

Proposed Sanitary Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill

Page 2: About you

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

an individual

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".)

Member of the public

Please select the category which best describes your organisation

No Response

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 would like this response to be anonymous (the response may be published, but no name)

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 If you choose the second or third option, a name is still required, but it will not be published.

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?

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Fully Supportive

Please explain the reasons for your response

I think the tax on menstrual sanitary products is unjust. They are necessary items and do not constitute a 'luxury' or something that you can do without. Personally I opted to use a menstrual cup a few years ago due to the increasing cost of tampons and pads and the existence of a medical condition which led to heavy bleeding for weeks at a time which meant the money I was spending on products and the accompanying tax was greatly increased. Even with this expensive (and taxed) device I have needed to buy pads for post-operative bleeding and for spotting and unpredictable onset of periods which can be sudden and heavy. The move to remove tax on tampons has been put on hold and even taking tax out of consideration the basic cost of products continues to rise. There may be some fears regarding the cost of the scheme and people opting in to the scheme who are not really in need. However I think this is unlikely - looking at the evidence in the proposal of opt in for the C card scheme - and even so the gendered aspect to the need is clear. The cost of these products falls on people who menstruate and falls more heavily on those who are more burdened with the impact of menstruation already. The impact of this additional cost on those in poverty has been illustrated by the proposal and the immediate benefit will be felt. It should also be noted that the provision of extra pads or tampons is already being born by people who menstruate and that this proposal spreads the cost across the whole of society. Most women would not think twice before offering a spare towel or tampon from their bag to a fellow human being caught without in a public toilet. And take it on faith that someone might be there to help them out if they are caught in a similar situation. Having a network of places where those most in need can access these essential supplies makes the service official and reliable and most importantly means that it is not just menstruating women that bear the cost of this social need.

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?

Yes

Please explain the reasons for your response

I imagine that there would be a need to document usage of the scheme in order to adequately audit and supply for future need limiting wastage. I wonder if it would be possible to obtain products for another person under this scheme - the proposal mentioned a woman who was post partum and requiring pads and I can think of times when I have been unwell with menstrual disorders and have got my partner to pick up products for me. Could this be similar to a prescription collection where it is possible to have someone pick up items for you with your name and address. There would need to be provision for homeless women too who are clearly some of the most in need for this service and would not have a current address.

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

Please explain the reasons for your response.

I think the obstacle of having to use the card scheme and attend a clinic is barrier enough to obtaining sanitary products. The potential for wastage is small as the items have a very long life and anyone claiming 'too many' products will always have reason to use them next month. And it is not possible to define what is 'fair usage' given the existence of menstrual disorders that I have experienced myself where I have bled for up to 6 weeks continuously. I am not sure how the card scheme would operate in schools and in these locations where there are restrictions on young people's movements and timetables may mean that a dispensary within the building is necessary. How this is devised would be a decision for individual institutions. Women know the number of products they need and how many they need to have on hand for the number of times they can attend a clinic.

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

Trust women to use what they need and save what they can. The promotion of menstrual cup usage through the scheme may be a way towards reducing waste and expense but there are always occasions where there is a need for towels or tampons even when you have access to a cup. Trust women.

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)?

Access is important. A range of locations and times would be important as those most in need are often working anti-social or unpredictable hours.

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)?

Unsure

Please explain the reasons for your response

I am not sure how practical this would be. Having products available within the toilet itself is the most ideal for young people. The packaging and size of small dispenser specific products is wasteful and could be expensive. The vending machine model is not designed with widespread provision in mind but to make money out of a necessity. If there is an obligation to provide access within toilets then there should be flexibility about the specific provision in each institution.

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)

Yes, frequently

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

I described above that I moved to menstrual cup usage because I couldn't rely on being able to afford the increasingly expensive sanitary products and having a menstrual disorder that led to me bleeding for up to 6 weeks at a time. Even so there have been times when I have had to use pads (post operatively, and for unpredictable interim bleeding) and currently I have no source of income and no access to benefits so I am reliant on my partner to purchase these products. I don't like to run out of these products completely because my financial situation is so precarious - we frequently run out of money for food towards the end of the month. Our situation could be a lot worse but I can definitely envisage a situation where I would have run out of menstrual products this year had I not already bought myself a mooncup when I had more money.

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

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I would expect to claim free products occasionally

Please explain the reasons for your response

If there were an occasion where my mooncup became unusable or if my health worsened and I needed regular access to pads rather than using my cup I would need to access the service. Currently I rarely purchase any products and hope this will continue. I also very much hope that my financial situation improves in the new year.

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)?

The method of supply and particularly the method of distribution within institutions (I have my doubts about the vending machine model) should be carefully considered.

I would not want the current situation where the companies exploiting the needs and anxieties of women are passing on this exploitation to the Scottish Government. While adequate choice and variety in products is necessary to meet the needs of women the choice of suppliers would need to be done carefully and hopefully in collaboration with the service users.

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?

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Positive

Please explain the reasons for your response

The extra costs born by women in society are massive and this is one of the largest. It is a positive step towards gender equality and particularly in relieving child poverty in families with female children and caregivers.

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

It must be recognised that some of those undergoing gender reassignment surgery are in need of sanitary products.

I would also be concerned about where the line is drawn between sanitary products for women who have had children and suffer varying degrees of pelvic floor weakening and those who need sanitary products for bleeding. And for that matter any older person, men included, who require some form of incontinence protection. These are separate issues but still affect a portion of the population, many of whom are of reduced financial means, and which constitute a physical need which enables full participation in society. I think the question will be asked if this kind of provision would also be available.

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

Please explain the reasons for your response:

This should be a consideration in the types of product on offer. The benefits of offering menstrual cups for those who are able to use them should be taken into consideration and the long term financial and environmental benefits of these should be valued and set against the initial high cost of the first purchase.

Page 19: General

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

No Response