

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 If you choose the second or third option, a name is still required, but it will not be published.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

Fully Supportive

Please explain the reasons for your response

I utterly agree with the proposed Bill - the only disagreement I have is that it has been far too long in coming. Although many things have changed for the better with regard to women's lives, we still have a long, long way to go in the way that society regards the 'importance' - or lack of it - of things that affect women's lives adversely. Particularly in a health setting, what were once termed 'women's problems' are still seen as unimportant/ lacking urgency. It is an oft said thing that if men had periods/ pregnancies/ babies/ etcetera/ etcetera, 'something' would have been done to improve the experience a long time ago! Again, there is an assumption that in our 'privileged', modern, Western society, there is no need for such provision. That this is, or should be a third world problem and that if it does occur it is due to laziness or poverty or lack of education - all of which, of course, are the fault of the individual!! This proposed Bill is the kind of small but very important initiative that puts people before profits - a way of governing that I had hoped the Scottish Government would embrace whole-heartedly when it was set up. I welcome this initiative, which has the potential to impact in a very positive way on the lives of so many women, as an example of that. N.B. I still think that what we should be doing is ensuring that everyone has an income that allows them to live comfortably! (Although that would not solve all problems, I know - but it would be a better start!)

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

What do you mean - 'free to those who need them'? This is badly worded. Also, I do not think parallels can be drawn with the free card system for condoms. The use of condoms is a choice. Women cannot choose to not have periods! In the consultation document it is stated: 'Universal right to access free sanitary products The proposed Bill places a requirement on Scottish Ministers to establish a universal system which would give free access to sanitary products on request. This would mean the provision of a system in which everyone in Scotland who menstruates would have the right to access sanitary products without charge, regardless of their income and without having to give proof of their identity.' Why are any cards needed? I do not see the need for them in these circumstances. The only 'problem' I can see is if they are freely available then presumably anyone can ask for them - that might cause problems and I can see that there may have to be restrictions placed. But - are you going to place a restriction on the quantity that can be handed out at any one time? Or the type of product? Or who can collect them? There may be times when the person who needs the products sends a representative to get them. Are you going to refuse this? I do not see how you can. Doubtless other questions will be/ will have been raised which will need to be thought through. But this needs to be carefully thought out. It must be done with sensitivity; a system which leads to women feeling in any way ashamed or diminished would be counter to the spirit of the initiative. I think they need to be freely available, on request. Also, the production and distribution of cards simply adds an unnecessary layer and cost and smacks of needless bureaucracy.

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

There is no need for a card scheme

Please explain the reasons for your response.

Please see previous answer. Sorry I have so few answers, only more questions! I can see difficulties with having no card system or similar, but on the other hand, having a system raises as many potential

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

problems. But I do think there should be unlimited access - it places us all in the same boat, so to speak. Women and girls (and their menfolk) who already feel bad about going to foodbanks should not feel further diminished by having to produce a card or whatever to get sanitary products. Also one should not have to argue over the number of products one has to claim - and needs vary hugely. People should not have to justify their needs to officious staff - and we all know those exist! The only restriction I would countenance would be on collection by young children - say under 8, as per the Welsh Government guide to good practice mentioned in the consultation document. There may be an argument for the wider provision of machines which dispense these products - though that would have cost implications, of course. Also, there would need to be other methods of provision/ distribution so as not to restrict choice.

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)?

Yes, I do. Ideally, they should be available at a wide range of outlets. They should be freely available and accessible in all workplaces where women are employed. Similarly, they should be available and accessible in premises women access for a variety of reasons.
First in supermarkets and shopping centres - in all those outlets where they are already available to buy. Many supermarkets (and other companies) pride themselves on the donations they give to charity - indeed many organisations brag about the contributions they make and ask customers to decide where these donations might go! Here is a ready made good cause for them to subscribe to!
Where distribution by machine (and payment) already occurs, changes could be effected so that products are freely available e.g. pubs, clubs, theatres, cinemas, cafes, restaurants, hotels, sports centres, etc., etc..
Obviously products could also be made available at GP surgeries and at venues listed above, as well as in schools, universities and colleges. Could I also ask that hospitals be added to that list - particularly for people who are staying in hospital for however short/ long a time? (More on the reason for this in another answer.)

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

Please explain the reasons for your response

As mentioned in the consultation document, women and girls attending these establishments do not always have the flexibility of premises close at hand where sanitary products can be accessed. Sometimes periods can arrive unexpectedly when one is unprepared. Often as a student of whatever age, one has enough to think about/ prepare for/ carry around with one - and knowing that such products are freely available and accessible can give one peace of mind - and we all have enough stress in our lives already. Again, students may not always have an appropriate amount of money with them - and these things are not always cheap - and choice of cheaper options, should one want that, might not be readily available. I think too that it should be stressed that sanitary products should be not only available but ACCESSIBLE. For example at some schools pupils can ask, usually a specified person, for products - but what if that person is not available? Or needs to be approached when s/he is in the company of others? Many girls would find that intimidating or feel that in approaching this person everyone will know their situation. Could I also reiterate my request for hospitals (for in-patients in particular) to be added to this list.

