



## ISSUE

Many people face barriers to accessing menstrual products or educational materials because of financial limitations and/or harmful social norms and attitudes surrounding menstruation. Period poverty refers to the inadequate access to menstrual hygiene tools and education, including access to sanitary products, proper facilities for washing and waste management.

## PURPOSE

Providing access to menstrual products can allow people to participate in society and not have to make difficult choices between necessities, such as food and menstrual hygiene products. Provision of sanitary products in all public facilities will allow those who have periods to decrease barriers to participate in work, education and other roles in society.

## RECOMMENDATION

- The Government of Alberta supply menstrual hygiene products at no cost in all provincial public facilities.

## RATIONALE

- Menstrual hygiene products are a necessity, not a luxury. In public facilities, other necessities (e.g., toilet paper, soap and paper towel/dryers) are available at no cost.
- People with low-incomes or on social assistance find it difficult to allocate money toward purchasing menstrual hygiene products, and depending on where people live, the cost of products may be higher outside of major urban centres.
- An Environics Research survey found that (Government of Canada, 2023):
  - One in six (17%) Canadians who menstruate have personally experienced period poverty; this rises to one in four (25%) if their household earns less than \$40,000 a year.
    - The 2021 average income was \$47,600 and median income \$36,900 for women 16 years and older in Alberta (Statistics Canada, 2023).
  - One in five (20%) people who menstruate say they may not afford period products at some point in the next 12 months, and 7% say this is very likely. Six in ten of the first group agree that inflation has increased the likelihood of not affording period products.
  - One in four Canadians agree periods are dirty and unclean, and about one in five agree menstruation should not be publicly discussed (22%) and menstrual products should be kept out of sight (22%).
- A 2023 Plan International Canada survey found:
  - One-quarter (25%) of Canadian women have had to choose between purchasing menstrual products and other essential items like food or rent.
  - 65% of Canadian women either did not receive any menstrual health education-on anatomy, premenstrual syndrome, hygiene and related topics-or did, but it was not comprehensive.
- Unsanitary measures can lead to detrimental health implications, such as prolonged use of the same tampon can develop infections that would lead to toxic shock syndrome, a potentially fatal condition.
- Up to 70% of women say they have missed school or work because of their period (Dube, 2018).



- The majority of women participate in both paid and unpaid work in our society. Absenteeism would be improved as women would not feel the need to avoid public spaces when they may not have access to menstrual products.
- Vending machines limit access, therefore providing free access to menstrual hygiene products in public facilities takes away this barrier and also minimizes shame and stigma.
- A provincial program to provide free access to menstrual hygiene products in public facilities would cost much less, and the purchasing power of the provincial government would also allow it to negotiate a lower price.

## **BACKGROUND**

- Menstruation typically begins around age 12 and ends at menopause, around the age of 50, and can last four to six days with each cycle (Healthwise Staff, 2022).
- Estimates suggest that the average woman spends upwards of six years menstruating over the course of her lifetime (Kane, 2015).
- In Alberta, there were 1,139,905 females between age 10 to 49 in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2023). This was 26.7% of the population.
- Presently, some organizations have taken initiative:
  - The Edmonton Public School Board supported free menstrual products in school washrooms in April 2021 and the Government of Alberta committed \$260,000 in support of a two-year pilot for 100 schools (2022).
  - The Government of Canada committed \$25 million over two years (2022-2023 and 2023-2024) to provide menstrual products to Canadians. These funds are for:
    - research and engagement to better understand menstrual equity.
    - distributing free menstrual products as a pilot to Food Banks Canada.
  - The Government of Canada has also provided free menstrual products to First Nations schools on reserve, federal schools and federally-regulated workplaces across Canada (2023).
  - The British Columbia Government announced \$750,000 for period poverty grants and a task force (2022).

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- It is estimated that Canadian women spend up to \$6,000 in their lifetime on menstrual hygiene products (Craggs, 2019).

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