

Notice of Motion: Fighting Period Poverty

Text From: Councillor Teale Phelps Bondaroff, District of Saanich

WHEREAS almost one quarter of Canadian menstruators say they have struggled to afford menstrual products for themselves or their children (period poverty), and that people who are menstruating but do not have menstrual products available to them experience social isolation, financial instability and increased mental health concerns by not being able to attend school, work, or community activities without experiencing stigma and shame;

WHEREAS local governments play a pivotal role in addressing period poverty within their communities, and may need support implementing practical solutions to provide free menstrual products to community members;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT UBCM executives work with menstrual equity advocates and community partners to develop and distribute a *Period Promise Municipal toolkit* that will help provide local governments with the tools necessary to make menstrual products freely available in their washrooms and beyond.

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Backgrounder

Period poverty, defined as the widespread lack of access to menstrual products due to financial limitations, is a pressing issue affecting girls, women, and trans and non-binary individuals in British Columbia. Financial constraints prevent many from affording menstrual products, leading to challenges in education, work, and overall social participation. According to a 2018 Canadian Gender Study, almost one-quarter of Canadian women have struggled to afford menstrual products for themselves or their dependents.¹ According to a recent Leger survey, “one in four Canadian women who menstruate (25%) have been forced to make the decision between purchasing menstrual products and purchasing other essentials such as food or rent within the last year.”²

The impacts of period poverty extend beyond financial constraints. Individuals facing this challenge can experience social isolation, lost wages, and access to educational opportunities. These individuals can also experience a decrease in mental wellness as the lack of access to menstrual products can prevent them from attending school, work, or community activities without stigma and shame. A 2018 study found that approximately 55% of respondents had missed work, school, or declined social activities because of their periods.³

The burden of period poverty falls disproportionately on women and those who menstruate. The annual cost of menstrual products per person was estimated at \$70 in 2019, and this cost can be considerably higher for those living in rural and remote communities. This cost is also increasing – one source

¹ Hill and Knowlton Strategies & Plan International (2018). “A Canadian Gender Study.” Available at <https://plancanada.ca/reports-and-publications/canadian-data>

² Leger. (2023 May 19) “The Hidden Cost of Periods: A Canadian Perspective.” Available at ...

³ Hill and Knowlton Strategies & Plan International (2018). “A Canadian Gender Study.” Available at ...

reported that last year in the US, the price of a box of tampons increased by 10% and the price of a pack of pads increased by 8.3%.⁴

The stress, anxiety and shame resulting from inadequate access to menstrual products negatively impact well-being. People who experience period poverty are placing themselves at greater risk by using menstrual products for longer than their recommended time, or using unsanitary alternatives like rags and newspaper, placing their health and security at risk. These health risks are compounded by reduced employment options, compromised academic performance, and negative mental health impacts as a direct result of lack of access to menstrual products.

Period poverty is a symptom of poverty, affecting marginalized groups at a disproportionately high rate. Vulnerable populations, including single mothers, transgender and non-binary individuals, Indigenous communities, people of colour, people in rural and remote communities, and those with disabilities, are more likely to experience period poverty.

To address the multifaceted challenges of period poverty, it is crucial to recognize the key role that municipalities play in order to support menstruating individuals in their communities. The Period Promise Municipal Toolkit is being developed by Menstrual equity advocates in partnership with community partners and United Way BC as a practical guide for local governments to actively contribute to menstrual equity within their communities.

Currently there is a resourcing gap to continue the refinement and launch of the Period Promise Municipal Toolkit; UBCM is uniquely situated as a partner to support the co-development and roll-out of the Period Promise Municipal Toolkit and support its member local governments to address period poverty in their respective constituencies.

By providing free menstrual products, local governments not only address an immediate need but also contribute to the overall health and security of those experiencing period poverty. This is a tangible and impactful step towards alleviating period poverty in British Columbia. Local governments in BC can also contribute to improved comfort and experiences for individuals visiting public facilities, fostering equity, dignity, and overall well-being.

There is precedent to the commitment, success and work in communities across the Province – six (6) municipalities in BC have formally joined 46 other organizations that signed on to the United Way Period Promise Policy Agreement:

- City of Colwood
- City of Kamloops
- City of North Vancouver
- City of Prince George
- City of Richmond
- City of Victoria⁵

⁴ Wang, C. (2023 June 8). "How Inflation is Making Your Period More Expensive." *Intimina*. Available at ...

⁵ United Way British Columbia. (n.d.). "Period Promise" Available at See also United Way Southern Vancouver Island (n.d.). "Period Promise." Available at ...

The District of Saanich is also in the process of implementing this policy, and will sign the Period Promise when the roll out is complete.

The progress adjoins the wave of menstrual equity happening in BC and Canada. Since 2019, thanks to the advocacy of many students, schools in BC have free menstrual products in their washrooms.⁶ In December 2023, the federal government adopted a policy that would ensure that menstrual products were made freely available in the washrooms of all federally regulated workplaces (such as banks, airlines, Crown corporations, broadcasters and telecommunications companies, railways, postal and courier services).⁷ This policy is gathering momentum and popularity, a 2023 Leger poll found that “over eight in ten (82%) women agree that period products should be available for free in public washrooms.”⁸

In BC, the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction has partnered with United Way BC in 2019 to produce a Period Promise Research Project to get a profile of period poverty in BC.⁹ A few years later, the Government of BC established a multi-sector Period Poverty Task Force to further advance the Province’s goal to end period poverty and remove the stigma associated with menstruation.¹⁰ This included the roll-out of pilot project grants to test out short-term, impact-focused models for increased access to free menstrual products in BC.¹¹ The time is ripe to continue the momentum towards addressing period poverty in BC communities.

⁶ Schmunk, R. (2019 April 5). “B.C. public schools must provide free menstrual products for students, government orders.” CBC Available at ...

⁷ Government of Canada. (2023 December 15). “Menstrual products now available at no cost to employees in federally regulated workplaces.” Available at ...

⁸ Leger. (2023 May 19). “The Hidden Cost of Periods. A Canadian Perspective.” Available at ...

⁹ United Way. (2021 January). “United Way Period Promise Research Project Final Report.” Available at ...

¹⁰ United Way British Columbia. (n.d.). Period Promise. Available at ...

¹¹ Ibid.