

TIMELINE:

Sterilization / Medicalization / Eugenics / Deinstitutionalization

19th century

- **1835 Onwards:** By the middle of the nineteenth century, “Lunatic Asylums” are established in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, P.E.I., Newfoundland, Ontario and Quebec. Throughout the nineteenth century and most of the 20th century, this pattern of institutionalizing “the insane” would continue.
- **1883:** Francis Galton coins the term “eugenics,” to refer to “good breeding.”
- **1899:** Harry Sharp performs the first eugenic-based sterilization at the Jeffersonville Reformatory in Indiana.

1900-1920

- **1905:** French Psychologist Alfred Binet creates the Binet-Simon test, one of the first Intelligence-Quotient (IQ) tests, designed to identify intellectual disabilities in school children.
- **1907:** the US state of Indiana enacts the first law in North America allowing for sterilization for Eugenic purposes.
- **1914:** by this year, 12 US states had enacted sterilization laws.
- **1914-1918:** World War One. Many returning soldiers suffer from “Shell Shock”
- **1915:** Helen MacMurchy, one of Canada’s leading advocates of Eugenics, becomes Ontario's "Inspector of the Feeble-Minded."
- **1918:** The Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene is established.

1920s

- **1920:** MacMurchy’s tract *The Almosts: A Study of the Feeble-Minded*, is published, reaching a large Canadian audience and helping popularize the idea that the solution to feeble-mindedness is to isolate and sterilize the “unfit.”

- **1923:** Alberta Provincial Training School for Mental Defectives opens in Red Deer, Alberta.
- **1926:** Doreen Befus is born in Medicine Hat, Alberta.
- **1928:** Alberta's Sexual Sterilization Act is passed, legislation permitting the sexual sterilization of inmates of mental health institutions eligible for discharge. Alberta was the first jurisdiction in the British Empire to legislate involuntary sterilization
- **1930:** The Eugenics Society of Canada is founded in Ontario.
- **1930s:** electric shock is introduced as a therapy for patients with mental health disorders, a treatment that became widespread by the 1950s.

1930s

- **1933:** Nazi regime in Germany passes forced sterilization laws, targeting the mentally ill and disabled, among other "undesirable" groups.
- **1933:** British Columbia passes its own Sexual Sterilization Act
- **1933:** Doreen Befus, ward of the state after being abandoned by her parents, is sent to the Provincial Training School for the Mental Defectives.
- **1937:** an amendment to the Alberta Sexual Sterilization Act allows for the sterilization of "mental defectives" *without* their consent.
- **1944 or 1945:** at the age of 18, Doreen Befus is brought before the Eugenics Board and recommended for sexual sterilization. The procedure is performed without Doreen's consent.

Postwar Period

- **1950:** Chlorpromazine, the first antipsychotic drug, is developed, sparking research into more psycho-pharmaceuticals.
- **1958:** various provincial associations come together to create the Canadian Association for Retarded Children, calling for better access to education and services for those with intellectual disabilities. In 1969 this is renamed "the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded" and in 1985 to "the Canadian Association for Community Living."

- **1958:** Deerhome, a provincial facility for adults with disabilities, opens in Red Deer.

1960-1980

- **1960:** the number of beds in Canadian psychiatric institutions are at their height.
- **1964:** the report of the Royal Commission on Health Services is released. It recommends that patients capable of receiving care in the psychiatric units of general hospitals be removed from psychiatric hospitals, live in their communities, and receive care, when needed, in general hospitals.
- **late 1960s:** large-scale deinstitutionalization of mental health facilities in most parts of Canada.
- **1972:** Alberta Sexual Sterilization Act is repealed. By this point, over 2800 sterilizations had been performed in the province.
- **1973:** British Columbia Sexual Sterilization Act is repealed.
- **1976:** the Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped (COPHO), now known as the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD), is formed to align the various provincial organizations into one national body.
- **1976:** after living in institutions for 42 years, 49-year-old Doreen is released from institutional care and moves into a group home in Red Deer. Three months later, she would rent her own basement apartment, which she would live in for twelve years.
- **1977:** the resident population of Michener Centre (previously the Provincial Training School) is 1800, down from 2300 in the mid-1970s.
- **late 1970s:** Doreen begins a life of activism for the disabled.

1980-2001

- **1981:** International year of the Disabled. Doreen Befus travels across Canada to promote the rights of the disabled.
- **1982:** The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms prohibits discrimination on the grounds of physical or mental disability.
- **1988:** Doreen is awarded the Air Canada Heart of Gold award by the town of Red Deer.

- **1995:** In response to deinstitutionalization, Saskatchewan begins issuing Community Treatment Orders, which compel some persons receiving mental health treatment to comply with a treatment program in the community. Ontario follows suit in 2001. Alberta, Manitoba, British Columbia and Prince Edward Island use “leave certificates.”
- **1995-96:** Leilani Muir, sterilized at the Provincial Training School, successfully sues the Alberta government for wrongful sterilization and confinement, leading to hundreds more lawsuits launched by survivors of sterilization in Alberta.
- **1999:** Government of Alberta apologizes for forced sterilization.
- **2001:** Doreen dies suddenly at her own home, at the age of 74 years.