



Hamilton

INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Mayor and Members Board of Health
COMMITTEE DATE:	May 13, 2019
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Menstrual Products (BOH19019) (City Wide) (Outstanding Business List Item)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SUBMITTED BY and SIGNATURES:	Jennifer Vickers-Manzin, CNO Director, Healthy Families Division Public Health Services Jennifer Vickers-Manzin on behalf of: Bonnie Elder Director, Ontario Works Division Healthy and Safe Communities Department

COUNCIL DIRECTION

On December 10, 2018 Board of Health passed the following motion:

- a) That staff be directed to review with the City Manager, the cost and implementation of providing shelters; drop-in centres; respite centres; others working with homeless, street-involved, low-income girls, and transgender individuals to free menstrual hygiene products, with a report back to the Board of Health; and,

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- b) That staff be directed to engage with the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Boards, and the appropriate agencies, to discuss the feasibility of providing menstrual hygiene products to students in middle and secondary schools in the City of Hamilton.

INFORMATION

All Hamilton residents deserve the opportunity to reach full health potential without disadvantage due to the social determinants of health. People in lower income settings, especially those who are homeless or precariously housed can face significant challenges obtaining basic necessities. Those in our community who have the highest material deprivation may struggle to afford rent, utilities, food, education, transportation and other costs.

Access to menstrual products is essential for the health, well-being, and full participation of persons who menstruate in society. The inability to afford menstrual products is a health equity issue that disproportionately affects persons who menstruate. Having lack of access to menstrual products due to financial constraints or 'period poverty' contributes to a lack of dignity for those who cannot afford products as well as other health and social emotional consequences. For example, making challenging decisions between health and education, economic security or sense of dignity.

In addition to income, there are other issues that limit access to menstrual products. Menstruation is a natural bodily function, yet it remains stigmatized and as a result many vulnerable menstruators feel silenced and a sense of shame. For example, individuals staining clothes when period arrives unexpectedly during school or missing school due to lack of period protection. Regardless of their circumstances, people who menstruate need adequate and appropriate access to menstrual products so that they can experience their full health potential, maintain dignity and participate fully in community.

Context

At the time of the motion there was a lack of understanding of current resourcing to enhance access to no cost menstrual products and/or receive financial benefits for menstrual products. This report includes a cost analysis of providing identified populations with menstrual products, summaries of relevant consultations conducted with internal and external community partners and options for moving forward.

The results indicate that there is significant movement and success related to menstrual donation drives however, there is inconsistent and poorly coordinated access to no cost

menstrual products for vulnerable populations. This scan revealed that while shelters are able to meet the demand for menstrual products for shelter users, low income residents, including those in receipt of Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) experience significant access challenges. Financial benefits do not specifically cover the cost of menstrual products and surveyed stakeholders agree that there is a need for coordinated activities.

Cost Analysis

The Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis (CCEA) estimates an annual cost of \$87 Canadian dollars per individual for menstrual products (range of \$76.50-\$153.00)¹. This estimate is based on average length of menstrual cycles (28 days) and includes a 20% overhead for administration and distribution menstruating females.

Costs to purchase menstrual products for all females, school aged females (females 12-18 years-old), low income females, females on Ontario Works and female shelter users are reported in Table 1. The population estimates were calculated using 2016 census data and data from City of Hamilton programs. The estimated total annual costs range from approximately \$46,000 for Female Shelter Users to \$11.2 million for all females in Hamilton aged 12-49 years-old.

It is recognized that there are members of the population who do not identify as female and who menstruate. At the time of the report, there was no data available on numbers for this population, however there may also be needs related to accessing menstrual products for this group.

Table 1. Estimated number of individuals and estimated annual cost of menstrual products for each sub-population in the City of Hamilton.

Population (Hamilton)	Number of individuals	Estimated Total Annual Cost (Range: \$76.50 - \$153.00)
Females age 12-49yrs	129,505	\$11,266,935 (\$9,907,133 - \$19, 814,265)
Females age 12-18yrs	20,855	\$1,814,385 (\$1,595,408 – \$3,190,815)
Low income females age 12-49yrs	17,979	\$1,564,182 (\$1,375,402 – \$2,750,803)
Low income females age 12-18yrs	2,920	\$254,014 (\$223,357 – \$446,714)
Ontario Works females age 12-49yrs	6,797	\$591,339 (\$519,971– \$1,039,941)

Ontario Works females age 12-18yrs	1,225	\$106,575 (\$93,713 – \$187,425)
ODSP females age 12-49yrs	7,311	\$636,055 (\$559,292 – \$1,118,583)
ODSP females age 12-18yrs	1,212	\$105,444 (\$92,718 – \$185,436)
Female shelter users age 12-49yrs	532 *	\$46,284 (\$40,698 – \$81,396)

* Number reflects unique females that used one of the following shelters at least once and were between the ages 12-49 years-old at the time of their last stay in 2018: Family Centre; Mary’s Place; Mountainview; Notre Dame; Womankind. Estimate assumes 12-month supply for each unique visitor regardless of length of stay.

Further information regarding calculations of this data can be found in Appendix “A” to BOH19019: Table 1 Methods.

