

Resolution - Countering Disinformation in Canada

Club Name(s)/National Committee Names(s)

CFUW Guelph

Club President/National Committee Chair(s)

Acting President Gwen Revington

Proposers of the Resolution

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Resolved Clauses

RESOLVED, that CFUW urges the Government of Canada to establish an independent regulatory board, created by statute, with authority to identify, monitor and impose sanctions on the spread of disinformation across digital platforms, including the distribution and amplification of disinformation, while complying with the *Charter* right of freedom of expression.

RESOLVED, that CFUW urges provincial and territorial governments to develop, as part of the school curriculum, mandatory media literacy courses for each grade (grades K-12) that are specifically focused on disinformation, including critical thinking skills, manipulation techniques and mechanisms of dissemination.

RESOLVED, that CFUW urges all levels of government to develop and implement extensive and ongoing information awareness campaigns to educate the public on the dangers of disinformation, how to recognize different categories of disinformation, and how to assess the accuracy of information that is circulated on social media platforms.

RESOLVED, that CFUW calls on the Canadian government to continue to provide various forms of financial support for legacy journalism, including both broadcast and print media, to ensure reliable information sources remain available for all Canadians.

Background

Definitions:

Disinformation: information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization, or country (Wardle & Derakshan, 2017)

Misinformation: information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm (Wardle & Derakshan, 2017)

Introduction

Democracy in healthy societies requires a shared understanding of basic facts and confidence in key institutions. Disinformation destroys that shared understanding and impacts all individuals in Canadian society. The Canadian Communication Security Establishment (CSEC) has identified that Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays a key role in political disinformation attacking political figures (CSEC Update, 2025). AI's ability to create fake information opens the door to

new challenges in addressing disinformation. The Report of the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference states that disinformation creates distrust and division and poses a significant threat to our democracy (Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions, 2025). David Coletta, CEO of Abacus Data, reported that 84% of surveyed Canadians indicated concern about the spread of disinformation, and that this concern crosses the political spectrum (Silver, 2024). In a recent CFUW Guelph survey, 96% of respondents stated that they believe that disinformation poses a serious challenge to society in general. 98.4% have concerns about the impact of disinformation on climate change, health and safety and our world order (CFUW Guelph Advocacy, 2026). The World Health Organization has stated that "...we're living through a medical misinformation "infodemic", and it is a serious threat to people's health" (Kleiner, 2025). The World Economic Forum Global risk report (2024) identifies disinformation and the technology that spreads it as a major global threat to the economy and to democracy. Disinformation threatens our public health and safety, our climate change action and our very democracy.

Public Health and Safety

The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) is seeing a direct link between disinformation and negative health outcomes (CMA, 2025). Disinformation has led to vaccine hesitancy and to some Canadians losing trust in public health organizations (Denniss & Lindberg, 2025). Timothy Caulfield, director of the Alberta University's Health Law Institute, is concerned that there has been an ongoing erosion of trust in matters of scientific health consensus, creating a knowledge crisis in which disinformation is dominating (Caulfield, 2025; McMaster, 2025).

Climate Change

The World Economic Forum (2024) identifies climate change as an extreme threat, and most likely to create a crisis on a global level. The United Nations Development Program [UNDP] (UNDP, 2025) has stated that climate change disinformation can undermine public trust in climate science, delay policy responses and polarize public discussion. Such tactics can include presenting only partial scientific information, promoting pseudoscience or amplifying conspiracy threats. Climate change policy remains a highly debated and polarized issue in Canadian politics (Hochachka, Wise & Regan, 2025).

Impact on Democracy

Disinformation can affect democratic processes, calling into question the integrity of our elections and the results (Silver, 2024). False media content mimics legitimate news (Martin, 2025). Both male and female politicians can receive online harassment, however, disinformation attacks against female politicians tend to be more personal and sexist in tone (Wong, 2024). Research suggests a significant outcome of gender-based disinformation is its ability to limit the involvement of women in politics and their overall success in the political arena (Seidel, 2021; Politics News, 2024). Therefore, online spaces are becoming increasingly toxic for female politicians (Ulrich, 2024).

Disinformation can also amplify differences in public opinion and can encourage hostility towards 'other' groups undermining our democracy, polarizing Canadians and targeting the social cohesion and trust that makes public debate and democracy possible (Martin, 2025). When the public is susceptible to disinformation, it can create group-based fear and resentment, eroding trust in public institutions (Hogue, Lavallée & Fung, 2025).

