
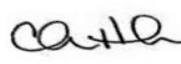




**CITY OF HAMILTON**  
**HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENT**  
**Children's and Community Services Division**

<b>TO:</b>	Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	May 4, 2023
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	Menstrual Product Pilot Project Update (HSC20001(b)) (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
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<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Jessica Chase Director, Children's and Community Services Division Healthy and Safe Communities Department
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Chris Herstek Director, Recreation Division Healthy and Safe Communities Department
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

**RECOMMENDATION**

- (a) That the City of Hamilton expand the Menstrual Products Pilot Project to provide free menstrual products at all City of Hamilton recreation facilities and municipal services centres, drawing on the current inventory and at no cost in 2023; and,
- (b) That the estimated annual cost of the Menstrual Products Pilot Project in the amount of \$32 K be a Council referred item to be deliberated through the 2024 Tax Operating Budget process; and,
- (c) That an annual estimated inventory of 113,000 units (tampons and pads) be maintained and tracked by the Recreation Division in order to project costs to deliver the program in future years; and,

- (d) That all future purchases to support the Menstrual Product Project at City of Hamilton recreation facilities and municipal service centres be funded from any available source jointly deemed appropriate by the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department and the General Manager of the Finance and Corporate Services Department including, but not limited to, one or more of the following sources: any available provincial or federal funding, or 2023 in year program and/or department/corporate surplus; and,
- (e) That the City fund Hamilton Food Share (HFS) to distribute free menstrual products for 2023, at a cost of \$91 K, funded through the Early Years System Reserve (112218); and,
- (f) That \$91 K to fund Hamilton Food Share if they are not fully self-sustaining by 2024, be a Council referred item to be deliberated through the 2024 Tax Operating Budget process.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On February 26, 2020, Council approved a 12-month pilot to distribute free menstrual products (tampons and pads) through a universal and targeted approach. Menstrual products were made available in women's and universal washrooms in five recreation centres, and Hamilton Food Share (HFS) was funded to distribute menstrual products through their network of food bank partners.

The pilot was funded at \$121 K through a reallocation of Ontario Works Special Supports health related benefits. The City's Recreation Division was allocated \$30 K, while HFS received \$91 K. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, full implementation of the pilot was delayed until 2022.

The following is a summary of menstrual products distributed between February and December 2022:

- 16,321 menstrual products (8,995 tampons and 7,326 pads) distributed at five City of Hamilton recreation centres (Dalewood, Dominic Agostino Riverdale, Huntington Park, Norman Pinky Lewis and Westmount)
- 34,438 menstrual products (14,941 tampons and 19,497 pads) were distributed through Hamilton Food Share and 10 partner food bank locations

Staff at the City and HFS monitored the distribution of products and solicited feedback through confidential on-line and paper surveys. There were 88 surveys completed by individuals indicating they had accessed menstrual products at recreation centres, and 540 surveys completed by individuals indicating they had accessed menstrual products at food banks.

Individuals were asked about the impact of accessing free menstrual products. Overall the responses indicate that:

- Accessing menstrual products was an issue for them or their household
- They felt supported by the program and worried less
- They were able to redirect funds to address other basic needs (food, rent, utilities, etc.)

When asked about ideas to improve the project, suggestions were primarily related to more product choice and expanding access to free products in more locations across the city.

Recreation staff felt that free menstrual products were meeting a community need, and that standardized inventory control, more product choice, and strategies to manage product waste and shrinkage would improve the program. They also recommended increasing access to menstrual products across all City recreation facilities.

Report recommendations include expanding the availability of free menstrual products to all City recreation facilities, as well as City Hall and municipal service centres. For 2023, this can be accomplished at no cost using existing inventory purchased using initial program funding.

Recommendations also include maintaining an inventory of 113,000 menstrual products for ongoing delivery of the program; that staff pursue available and appropriate funding sources; and that \$32 K be a Council referred item to the 2024 Tax Operating Budget process.

Staff also recommend funding Hamilton Food Share for an additional year (2023) to purchase menstrual products for distribution at \$91 K, as they work towards a self-sustaining model for 2024. Funds would be allocated from the Early Years System Reserve (112218). Lastly, should HFS fail to be fully self-sustaining for 2024, \$91 K be a Council referred item in the 2024 Budget process.

### **Alternatives for Consideration – Not Applicable**

### **FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Financial: There are no additional financial costs in 2023 to expand the program to all recreation centres and municipal service centres. The current inventory is sufficient to cover the estimated number of units required.

