



P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Information Item No. 3
Audit & Finance Standing Committee
February 19, 2020

TO: Chair and Members of Audit and Finance Standing Committee
Original Signed

SUBMITTED BY: _____
Jerry Blackwood, Director, Corporate & Customer Services
Original Signed

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: February 4, 2020

SUBJECT: Menstrual Products in HRM Facilities

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

April 30, 2019: Halifax Regional Council request a staff report to explore the option of providing free menstrual products in HRM facilities as a pilot project. If approved, all community centres, pools and arenas will be stocked with free menstrual products.

October 29, 2019: Halifax Regional Council motion approved to defer item pending receipt of a supplemental staff report with respect to pursuing full implementation of the provision of free menstrual products in all HRM owned and operated facilities, including community centres, pools, and arenas, together with a recommendation on financing from the Audit and Finance Standing Committee.

January 22, 2020: Budget Committee: Corporate & Customer Services, municipal facilities identified \$369,000 as an estimated 2020/21 budget pressure associated with implementation of providing free products in all HRM facilities. The Budget Committee requested adding it to the parking lot for consideration, and for staff to review costing.

February 12, 2020: In light of receiving additional information from the Halifax Public Library, Halifax Regional Council Budget Committee directed the Chief Administrative Officer to fund the cost of free menstrual products in HRM facilities through the 2020/2021 Corporate and Customer Services budget.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39

7A the purposes of the Municipality are to

(b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and...

79A (1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4), the Municipality may only spend money for municipal purposes if

(a) the expenditure is included in the Municipality's operating budget or capital budget or is otherwise authorized by the Municipality;

DISCUSSION

Free menstrual product costs were estimated based on providing product dispensers, disposal containers and estimated restocking time. When preparing the October 2019 report to Council, staff had no relevant history of actual costs to provide free menstrual products, as well as information on usage and uptake rates. Research of other jurisdictions found that the British Columbia School Board estimated annual costs of \$216,000 and the City of Toronto estimated \$220,000 for their group homes. These were the only cities to have cost estimates available.

More local information has become available since the first report in October of 2019. The Halifax School Board implemented a free menstrual products program with no operating budget increases, which will likely reduce the demand for menstrual products in HRM facilities. Halifax Public Libraries implemented a free menstrual products program in June 2019 at a projected cost of \$9,000 - \$11,000 annually for 14 facilities open 37,736 hours consisting of 3.6M visits annually.

Considering the updated information from the Halifax Libraries and the Halifax School Board, costs for the program to provide access to free menstrual products in all HRM operated recreation facilities, community board run facilities, arenas and pools can be absorbed in the operating budget. The HRM program will not include dispensers and will be modelled after the Halifax Public Libraries program. Facilities staff will work with the operators of each HRM facility on implementation plans.

Implementation date will be April 1, 2020.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

\$20,000 - \$30,000 in the 2020/21 operating budget to cover the cost of providing free access to menstrual products in all HRM facilities from W211-6304.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Public Health (Division of Capital Health)

ATTACHMENT

Attachment 1 - Evidence Report: Menstrual Products in HRM Facilities submitted from the Nova Scotia Health Authority, Public Health Division

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Diane Chisholm, Manager, Municipal Facilities Maintenance & Operations,
Corporate & Customer Services, 902.490.1536



Evidence Report: Menstrual Products in HRM Facilities

Background

On April 30, Halifax Regional Council voted to request a staff report to explore the option of providing free menstrual products in HRM Facilities, including community centres, pools, and arenas, as a pilot project. The purpose of this report is to highlight key health and equity considerations associated with providing freely accessible menstrual products, and provide support for this initiative.

Key considerations

Diversity & Inclusion

In providing freely accessible menstrual products, it is important to recognize that transgender and non-binary people also experience menstruation, and should be considered in this initiative. One can look to recent news of Halifax Libraries offering free menstrual products in *every* bathroom as an example to emulate. If HRM does decide to stock all washrooms with free menstrual products, it will be important to also consider installing appropriate disposal receptacles in bathrooms that do not already provide them (i.e. men's washrooms).

Relatedly, it is essential to ensure the language used in describing this initiative is inclusive. We encourage HRM to use the term "people who menstruate" as a descriptor for the target population, rather than "women" or "girls"ⁱ. However, much of the available research has been conducted with women and girls, so the language used in this report to describe this evidence will refer to those research participants when applicable.

Accessibility & Affordability

Poverty is an ongoing issue in Nova Scotia, and a key determinant of health. Statistics Canada data released earlier this year indicates that Nova Scotia is the only province in which child poverty has increased between 2015 and 2017, to its current rate of 17.1%ⁱⁱ. Increasingly, "period poverty" – defined here as inadequate access to affordable menstrual hygiene products - is being recognized as a source of inequity among people who menstruate. A recent survey of over 2000 women and girls by Plan International – Canada found that **35% have had to sacrifice something else in their budget in order to afford menstrual products**ⁱⁱⁱ. Recognizing that Nova Scotia has the highest rate of food insecurity in Canada^{iv}, Feed Nova Scotia has said "when people with periods can't afford food, they can't afford other necessities. They likely have to choose between groceries and period products, often putting their children's needs ahead of their own."^v Although increasing availability of menstrual products in public spaces will not solve the problem, it is a step in the right direction and a show of leadership by the Municipality. This initiative aligns with HRM's previous commitment to reducing poverty, as demonstrated by the *Building Poverty Solutions* report developed in collaboration with United Way Halifax and approved by Council in January 2018.