The Impact and Responsibility of Social Media Platforms

Social media platforms, including Meta (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Threads and Messenger), Tik Tok, Google, YouTube and X, are key platforms that effectively fuel disinformation. The use of trolls (groups systematically posting to manipulate ongoing narratives in order to disrupt), bots (automated software programs that mimic human interaction), false identity accounts, paid accounts and extremist influencers effectively increases the volume of disinformation online. Disinformation creates doubt and confusion, political polarization and distrust in key institutions leading to major societal harm (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2024). A 2024 article by the government of Canada indicated that 44% of Canadians get their news from social media and 53% of Canadians get information from close contacts. Among the four in five Canadians (83%) who do not regularly fact check, 50% of those lack interest in doing so (Bilodeau & Khalid, 2024).

Platforms reward disinformation postings that elicit fear, shock, and anger by encouraging greater engagement in the form of higher numbers of likes, comments, and re-shares (Iyer, 2024). Algorithmic bias is based on a user's online interactions, in turn creating echo chambers. Echo chambers are groups where the same ideas are shared repeatedly without question or analysis. Social media platforms are also financially incentivized (Diaz Ruiz, 2023). The greater the engagement through provocative disinformation postings the greater the advertising revenue for platform owners. Posts that contain disinformation receive higher levels of engagement and spread more rapidly and reach more users than truthful posts (Denniss & Lindberg, 2025).

Social media tech giants have shown little commitment to content moderation or self-regulation. Historically, responsibility for fact checking has been extremely limited. Currently, major social media platforms take no fact checking responsibility for their sites. They dismiss any tools that might mitigate disinformation on their platforms, and they flout authorities that attempt to regulate them or hold them accountable (Denniss & Lindberg, 2025). Fines that are issued have a negligible impact financially; as well, the major tech owners often threaten to withdraw services. Owners, knowing they profit from disinformation, show little or no inclination to address this issue that threatens Canadians, both at home and globally (Denniss & Lindberg, 2025 and Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2024).

The Canadian Context and the Need for Further Action

Although Canada continues to discuss the development of legal and institutional interventions to combat the issue of widespread online disinformation, regulatory tools are needed to effectively address this threat. The Report by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage identifies major social harms from unregulated social media platforms, including the impact of disinformation. Among its numerous recommendations, the Standing Committee indicated a strong need for the federal government to regulate tech platforms (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2024). Recently, the Federal, Provincial, Territorial (FPT) Information Regulators, concerned about the destructive impact of disinformation, have called on the Canadian government to: support media pluralism, to provide funding to ensure that institutions have resources to run their access transparency programs, to enhance digital media literacy and to regulate online platforms (Information Commissioner of Canada, 2025).

Given the very real dangers of online disinformation, no single intervention is sufficient. Only a comprehensive three-pronged approach can meaningfully combat this threat.

Education

A well informed and vigilant public is one of the best defenses against disinformation. This will require national initiatives and disinformation campaigns to educate the Canadian public about the devastating consequences of disinformation and the threat of AI-generated content and online manipulation techniques. Active campaigns that meet people in their actual information environment and provide repeated exposure to accurate information from multiple trusted sources will build societal resilience against disinformation (Bateman & Jackson, 2024).

It is also important that disinformation education becomes part of school curriculum in both elementary and secondary grades. Education is considered a key component when combatting the complex risks and destructive impact of disinformation. Finland has demonstrated how effective this intervention can be, creating a successful multi-prong, cross-sector educational approach that reaches citizens of all ages (MacKintosh, 2019). Although education is a provincial/territorial area of responsibility there is also a role for the federal government to play. As stated by S.Hogue et. al. "... the federal government could work with provinces and civil society to create a general framework they could be adapted to the local particularities of each educational curriculum" (Hogue, Lavallée & Fung, 2025). As well as integrating critical thinking skills into curriculum, schools must include specific modules about deep fakes, synthetic media manipulation techniques and methods that spread viral disinformation. The goal is to build cognitive resilience – the capability to critically assess information and resist disinformation manipulation (Romanishyn, Malytska & Goncharuk, 2025).

Legacy journalism

The Centre for International Government and Innovation (CGI) has addressed the need to respond to the public's susceptibility to disinformation. It calls for a proactive response recognizing the urgent need to educate and encourage Canadians of all ages to critically assess the information they consume. It has also determined that there is an urgent need to invest in local media, independent investigative journalism, and the development of digital sources that reflect uniquely Canadian perspectives (Padalko & Fitzgerald, 2025). Legacy journalism, traditionally established news organizations, media outlets and digital news sites, are characterized by formal editorial hierarchies, professional gatekeeping standards and institutional credibility. At a time when coordinated disinformation campaigns using AI-generated content can flood the information system within a minute, legacy journalism's commitment to source verification, editorial accountability and on-the-ground reporting provides credible benchmarks the public need to distinguish fact from fiction (Bateman & Jackson, 2024).