Relevant Consultation

Support for menstrual products can be provided through increased access and distribution of no cost products or through financial benefit programs to support vulnerable individuals to purchase products. The information below provides a summary of current state.

City of Hamilton Internal Services

A scan of City of Hamilton services was completed with Ontario Works, Housing, Public Health, Children’s Services and Neighbourhood Development, Recreation and the Social Navigator Program (Police and Paramedic services).

Overall, there were no internal programs who reported that they consistently budgeted for menstrual products for their clients. A few services, access menstrual products for clients through donations from community partners. Some programs use discretionary funds to buy products. Program staff recognized the need for clients to be able to access menstrual products. Many stated that they connect clients with community resources however, staff recognize the availability of support through community resources is poorly coordinated and inconsistent. Key informants also identified cultural awareness and taboo surrounding menstruation as issues for increasing vulnerability for clients.

For summaries of the interviews completed with these programs, please see Appendix “B” to Report BOH19010: Internal City of Hamilton Consultation Summary. Key areas are highlighted below.

Housing

Emergency shelters that are partially funded by Housing Services through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI), supply free menstrual products. In some cases, these items may fall under a portion of their program costs, however when possible they rely on donations and donation dollars to purchase these items to offset costs. CHPI guidelines stipulate that funding must ensure people experiencing homelessness obtain and retain housing, or people at risk of homelessness remain housed. Decisions regarding the allocation of CHPI would require further review to assess implications on funding requirements.

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) is a community-based program that provides direct financial support to communities across Canada to help them address their local homelessness Initiative. Communities, including Hamilton, determine their own needs/priorities and develop appropriate projects for approval via the Community Advisory Board, this may include personal hygiene products. Personal Hygiene products can be included as an eligible expense as part of both Housing First and Non-Housing First projects. To date, Hamilton initiatives funded through HPS do not specifically report this expense item, therefore the ability to assess historical funding is limited. Additional investigation is required to determine feasibility of future funding.

Ontario Works

Financial support from OW and ODSP is intended to cover basic needs and shelter. Basic Needs are defined as 'an amount provided to persons who satisfy all conditions of eligibility to assist with the cost of food, clothing and other personal items for members of the benefit unit. The provision of basic needs is based on family composition, the age of any dependents, geographic location and the individual circumstances of the benefit unit' (OW Directive 6.2 Basic Needs). Currently, a single adult is entitled to \$343/month for basic needs regardless of gender.

Clients of OW and ODSP as well as other low-income individuals can apply for the Special Supports Program to access health-related benefits. The Special Supports program in the Ontario Works Division of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department administers funding for health and non-health items such as: emergency adult dental services, dentures, vision care for adults, mobility aids, orthotics, transportation assistance, hearing aids, funerals and burials/cremations. These items are available to qualifying social assistance (OW and ODSP) recipients and, in the Hamilton, they are also available to qualifying low-income residents. Special Supports does not supply or cover the cost of menstrual products.

OW staff may provide hygiene kits to their clients. Hygiene kits are purchased through employment related funds and include products such as shampoo, soap, toothpaste, and

a limited supply of menstrual products. These kits are intended to support clients in finding employment. The kits are distributed on a first come first serve basis by case workers.

Community Partners

An environmental scan was conducted with community partners who support vulnerable clients, specifically shelters, drop-in centres, respite centres and others working with homeless, street-involved and low-income individuals.

All agencies interviewed agreed there is a need within the community for low or no cost menstrual products. Most agencies interviewed stated they are dependent on donations to meet the needs of their clients with a few shelters purchasing products when no donated products are available. The shelters and drop in agencies said they can meet needs most of the time however frequently cannot provide clients with the products they prefer (e.g. pads vs. tampons). The food banks interviewed stated they are not consistently able to meet client needs.

None of the agencies interviewed are distributing sustainable products, such as cups or reusable pads, at this time. A few agencies identified concerns with these products as many of their clients do not have consistent access to clean water. A few stated that they would like to be able to offer choice to clients to help support their dignity and recognized there may be value from a cost perspective in offering reusable products to those clients that request them.

For summaries of the interviews completed, please see Appendix “C” to Report BOH19019: Community Partner Consultation Summary.

Menstrual Equity Advocate

A meeting was held with the founder of FemCare Community Health Initiative. FemCare is a non-profit organization that is currently involved in advocacy work related to menstrual equity. Actions include facilitating several product drives in the community; promoting anti-stigma messages through an online campaign and advocating to the municipal, provincial and federal government for policy that addresses menstrual equity.

Engagement with School Boards

Consultation with the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) and the Hamilton Catholic District School Board (HWDCSB) leadership was completed. Both school boards recognized the importance of this issue and advised there is currently no centrally coordinated approach for providing products to students. Individual schools have taken initiative to purchase products for students as needed. Schools typically use

discretionary funding to purchase products. Both the HWDSB and HWCDSB are committed to further exploration of this issue.

Other Communities

Other Canadian communities have also been engaged in projects related to this issue. For instance, Toronto City Council has recently investigated providing menstrual products to clients accessing community services such as shelters, drop-in and respite centres.

