

# Proposed Sanitary Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill

## Page 2: About you

Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

on behalf of an organisation

Which of the following best describes you? (If you are a professional or academic, but not in a subject relevant to the consultation, please choose "Member of the public".)

*No Response*

Please select the category which best describes your organisation

Public sector body (Scottish/UK Government/Government agency, local authority, NDPB)

Please choose one of the following; if you choose the first option, please provide your name or the name of your organisation as you wish it to be published.

I am content for this response to be attributed to me or my organisation

Please insert your name or the name of your organisation. If you choose the first option above, this should be the name as you wish it to be published. If you choose the second or third option, a name is still required, but it will not be published.

NHS Health Scotland

Please provide details of a way in which we can contact you if there are queries regarding your response. Email is preferred but you can also provide a postal address or phone number. We will not publish these details.

## Page 7: Your views on the proposal

Q1. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill?

Partially supportive

Q1. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill?

**Please explain the reasons for your response**

We agree with the main principles of the Bill and the evidence presented and concur that it will help to address issues concerning the right to health, gender inequality, poverty and stigma of 'period poverty'. The UN Right to Health recognises the social, economic and cultural rights to access good health as well as prevention of disease: if women are not able to protect themselves during menstruation, they will be at risk of infection, be unable to maintain adequate hygiene and might be prevented from participation in school or work. In terms of gender inequality, menstruation is specific to one sex and is unavoidable for most women. We do not know the scale of 'period poverty' due to stigma surrounding the issue. However, for some women, barriers to accessing sanitary protection is due to domestic abuse where restricting access to products is used as a form of control. However, we are not convinced that a legislative approach is required. We suggest that it should be mandated through a health policy, such as a strategy/action plan that requires organisations to provide free sanitary products

## Page 8: Universal provision of sanitary products

Q2. Do you think a universal, card-based system (modelled on the c-card system for free condoms) would be an effective means of providing sanitary products for free to those who need them?

Unsure

**Please explain the reasons for your response**

We suggest that the effectiveness of the c-card system (condom distribution) more broadly is reviewed to ensure that it can address inclusion and reach. The 'National Condom Distribution Services Network' is a network of local c-card schemes in Scotland that could be consulted on the potential for using this option. There is also an online community space in the knowledge network:  
<http://www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/home.aspx>

Q3. Which of the following best expresses your view in relation to a card-based system?

The card should be available to anyone; card-holders should have unlimited access to free sanitary products

Q4. Do you have a view on which locations would be most suitable for dispensing free sanitary products (e.g. GP surgeries, pharmacies, community centres, health clinics)?

No, but a range of options would be preferable and would allow optimal access, particularly in more rural areas where geographical access to services is a general issue.

## Page 11: Schools, colleges and universities

Q5. Do you agree that there should be specific obligations on schools, colleges and universities to make sanitary products available for free (via dispensers in toilets)?

Yes

## Page 12: Personal experience (questions 6 and 7 are for individual respondents only)

Q6. Have you ever struggled to access or afford sanitary products during menstruation? (e.g. financial barriers, unexpected circumstances, health issues)

Not applicable: I do not need or use sanitary products

Please explain or give an example of your experience if you feel able to do so.

NA

Q7. If sanitary products were available for free, which of the following would apply to you?

Not applicable: I do not need or use sanitary products

Please explain the reasons for your response

NA

## Page 14: Financial implications

Q8. Taking account of both costs and potential savings, what financial impact would you expect the proposed Bill to have on:

	Significant increase in cost	Some increase in cost	Broadly cost-neutral	Some reduction in cost	Significant reduction in cost	Unsure
(a) Government and the public sector (e.g. local authorities, the NHS)						X
(b) Colleges and universities						X
(c) Businesses (including suppliers/retailers of sanitary products)						X
(d) Individuals (including consumers of sanitary products)					X	

Q9. Are there ways in which the Bill could achieve its aim more cost-effectively (e.g. by reducing costs or increasing savings)?

There would be economies of scale with procurement on a national level with local distribution.

## Page 16: Equalities

Q10. What overall impact is the proposed Bill likely to have on equality, taking account of the following protected characteristics (under the Equality Act 2010): age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation?

Positive

Q11. In what ways could any negative impact of the proposed Bill on equality be minimised or avoided?

We have not identified any potential negative impact other than ensuring that the system of access is as inclusive as possible and any barriers are considered and tackled. A more formal impact assessment would be recommended.

## Page 18: Sustainability

Q12. Do you consider that the proposed Bill can be delivered sustainably i.e. without having likely future disproportionate economic, social and/or environmental impacts?

Yes

## Page 19: General

Q13. Do you have any other comments or suggestions on the proposal?

During the course of the consultation, the Scottish Government announced its intention, in its Programme for Government, to provide free sanitary products in schools, colleges and universities as well as consider options for low income women. Therefore, this aligns with some of the Bill's provisions. We would agree that a universal system would be preferred to avoid the stigma and bureaucracy of a means-tested approach and to widen beyond a threshold of 'low income'. We know that women have overwhelmingly experienced the burden of cuts due to UK 'welfare reform': Engender reported that between 2010 and 2015, £26 billion worth of cuts have been made to benefits, tax credits, pay and pensions, 85% of this has been taken from women's incomes. Lone parents and their children have been particularly affected. We also know that families with children experience cost barriers to school as a result of their low income status and this can impact on children's ability to learn, leaving them feeling excluded, discriminated against and stigmatised. Being unable to afford a basic necessity such as sanitary protection is an indicator of material deprivation which is recognised as a key income-based measure of poverty. Therefore, wider efforts to increase household incomes and reduce expenditure are essential.

A universal system would be inclusive of all and therefore irrespective of gender identity.