Regulation

In an age where falsehoods can spread faster than truth, the regulation of disinformation has moved from a theoretical debate to one of the most urgent democratic imperatives of our time. Social platforms currently use algorithms (hidden engines of constant amplification) to prioritize content-based user interaction favoring sensationally charged disinformation postings. Regulations that limit the spread of disinformation without violating the *Charter* and its right to freedom of speech, target algorithms and their role in the distribution of disinformation (Sun, 2023).

Algorithmic deamplification is the deliberate adjustment of platform recommendation systems to reduce both the visibility and speed of disinformation postings. Algorithmic deamplification has proven to reduce engagement and online disinformation by more than 50% (Kaiser & Mayer, 2023). Recommendation algorithms are systems that predict and direct content. Specific recommendation algorithmic systems play critical roles in creating the formation of disinformation networks. Regulations that would hold social media platforms accountable for designing transparent recommendation systems would significantly minimize the spread of online disinformation (Munoz. Rojas, Diez & Bellogin, 2025).

The European Union's *Digital Services Act* and its Voluntary Code of Conduct on Disinformation represent the most comprehensive regulatory framework yet developed to address the spread of disinformation across digital platforms. While the EU approach has faced numerous implementation challenges, it has provided invaluable insights into which regulatory mechanisms are effective, and where significant gaps remain (Botan & Horowitz, 2025). Alignment between a Canadian regulatory body, and the EU framework would provide Canada with the foundation of tested regulatory knowledge, as well as an opportunity to address regulatory challenges, at the same time positioning Canada as part of a broader democratic coalition committed to platform accountability (Digital Governance Council, 2025).

Despite the urgent need for regulatory frameworks to combat online disinformation, the most immediate and powerful accountability tool may rest with individuals. No regulation or algorithm is more powerful than the informed, intentional choices of the people it was built to serve.

Disinformation is not only a problem of false facts, but also an assault on our shared reality that democracy depends upon to function. Without meaningful regulation, unchecked, disinformation erodes public trust, distorts democratic processes and empowers those who would exploit this confusion for political or financial gain. A society that cannot agree on basic truth cannot make informed decisions, hold those in power accountable or protect its citizens.

Regulating disinformation is not a threat to free expression - it is a defense of the informed open discourse that free expression was always meant to serve. The unchecked spread of disinformation on digital platforms poses a direct threat to democratic integrity and social cohesion, making both personal and regulatory interventions not a matter of choice but of necessity.

Implementation

Nationally, CFUW could:

- Advocate and urge the federal government to establish an independent regulatory board, created by statute, with authority to identify, monitor and impose sanctions on the spread of disinformation across digital platforms, including the distribution and amplification of disinformation, while complying with the *Charter*.
- Advocate and urge the federal government to develop and promote education materials on disinformation, its dangers and how to confirm the validity of information found in the public domain.
- Encourage the federal government to meet with its provincial/territorial counterparts to develop a coordinated approach to the creation of media literacy programs focussed on disinformation.

- Advocate and urge the federal government to provide financial support to legacy broadcasting institutions and to mainstream and print media.
- The National Advocacy group could establish a virtual repository to record the actions taken by all levels of CFUW with respect to this Resolution and the results of those actions. The repository could then serve as a resource for all levels of CFUW with respect to potential implementation measures.

At the provincial/territorial level, Provincial/territorial Councils could talk to legislators about:

- Developing, as part of the school curricula on media literacy, course material that is specifically focussed on disinformation, how to recognize it and its dangers.
- Providing financial support to legacy broadcasting institutions and to mainstream and print media.

Locally, CFUW Clubs could:

- Meet with local Members of Parliament to urge them to persuade the federal government to establish an independent regulatory board, created by statute, with authority to identify, monitor and impose sanctions on the spread of disinformation across digital platforms, including the distribution and amplification of disinformation, while complying with the *Charter*.
- Meet with local Members of their Provincial/territorial Legislature and advocate for the development of media literacy programs focussed on disinformation, as part of the school curricula.
- Meet with local Members of Parliament, members of the Provincial/Territorial Legislature and with municipal councillors and discuss the need to support legacy broadcasting institutions and mainstream and print media. Local clubs could also raise the need to support local legacy media and broadcasting.
- Ahead of municipal, provincial/territorial, and federal elections, develop questions for candidates concerning the issue of Disinformation.
- Encourage CFUW members to learn about disinformation risks and ways to counter them.
- Within CFUW membership, raise general awareness of the issue of Disinformation by offering workshops and/or speakers on the issue.
- Work together with other local groups interested in raising awareness about the dangers of disinformation and promoting steps to reduce its spread.
- Gather and produce educational materials on disinformation for members, interested local organizations and for the public.
- Collaborate with other CFUW clubs to develop Webinars, workshops and other learning activities that will inform members about disinformation.
- CFUW Guelph will develop a petition to be adopted and circulated at a local, provincial/territorial and national level.

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