

# History of LGBTQ+ Inclusion

Canadian Aviation Pride  
Fierté en aviation canadienne



## A history of LGBTQ+ inclusion in Canada over the past 50 years

With the minting of commemorative \$1 and \$10 coins in April 2019, Canada has acknowledged 50 years of progress in the inclusion of our LGBTQ+ community within a country well known for its values of diversity and equality.

The coins commemorate the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1969 by then-Justice Minister and Attorney General, Pierre Trudeau, who famously said "There's no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation". Though this was only a first step, the progress in the 50 years since has been steady, and as Canadians we can look back on it with pride.

The first gay rights march took place in 1971 in Toronto leading to Pride marches in various cities in the following years. By 1977, Quebec became the first jurisdiction in the world to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. Over the next ten years, "sexual orientation" would be added to various provincial Human Rights Acts as prohibited grounds for discrimination, although it would not be until 1996 that it was added to the Canadian Human Rights Act. Gradually spousal benefits were negotiated for same-sex partners working for provincial and federal governments.

Finally, in 1992 the ban on homosexuals in the Canadian Forces was rescinded, allowing us to serve openly and without fear of termination. In 1998, the first openly gay mayor of a large North American city was elected in Winnipeg. With the 1999 Supreme Court ruling that gay and lesbian couples should have the same rights as heterosexual common-law couples, the stage was set for progress on same-sex marriage. It resulted in the amendment of some 68 federal laws to ensure equal rights in areas such as pension benefits, income taxes, old age security and immigration.

With a 2003 BC court decision challenging the existing definition of marriage, in July 2005, Canada became the fourth country in the world to officially approve same-sex marriage nationwide, although two provinces, British Columbia and Ontario, had already implemented same-sex marriage two years earlier. Interestingly enough, a retroactive ruling in Ontario resulted in a 2001 marriage becoming the first legal same-sex marriage in the world!

By 2012, there had been several "out" Members of Parliament as well as a Cabinet Minister, and one of the federal political parties, the NDP, had five openly-LGBT MPs. In 2013, the new Premier of Ontario, Kathleen Wynne, became not only the first female and first LGBT Premier in Ontario, but also the highest-ranking elected openly-LGBT official in North America.

In 2014, some 39 cities across Canada voted to fly the rainbow flag outside their city halls for the 2014 Winter Olympics. In 2016, the Prime Minister became the first to attend a Pride Parade and a pride flag was raised on Parliament Hill in Ottawa.

In 2017, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized on behalf of Canada to the LGBTQ+ community for the “state-sponsored, systemic oppression and rejection” which had occurred throughout the federal public service over the decades, and reparations were paid to civil servants and military personnel who had lost their livelihood as a result of those policies. It was recognized that these policies had encouraged broader community homophobia.

In June 2017, the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code were amended to include "gender identity and gender expression" as prohibited grounds of discrimination. In August, Jonathan Vance, Chief of the Defence Staff, Canada's top general, took part in Ottawa's Pride parade along with the Prime Minister and several of the military's senior generals, saying that his participation was a chance to encourage young Canadians to consider a career in the Armed Forces. He noted, "We want to recruit people from as diverse a segment of society as we can, and that includes those LGBTQ folks that would be interested in the Canadian Armed Forces."

On the release of the two coins in 2019, the “Special Advisor to the Prime Minister on LGBTQ2 Issues” said that they provide an opportunity to reflect on a landmark event in Canada's history, but also a reminder of the progress still to be made as we work toward inclusion and equality for all LGBTQ+ Canadians.

So while we celebrate the progress toward inclusion of our community in Canadian society and the workplace over the past half century, we are all too aware that we have not eliminated discrimination, hostility, and lack of acceptance, as examples of these continue to occur. Some aviation company staff members even believe that with all this progress, there are no more challenges for LGBTQ+ operational staff, and that we no longer experience any barriers.

Then, recently, one of our members, a first officer on a large aircraft belonging to a major Canadian aviation company, had to listen to his Captain doing a rant on Transgender people, but did not feel that he dare speak out lest he also become a target. Clearly the company's diversity program has some work to do to make sure its inclusion message reaches all employees.

So what we see and hear tells us that we are still on this journey, and though the destination can almost be seen over the horizon, it will take our continued effort and more time to change behaviors so that our industry along with others becomes properly inclusive, not only of the LGBTQ+ community, but of all under-represented groups. ■