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, occasionally

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

Yes - in my teenage years. My family were not well off at all. Unfortunately I experienced very heavy periods which went on for almost 3 weeks and so cost a lot. I was also regularly off school as they were so painful. In those days the medical 'advice' was 'wait until you grow up, get married and have a baby - then everything will sort itself out.' Well, I did grow up, but I did not get married or have babies and nothing got 'sorted out' until I went on the pill! (Which came with its own problems, of course). But at least it regulated the length and intensity and decreased the pain. Also (and this is why I mentioned hospitals) some years ago, due to depression and stress, I was hospitalised for a week in the local psychiatric hospital. I began menstruating on the day of admission - of course I had forgotten to bring anything with me under the circumstances - and spent 3 very uncomfortable days as I was told by the nurse in charge that I needed to go to the chemist to buy something, but the ward was so busy that no nurse could be spared to accompany me! I can still remember the shame and discomfort of those 3 days. I still can not understand how one woman could do that to another and I would not want to see anyone else go through that.

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

I am 65. My periods (thankfully) stopped some years ago.

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	

Please explain the reasons for your response

As I'm not clear how this Bill will be implemented I find it difficult to answer this question at all: a) I do not know what the current costs to Government and the public sector are, nor do I know what they will be so it

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

is impossible to decide whether costs will increase or decrease and to what extent. b) Again, I do not know current spending patterns in these establishments, so cannot make predictions. c) I would imagine any supplier/retailer will squeal at the loss of any profit - but since the products will still be paid for out of the public purse (one would imagine at a reduced rate - but on the other hand, as most politicians/ civil servants seem to regard public money as something to be squandered, perhaps at a greatly inflated rate, particularly so if the politicians/ civil servants have any sort of stake in the supplier/retailer - or perhaps this is generally only true of Westminster?) they should not lose out to any great extent. And, of course, there is the fact that their public profile would benefit if they were seen to be charitable in their approach. d) Individuals who partake of the scheme would incur significantly less costs depending on their individual circumstances. And rightly so - and the health benefits, mental and physical, to those who would have had to do without, or to manage with less than they should, would be incalculable. This would impact on both work and school attendance - helping to keep incomes at a reasonable level in the former case and impacting on education and thus future earning power in the latter.

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

Again, as I'm not sure how this is going to be 'rolled out', it is difficult to say. No doubt there will be bureaucratic costs - but hopefully (ha!) these can be kept to a minimum. By using existing 'outlets', staff costs could be kept low(er) - but this depends on where and what staff. Staff who are already under stress cannot be expected to take on further duties without further remuneration. Volunteers, perhaps - but that would incur further training costs(?)
That is why I wondered about the use of already existing machines - though again that might be more than I imagine. I really do not know enough about it all to make any educated suggestions.

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

To me it seems positive, as long as it is free to all who need it, and availability and accessibility are assured in a sensitive, empathic manner that does not single out any group or individual for further shame/ embarrassment. I cannot think of any negative impact, though no doubt there will be those who can, and those who are opposed on principle. I can think of other things that money could be spent on - as we all could - but looking at the scheme purely on its own merits I find it difficult to think of any objections.

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

First tell me what the suggested negative impact(s) might be, then give me time to consider.

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:

As I can't see into the future I really cannot say - but if we proceeded on this basis with everything, we'd never get anything done. We can only really look at the foreseeable future - and today even that is difficult. Trump could propel us into WW3 tomorrow - and where Trump goes, it seems, May will follow. So, on the whole, yes. There may be, there will be impacts but not disproportionately negative ones.

Page 19: General

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

You mentioned in the consultation paper that local boards (?) would make decisions about what products might be available?

I think that a) We need to ensure that whatever sub-committee of these boards is set up has a PROPER proportion of women/ trans gender people on board and that within that number are representatives of women of all ages, colour, socio-economic groups etcetera.

We do NOT want groups of white middle-class males making these decisions!

b) We do not want a situation where there is a post code lottery with different parts of the country providing different products and of differing quality.

c) People who use the service must have options and those options must be available in a wide range of locations.(availability and accessibility)

No product should be forced on anyone. These are extremely personal decisions and personal choice and comfort must be taken in to account. People must be free to make their own choices.

I also noted the following in the consultation paper:

Angela Constance MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, subsequently announced on July 11, 2017 that the Scottish Government would launch a six-month pilot scheme in Aberdeen for women and girls on low incomes to receive free sanitary products.

I *** have never heard of this or seen it advertised. As a pilot scheme this should be open to all women. How does this scheme propose to decide who receives the products? Is it only for people attending foodbanks? Is there a test of income? This is unfair as well as demeaning as many women on the cusp, as it were, are struggling to afford sanitary products. To get a real 'feel' of what up take might be the pilot scheme should be accessible to all women in Aberdeen. I would be interested to receive more information about this scheme or to find out where I can access more information.