native American/First Nations Gay and Lesbian Conference in Winnipeg.



**1990**

World Health Organization removes homosexuality from being designated a mental disorder.

**1983**

Little Sister's Book and Art Emporium, an independent bookstore focused on championing queer voices, opens in Vancouver and continues to operate today. They became famous for a court battle with the Canada's Border Service Agency (CBSA) over the systemic targeting and confiscation of materials intended to celebrate the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. In 2000 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favour of Little Sister's.



**1992**

Sexual orientation is “read into” Canada’s Human Rights Act following a human rights complaint from Captain Joshua Birch after he was discharged from the Canadian Forces for disclosing that he was gay.

**1992**

Following several lawsuits and human rights complaints, Canadian Forces Administrative Order (CFAO) 19-20 is repealed, allowing gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people to serve in the Canadian Forces.



**1995**

Egan v. Canada rules that freedom from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is a protected right.

**2000**

Parliament passes Bill C-23 which gives same-sex couples the same social and tax benefits as heterosexual couples in common-law relationships.

**1998**

Supreme Court of Canada rules that Provinces cannot exclude protection of individuals from human rights legislation based on sexual orientation.

**1998**

Sexual Orientation is added to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.



**1996**

Bill C-33 adds Sexual Orientation to the Canadian Human Rights Act.

**2003**

Same-sex marriage is legalized in B.C. and Ontario. It would later be legalized at the federal level in 2005 through Bill C-38.



**2009**

The Q Hall of Fame Canada, headquartered in Vancouver, is founded. Nominees into the Q Hall of Fame include 2SLGBTQIA+ community members and allies who have played a prominent role in the protection or advancement of 2SLGBTQIA+ rights in Canada.

**2011**

The Transgender Archives are established at the University of Victoria as the largest archive in the world specializing in the history of transgender activism.



**2021**

Bill C-4 amends the Criminal Code of Canada to criminalize “conversion therapy”. The bill defines conversion therapy as the “practice, treatment or service designed to change a person’s sexual orientation to heterosexual, or to change a person’s gender identity to cisgender”. Providing, promoting, or advertising conversion therapy is now a criminal offence.



**2021**

B.C. Human Rights Tribunal rules that deliberately misgendering someone is a human rights violation.

**2019**

World Health Organization votes to remove “transgender” from being designated as a mental disorder.

**2018**

B.C. updates government-issued identification requirements to allow an “X” gender marker on B.C.-issued driver’s license, identity card, birth certificate, and B.C. Services Card.



**2016**

Bill 21 amends B.C. Human Rights Code to include “Gender Identity and Expression”.

The movement for 2SLGBTQIA+ rights is ongoing. The community continues to celebrate successes, and move forward as issues emerge. Check out the Words Matter resource to learn more about the importance of using inclusive language and how it supports continued progress.

[Words Matter](#)



[More information on the history of Canadian Pride](#)