The City will fund Hamilton Food Share to purchase menstrual products for distribution in 2023, at a cost of \$91 K, funded through the Early Years System Reserve (112218). Funding is for product purchase only.

Funding in the amount of \$32 K for product will be referred to the 2024 Annual Operating Budget, along with \$91 K for HFS should they fail to be self-sustaining.

Staffing: There are no staffing implications associated with Report HSC20001(b).

Legal: There are no legal implications associated with Report HSC20001(b).

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

On February 26, 2020, Council approved a 12-month Menstrual Products Pilot (MPP) project to provide free menstrual products. The MPP project was developed with the following principles in mind:

- Supporting individuals who menstruate and are experiencing financial need
- Upholding personal dignity
- Providing choice

Through a universal approach, menstrual products were made available in women's and universal washrooms in 5 recreation centres, one in each recreation district. The targeted approach provided funding to Hamilton Food Share (HFS) and distribution of menstrual products through HFS's network of local foodbanks.

The cost of the pilot was \$121 K. Hamilton Food Share received \$91 K to bulk purchase products for distribution through foodbanks. The remaining \$30 K went to the City's Recreation Division to purchase and distribute products.

The project also included an evaluation undertaken by Health & Safe Communities' Performance, Planning & Evaluation team.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, full implementation of the pilot was delayed until 2022.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS**

There are no policy implications or legislative requirements associated with Report HSC20001(b).

## **RELEVANT CONSULTATION**

### **Hamilton Food Share**

Hamilton Food Share partnered with the City to deliver the MPP Project and is committed to a self-sustaining model for 2024. As part of program delivery, HFS

solicited client feedback through a short survey: 54 surveys were completed. Survey results follow in the Analysis and Rational section.

HFS has provided the data, feedback and costing included in this report.

## **ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION**

Access to menstrual products is essential for health, well-being, and full participation in society. Lack of access to menstrual products due to financial constraints or “period poverty” is a health equity issue affecting girls, women and persons who menstruate. All Hamilton residents deserve the opportunity to reach their full health potential without disadvantage due to social determinants of health.

The following is a brief scan of other jurisdictions that provide access to free menstrual products.

### **School Boards**

In 2021, the Province committed to providing school boards with menstrual products for a three-year term. Local boards of education have made products available at secondary schools, alternative education centres, and some elementary schools. Boards are currently in year two of this provincial funding.

### **Hamilton Public Library**

The Hamilton Public Library (HPL) began a pilot in 2020 and has been providing free menstrual products at 14 branches across Hamilton.

### **Other Municipalities**

Many Ontario communities recognize the issue of “period poverty” and provide free menstrual products or are exploring ways to provide access to free menstrual products. Municipalities offering free products include the cities of Burlington, Cambridge, Guelph, London, Mississauga, Ottawa and Thunder Bay.

## **Menstrual Products Pilot Project – City of Hamilton Recreation Centres**

### **Distribution**

Limited distribution of menstrual products took place prior to the formal pilot beginning in 2022. Recreation centres first started distributing products in March 2020, but this was interrupted numerous times due to COVID-19 shut downs and staff redeployment. The program was relaunched in fall 2021 with some additional stops and starts due to logistics and additional shut downs.

Baskets of menstrual products (tampons and pads) were available in women’s and universal washrooms in five City recreation centres, one in each recreation district.