The aforementioned Plan International study found that **over 80% of participants supported making menstrual products free in public spaces**^{vi}. This is reflected in a growing movement across the country, toward providing free menstrual products in workplaces, schools, and public spaces. Municipal examples can be found in London, Ontario and Victoria, B.C, and we would encourage municipal staff to reach out to these exemplar municipalities to gain insight into their process and lessons learned.

Health & Social Impact

Freely accessible menstrual products have positive implications for mental and physical health, as well as participation in school and community activities. Research demonstrates that lack of access to menstrual hygiene products may put people who menstruate at greater risk of mental health issues. In one survey, **nearly two-thirds of people who experienced period poverty said they lack confidence because of bullies at school and 39 percent reported experiencing anxiety and depression**^{vii}. Period poverty can also have serious implications for physical health. People who cannot afford menstrual products have been found to use rags or toilet paper, and to prolong use of pads and tampons, all of which can result in increased risk of infection or toxic shock syndrome^{viii}.

In addition to the mental and physical health impacts, period poverty can affect participation in community opportunities. When students who menstruate cannot access menstrual products, it can prevent them from participating in sports or extracurricular activities. Indeed, **63% of girls and women reported that they have regularly (12%) or occasionally (51%) had to miss out on an activity because they were concerned about a lack of access to menstrual products**^{ix}. This is especially relevant to the proposed pilot, as increasing access to affordable products in recreation settings will support all genders' equal participation in sport and recreation. Period poverty also has effects on education; according to a 2018 study, **one in seven girls in Canada have either left school early or missed school entirely because they did not have what they needed to manage their periods**^x.

Stigma

Despite the fact that menstruation is a normal experience, it remains a widely stigmatized issue, leading many people who menstruate to feel embarrassed or ashamed. The 2019 Plan International Canada study revealed that despite growing public conversation about menstrual products and menstruation, social stigmas strongly persist. **Almost half (41 per cent) of female respondents have been teased about being on their period**, including by friends, colleagues and relatives^{xi}. Providing universal access to menstrual products in HRM facilities – just as we do with toilet paper and soap – helps normalize these products as everyday hygiene items, thereby reducing the associated stigma.

Recommendations

Based on the aforementioned evidence, **Public Health strongly supports the proposed pilot**, and recommends the following be taken into consideration:

- *Providing free menstrual products in public washrooms for all genders, as demonstrated by Halifax Public Libraries*
- *Ensuring inclusive language when discussing menstrual equity (e.g. “people who menstruate”)*

As always, Public Health CZ is pleased to support the Municipality on endeavors of mutual interest which improve the health and well-being of Halifax residents.

ⁱ Bell, Jen. (2017, April 26). Talking about periods beyond gender. *Clue*. Retrieved from <https://helloclue.com/articles/cycle-a-z/talking-about-periods-beyond-gender>

ⁱⁱ Cited in Nova Scotia Finance & Treasury Board. (2019, February 26). *Canadian Income Survey*. Retrieved from https://novascotia.ca/finance/statistics/topic_news.asp?id=14591&fto=24x&rdval=2019-02

- ⁱⁱⁱ Plan International. (2019). Female and male views on menstruation in Canada. Retrieved from: <https://plancanada.ca/file/downloads/Plan-International-Canada---Female-and-male-views-on-menstruation---May-2019.pdf>.
- ^{iv} Sriram, U., & Tarasuk, V. (2015). Changes in household food insecurity rates in Canadian metropolitan areas from 2007 to 2012. *Canadian Journal of Public Health, 106*(5), 322-327. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.17269/cjph.106.4893>
- ^v Feed Nova Scotia. (2018, October 12). Dignity. Period. Retrieved from <https://www.feednovascotia.ca/blog/dignity-period>
- ^{vi} Plan International. (2019). Female and male views on menstruation in Canada. See above link.
- ^{vii} Cited in Ellsworthy, E. (2018, July 18). Lack of access to sanitary products has long-reaching effects on women's lives. *SWNS Digital*. Retrieved from <https://www.swnsdigital.com/2018/07/researchers-find-lack-of-access-to-sanitary-products-has-long-reaching-effects-on-young-womens-lives/>
- ^{viii} House, S., Mahon, T., & Cavill, S. (2012). Menstrual hygiene matters: A resource for improving menstrual hygiene around the world. Retrieved from http://www.susana.org/_resources/documents/default/3-2210-21-1426498269.pdf
- ^{ix} Plan International. (2019). Female and male views on menstruation in Canada. See above link.
- ^x Procter & Gamble. (2018). Always Confidence & Puberty Study. Retrieved from <https://www.pgeveryday.ca/wellness/family-health/always-helps-end-period-poverty>
- ^{xi} Plan International. (2019). Female and male views on menstruation in Canada. See above link.