Other notable examples of projects include the Thames Valley District School Board recently providing menstrual products in all washrooms in London, Ontario. Further, British Columbia announced in April 2019 that all schools will be required to provide menstrual products in all washrooms by the end of the year. The challenges and success of these programs have yet to be reported.

Other Contextual Considerations

Local Initiatives

There are a number of other local initiatives aimed at addressing challenges related to this issue. Fundraising and product drives include March Padness and Tampon Tuesday continue to expand with an aim to have more impactful initiatives for menstrual equity. Students at McMaster University have started a group called Bleed Free McMaster which aims to reduce stigma, increase accessibility to menstrual products through product drives and to promote the use of more environmentally-sustainable products. Similar initiatives are happening in cities across Canada.

Federal Initiatives

Currently, there are no national policies subsidizing the cost of menstrual products. Minimal interventions have occurred on a federal level since the removal of sales tax from menstrual products in 2015. The poverty reduction strategy, Opportunity for All, identifies access to basic necessities as a priority. In 2018, the NDP added a statement to create a health subsidy for free access to menstrual products to their policy platform.

Sustainable Products

A variety of environmentally sustainable products were investigated to explore whether there may be innovative ways to support clients that create less waste and are more sustainable. The most common suggestions for environmentally friendly products include menstrual cups and reusable pads. Menstrual cups cost approximately \$28-\$40 for one cup and require access to water to clean between uses and between cycles. Reusable pads cost approximately \$15-\$20 for one pad and need to be cleaned between uses. Other options that were explored include period underwear, menstrual discs and organic tampons. Cost and access to water for cleaning may be barriers for these options.

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Options for Addressing Need

The feasibility of addressing 'period poverty' has both financial and implementation considerations. A dignified and coordinated approach needs to be applied when enhancing access to menstrual products. Options may include increased access and distribution of no cost products or enhancement of financial benefit programs to support vulnerable individuals to purchase products. In consideration of Table 1:

- Universal access has some benefits related to the normalization of menstruation, however, there is no demonstrated universal need and a universal approach is cost prohibitive;
- Targeted strategies will support those most in need. This scan revealed that while shelters are able to meet the demand for menstrual products for shelter users, low income residents, including those in receipt of OW and ODSP experience significant access challenges;
- The benefits of coordinating and increasing access to no cost menstrual products has potential cost savings via bulk purchasing and maximizing donations. Distribution needs to be planned to ensure low administrative costs and equitable distribution. This approach does not provide for personal preference of products; and,
- Subsidizing financial benefit programs for menstrual products can target those in need and support personal choice. This approach may not adequately address material deprivation and leave individuals continuing to make challenging decisions between health and education, economic security or sense of dignity. Re-allocation of existing funds has the potential to negatively impact the level or type of items currently provided while additional net levy funding presents a new cost.

Given the above and in consideration of Table 1, the BOH may consider the following options:

Advocacy

The BOH may elect to correspond with the Premier of Ontario and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to request an increase in social assistance rates to a level that reflects the true costs of basic needs, taking into consideration the added costs for people that menstruate.

To build awareness and combat stigma at a municipal level, the BOH could consider recognizing May 28 as Menstrual Hygiene Day.

Collaboration among School Boards and Key Partners

Enhanced collaboration amongst community partners offers the opportunity to maximize and coordinate existing work in community. Ongoing engagement with community

partners will allow for opportunities to create a more consistent and coordinated approach to meet the needs of our priority populations. Exploring needs of vulnerable women in our community by engaging with them directly will continue to inform implementation and distribution strategies. For example, what type, where and how people who menstruate prefer to access menstrual products.

Schools are a potential location to target persons who menstruate between the ages of 12-18 years-old. To determine the feasibility of a targeted or universal approach to enhance access to no cost menstrual products within the school system, it is suggested that further investigation opportunities be referred to the following committees: Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board Liaison Committee and the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board Liaison Committee.

Provision of Products

To determine the feasibility of providing menstrual products a complete review of current budget allocations and spending would need to be completed with Divisions that provide services and benefits to vulnerable populations in our community. Any addition to the current list of items provided through programs would have the potential to negatively impact the level or type of items currently provided or could require additional net levy funding.

The BOH may elect to refer the provision of menstrual products to vulnerable populations to the 2020 budget discussion.

Corporate Partnership

Exploring opportunities to work with corporate partners could help offset costs of menstrual products. Examples of opportunities with the private sector include opportunities with companies that sell menstrual products. For instance, some private organizations offer school-based resources to promote the elementary healthy growth and development curriculum or community grants for initiatives to support women's health.

References

1. Canadian Centre for Economic Development. (2018). Access to menstrual hygiene products for the vulnerable: Canadian results. Retrieved from <https://www.cancea.ca/sites/economic-analysis.ca/files/Summary%20results%20All%20May%2028.pdf>

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix “A” to Report BOH19019: Table 1 Methods

Appendix “B” to Report BOH19019: Internal City of Hamilton Consultation
Summary

Appendix “C” to Report BOH19019: Community Partner Consultation Summary