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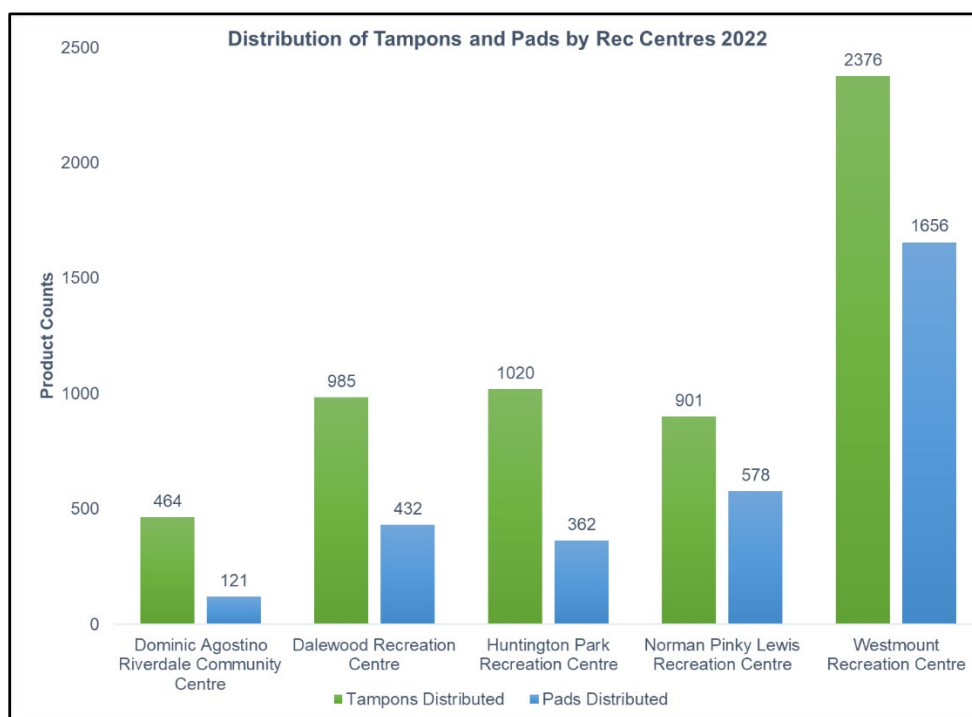
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Centres included Dalewood, Domenic Agostino Riverdale, Huntington Park, Norman Pinky Lewis and Westmount. Posters promoting the availability of products were placed in washrooms and common areas. The program was also promoted through the City website and social media advertising (Twitter and Instagram).

Inventory was purchased in bulk and available at five recreation centres between February and December 2022<sup>1</sup>. A total of 16,321 menstrual products (8,995 tampons and 7326 pads), were distributed across the five pilot sites. This represents \$2,193 of purchased inventory.

Westmount Recreation Centre had the highest usage rates, while Domenic Agostino Riverdale Recreation Centre had the lowest (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Distribution of Tampons and Pads by Rec Centres 2022



Usage rates varied by location and would have been impacted by type of programming, whether a recreation centre had a pool or not, and the number of closures due to maintenance, mechanical issues or other unforeseen circumstances.

This report focuses on distribution of products between February and December 2022. Recreation service levels and usage rates were slowly increasing as pandemic

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<sup>1</sup> City of Hamilton recreation facilities were still under provincial closure in January 2022 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

restrictions were lifted and demand from the community increased. Staff estimate that attendance at the five pilot sites had returned to approximately 60% of attendance recorded in 2019 (pre-pandemic).

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Staff tracked the distribution of products and asked for feedback from recreation centre staff involved in project implementation, as well as people who accessed free menstrual products through recreation centres.

#### **Recreation Division – Staff Feedback**

Midway through the pilot, staff at the five recreation centres distributing free menstrual products were contacted and asked to provide feedback through an on-line open-ended survey. Eighteen surveys were completed.

Staff reported that people were accessing the products, that better advertising of the program directly equated with higher product usage, and that the program was meeting community needs. Some of the challenges included minor product wastage (vandalism – product thrown out or flushed down toilets) and shrinkage (too much product taken by some individuals), COVID-19, and program demands competing with other job-related duties/responsibilities.

When asked about program expansion, survey respondents provided the following suggestions:

- Standardize inventory control
- More product choice (tampons with applicators, regular, super absorbent, etc.)
- Install permanent dispensers
- Increase access by expanding program to all recreation facilities
- Strategies to manage product waste and shrinkage

#### **People with Lived Experience**

Staff solicited client input during the pilot via a short on-line, voluntary and confidential survey administered between March and December 2022. Surveys could be accessed via QR code posted near products in recreation centres, and the City website and social media advertising (Twitter and Instagram).

88 surveys were completed by individuals that had accessed or were aware of free menstrual products available at recreation centres.

Individuals completing the survey were asked how free menstrual products helped the people who accessed them. Survey responses indicated the following results:

- 37% reported feeling supported when they did not have menstrual products at home
- 30% reported they were able to worry less

When asked about ideas to improve the program, 18% of those who had accessed or were aware of free menstrual products responded. Suggestions were primarily related to more product choice (i.e. tampons with applicators, Diva cups, products in different sizes and absorbency, specialized undergarments, organic products and bulk packaging for full cycles) and to expand access to free products at more locations throughout the city.

