

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".)

Professional with experience in a relevant subject

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 If you choose the second or third option, a name is still required, but it will not be published.

Catriona MacDonald

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?

Fully Supportive

Please explain the reasons for your response

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

Access to sanitary products is a women's health issue and it is the responsibility of the government to provide adequate healthcare to all women regardless of their ability to pay. For women living in poverty, sanitary products will never take priority over paying bills, buying food, or providing for children. However, this has a negative effect on women's health and ability to participate in society. Although women on a low income may receive financial assistance to pay for dental and optical care, as well as receiving free healthcare, no such provision exists for sanitary products despite these being a vital part of healthcare for almost all women. Even women who are forced to use foodbanks and are therefore least able to pay for sanitary products often find that no such products are available at foodbanks. It is therefore necessary that the government remedies this gap in provision of healthcare. For girls just starting to menstruate, the stigma attached has a negative enough effect without the added trauma of not having access to appropriate sanitary products to manage their periods. Not having access to such sanitary products affects girls' ability to participate in sports and other activities at school, which does obvious damage to health. In addition, where lack of access to sanitary products is combined with lack of access to clean clothes or washing facilities due to poverty, the issue is compounded and can affect school attendance, which has a clear effect on attainment. It is therefore necessary that the government makes provisions to ensure that all girls in Scotland are able to participate fully at school and have the opportunity to reach their academic potential. This is a gendered issue that leaves women and girls at a huge disadvantage when compared with their male counterparts. All over the world, period poverty and stigma around menstruation has a damaging effect on the health, education, social standing, safety and happiness of women and girls - and Scotland is no different. It is vital, when women bear the brunt of austerity and find themselves disproportionately impoverished, that the Scottish government uses its powers to ensure that women living in Scotland have the same quality of life and opportunities as the other half of the population. This Bill goes some way to ensuring that this responsibility is met, and consequently I fully support it passing into law.

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

The c-card system is easy for users and providers to understand, as well as being relatively uncomplicated to roll out across Scotland. Additionally, the anonymity of the c-card system removes any stigma and makes it more likely that the service would be used. However, it is vital to ensure that the c-card is also available to women who struggle to access healthcare services due to, for example, lack of a fixed address or additional support needs.

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.

In order for the system to be effective, it must be readily available to all women at all times. Women have different requirements for sanitary products at different times in their lives - for example, due to having given birth, or having begun or ended use of hormonal contraception. There is no restriction on contraception or prescribed medicine, and there should be no restriction on 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)?

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)?

The best place to dispense sanitary products would be somewhere that additional advice on periods and related issues could be sought, such as GP surgeries, pharmacies, school nurses' offices, and health clinics. However, since it is important that sanitary products reach women and girls most in need, they should also be distributed at places such as food banks, youth centres, women's refuges, and guidance counsellors' offices in schools.

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

Where there is already an obligation on institutions to provide aspects of healthcare - such as contraception, for example - free of charge to students, that should be extended to cover sanitary products.

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.

During periods of my life where I had no or very little income, most particularly while I was homeless, sanitary products were an expense I simply could not afford. I relied entirely on the kindness of women in public bathrooms.

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

I would expect to claim free products occasionally

Please explain the reasons for your response

I currently would not need to claim free sanitary products, but there have been times in my life that I would have needed to and there may be such times again in the future.

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 Bill could achieve its aim more cost-effectively by investing in and educating women on the availability of longer-term sanitary products instead of only focusing on disposable pads and tampons. Reusable sanitary products cost significantly less than disposable alternatives, and increased use of reusable products would reduce demand for the more expensive disposable products. Additionally, healthcare providers dispensing sanitary products could inform women of methods of contraception which can help to make periods more manageable.

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

Please explain the reasons for your response

This Bill would certainly improve equality for women. For poor women, it would remove a significant expense which they may currently struggle to meet, giving them an equal chance to seek employment, education or training to improve their lives. And for young women and girls, it would remove what has been shown to be a significant barrier to girl's ability to participate fully in education and other school activities, leading to more equal opportunities in education. As well as this, if the c-card system was used, transgender men - particularly those living in poverty - who still menstruate would be able to access sanitary products without having to disclose their transgender status, leading to an improvement in their health and quality of life as well as preventing discrimination. Additionally, women who have just given birth who require particular and more expensive sanitary products will be able to access these even if they do not have the financial means, leading to an improvement in their health and happiness and consequently the health and happiness of their babies.

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

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

When implementing the provisions of the Bill, it is important to ensure that providers are educated on and able to provide for the different needs of older, younger and disabled women.

In addition, it is necessary to ensure providers are educated on different religious or cultural sensitivities that may have an impact on the sanitary products suitable for individuals.

It would also reduce the impact on equality for transgender men who menstruate if they were not required to disclose their transgender status or were able to access sanitary products with anonymity.

It may be suggested that as this Bill offers female-specific sanitary products free of charge, it discriminates against men. This is not the case. There are already examples of healthcare provisions that are female-only (like smear tests) and male-only (like prostate exams), and this is simply an example of the former.

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:

The economic impact of this Bill, which would have an initial cost, would be balanced out by the economic contribution of women with more disposable income and women who do not miss work due to periods. Additionally, an investment into girls' educational opportunities will have a long-term economic benefit. The social impact of this Bill would be positive, improving equality for women and improving the lives of women in poverty. This Bill could also be a starting point for research and investment into more environment-friendly alternatives to disposable sanitary products.

Page 19: General

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

No Response