Responses from those who accessed or were aware of free products was small and should be interpreted cautiously.

### **Program Expansion – Additional City Facilities**

The cost to implement the pilot project was significantly less than the original estimated budget of \$30 K. The actual cost was \$2,467 and included menstrual products and an initial purchase of baskets.

Staff based estimates on projected numbers because local data on uptake of this kind of initiative was not available. The variance in program usage can also be attributed to reduced programming and mandated closures related to the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as closures due to maintenance, mechanical issues or other unforeseen circumstances.

Staff recommend making free menstrual products available at all remaining recreation facilities as well as City Hall and municipal service centres. There is no cost to expand the program for 2023 due to existing inventory of menstrual products purchased in 2022 with initial pilot program funding.

For 2024, staff recommend maintaining an inventory of 113,000 menstrual products (estimated annual use) for ongoing delivery of the program; that staff pursue available and appropriate funding sources; and that \$32 K be a Council referred item to the 2024 Tax Operating Budget process.

### **Menstrual Products Pilot Project – Hamilton Food Share Distribution<sup>2</sup>**

HFS was allocated \$91 K to purchase menstrual products for distribution as part of the pilot. The MPP Project served individuals experiencing income and food insecurity who accessed food banks and identified a need for menstrual products. To promote

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<sup>2</sup> Figures and analysis provided by Hamilton Food Share, 2023

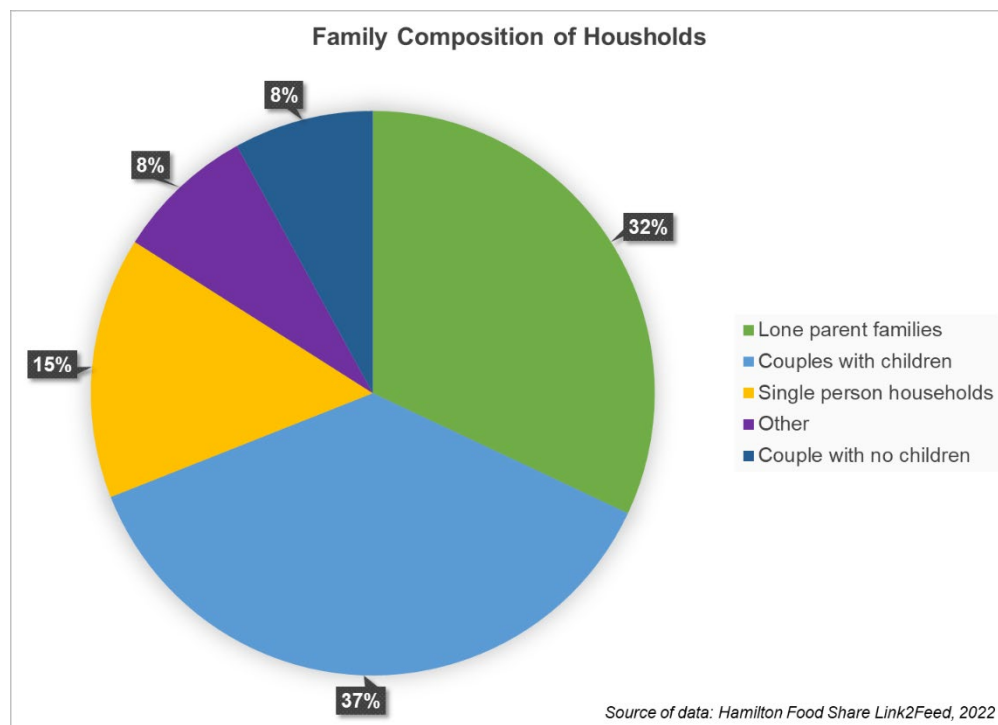


inclusion and reduce barriers, posters were displayed at participating food banks in the following languages: Arabic, English, Farsi, French, Kurdish, Somali and Spanish (identified as the top most preferred languages for the service users at participating agencies).

During the one-year pilot, a total of 100,407 households visited participating foodbanks. Of these visits, 16,519 households (16%) accessed the program and received menstrual products. Hamilton Food Share and ten partner emergency food bank locations distributed 34,438 menstrual products – 14,941 tampons and 19,497 pads.

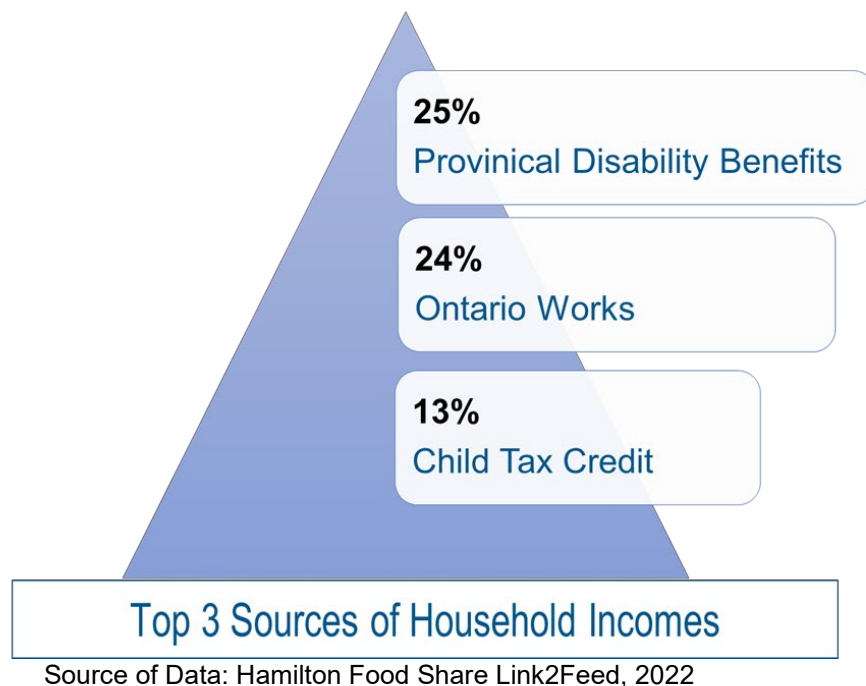
Over two thirds or 69% of households receiving menstrual products through the emergency food system, were families with children (single parent/guardian and couples with children) (Figure 2). The remaining households were comprised of couples, single individuals and other household configurations.

Figure 2. Family Composition of Households



The top three sources of income from those that accessed menstrual products from the emergency food system were disability benefits (Provincial, CPP and private), Ontario Works, and Child Tax Credit (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Top 3 Sources of Household Incomes



## Monitoring and Evaluation

Staff solicited client feedback through a voluntary and confidential survey using the Link2Feed<sup>3</sup> client intake system or paper responses. The survey was administered between November 1 and 30, 2022, and consisted of three questions.

There were 540 surveys completed, representing 44% of households accessing free menstrual products through the emergency food system during November 2022.

Individuals completing the survey were asked about the impacts of accessing free menstrual products. Survey responses indicated the following results:

- 91% reported that accessing menstrual products has been an issue for their household
- 97% reported they were able to redirect funds to basic needs (rent, food, utilities, etc.)
- 65% reported that the program met their needs while 34% indicated that the program did not fully meet their needs (the quantity or type of menstrual products were not always available)

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<sup>3</sup> Link2Feed is a client intake and data management system utilized by food banks and other hunger relief organizations.

Overall, HFS and the food bank partners report that having a consistent supply of menstrual products available for distribution provided barrier free support to many low-income households, and some additional financial relief.

### **Program Expansion and Sustainability**

Based on the pilot feedback, it is recommended that the program continue to include both a universal approach and a target approach. The universal approach includes distribution at recreation centres, City Hall and municipal service centres. The targeted approach is distributed through Hamilton Food Share and its emergency food network.

HFS has made program adjustments based on need in quantity and type of product across the emergency food system. They estimate an increased need of approximately 10%, however they anticipate the increased cost will be mitigated by purchasing a significant volume of product in bulk.

HFS is committed to a self-sustaining model for January 1, 2024. Staff recommend funding Hamilton Food Share for an additional year at \$91 K and that this is funded through the Early Years System Reserve (112218).

If the HFS menstrual products program is not self-sustaining by January 1, 2024, staff recommend that the City support this program for an additional year. Staff therefore recommend that \$91 K be a Council referred item to be deliberated through the 2024 Tax Operating Budget process.

### **ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION**

None

### **ALIGNMENT TO THE 2016 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN**

#### **Economic Prosperity and Growth**

Hamilton has a prosperous and diverse local economy where people have opportunities to grow and develop.

#### **Healthy and Safe Communities**

Hamilton is a safe and supportive City where people are active, healthy, and have a high quality of life.

### **APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

None