

Notice of Motion

Monday, November 18, 2024

From: Councillor Phelps Bondaroff

Signing the Period Promise

WHEREAS almost one quarter of Canadian menstruators say they have struggled to afford menstrual products for themselves or their children (period poverty), and that people who are menstruating but do not have menstrual products available to them experience social isolation, financial instability and increased mental health concerns by not being able to attend school, work, or community activities without experiencing stigma and shame;

WHEREAS the United Way's Period Promise is a campaign that calls for increases to access to menstrual products, and that local governments play a pivotal role in addressing period poverty within their communities. This campaign seeks to

generates public conversations to destigmatize menstruation, collects products and cash donations to supply local social service agencies with menstrual products, and celebrates local organizations that have adopted a policy to provide free menstrual products for their staff, clients, customers, and/or members of the community at large;

WHEREAS the District of Saanich currently offers free menstrual products in the washrooms of all of our facilities, including Saanich Hall, parks and recreation facilities and other Saanich buildings;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Saanich take the Period Promise by signing a Period Promise Policy Letter of Agreement with the United Way Southern Vancouver Island (UWSVI) (see Appendix 1).

The Notice of Motion will be considered at the December 2, 2024 Council meeting.

Background

Period Poverty

Period poverty, defined as the widespread lack of access to menstrual products due to financial limitations, is a pressing issue affecting girls, women, and trans and non-binary individuals in British Columbia. Financial constraints prevent many from affording menstrual products, leading to challenges in education, work, and overall social participation. According to a 2018 Canadian Gender Study, almost one-quarter of Canadian women have struggled to afford menstrual products for themselves or their dependents.¹ According to a recent Leger survey, “one in four Canadian women who menstruate (25%) have been forced to make the decision between purchasing menstrual products and purchasing other essentials such as food or rent within the last year.”²

The impacts of period poverty extend beyond financial constraints. Individuals facing this challenge can experience social isolation, lost wages, and access to educational opportunities. These individuals can also experience a decrease in mental wellness as the lack of access to menstrual products can prevent them from attending school, work, or community activities without stigma and shame. A 2018 study found that approximately 55% of respondents had missed work, school, or declined social activities because of their periods.³

The burden of period poverty falls disproportionately on women and those who menstruate. The annual cost of menstrual products per person was estimated at \$70 in 2019, and this cost can be considerably higher for those living in rural and remote communities. This cost is also increasing – one source reported that last year in the US, the price of a box of tampons increased by 10% and the price of a pack of pads increased by 8.3%.⁴

The stress, anxiety, and shame resulting from inadequate access to menstrual products negatively impact well-being. People who experience period poverty are placing themselves at greater risk by using menstrual products for longer than their recommended time, or using unsanitary alternatives like rags or newspaper, placing their health and security at risk. These health risks are compounded by reduced employment options, compromised academic performance, and negative mental health impacts as a direct result of lack of access to menstrual products.

¹ Hill and Knowlton Strategies & Plan International (2018). “A Canadian Gender Study.” Available at <https://plca-p-001.sitecorecontenthub.cloud/api/public/content/71f3f5c565434819a9f32820e8e8303d?v=afcd7657>

² Leger. (2023 May 19). “The Hidden Cost of Periods: A Canadian Perspective.” Available at <https://plca-p-001.sitecorecontenthub.cloud/api/public/content/be4eb4c962c14eb5b87f3f7d210004d4?v=7042f8f7>

³ Hill and Knowlton Strategies & Plan International (2018). “A Canadian Gender Study.” Available at <https://plca-p-001.sitecorecontenthub.cloud/api/public/content/71f3f5c565434819a9f32820e8e8303d?v=afcd7657>

⁴ Wang. C. (2023 June 8). “How Inflation Is Making Your Period More Expensive.” *Intimina*. Available at <https://www.intimina.com/blog/how-inflation-is-making-your-period-more-expensive/#:~:text=The%20rise%20in%20material%20costs,per%20month%20since%20April%202022.>

Period poverty is a symptom of poverty, affecting marginalised groups at a disproportionately high rate. Vulnerable populations, including single mothers, transgender and non-binary individuals, Indigenous communities, people of colour, people in rural and remote communities, and those with disabilities, are more likely to experience period poverty.

A Role for Municipalities

One way that municipalities can support menstruating individuals in their communities and help tackle period poverty, is by ensuring that their washroom facilities are stocked with free menstrual products. By providing free menstrual products, municipalities not only address an immediate need but also contribute to the overall health and security of those experiencing period poverty. This is a tangible and impactful step towards alleviating period poverty in British Columbia.

Saanich currently offers free menstrual products in our washrooms, and the only remaining step is to formally take the Period Promise. In so doing, we would join a host of other municipalities and actors across region and province. For example, six municipalities have signed a United Way Period Promise Policy Agreement:

- City of Colwood
- City of Kamloops
- City of North Vancouver
- City of Prince George
- City of Richmond
- City of Victoria⁵

As well as a host of other actors and organizations, which include the Greater Victoria Public Library, the Institute of Ocean Sciences, the Victoria Grizzlies, Ile Sauvage Brewing, West Shore Parks & Recreation, the Westshore Wolves, and PBC Solutions.⁶

Publicly signing a Period Promise Policy Agreement serves to:

- Raises public awareness and visibility for the issue: Publicly signing a Period Promise Policy Agreement draws attention to the importance of menstrual equity, raising awareness about the challenges people face when they lack access to menstrual products. This can help educate the community and reduce the stigma surrounding menstruation.
- Demonstrates leadership and accountability: Public support of the Period Promise Campaign demonstrates the District's commitment to menstrual equity and will serve as a prominent example to other neighbouring municipalities, encouraging them to step up and do the same. Hopefully, this will also inspire other community actors, such as local businesses and organizations, to also step up and offer free menstrual products in their washrooms.
- Inform the public: Publicly taking the Period Promise will help inform the public, most notably those experiencing period poverty, that should they need them, menstrual products will be available to them in Saanich facilities.

⁵ United Way British Columbia. (n.d.). "Period Promise." Available at <https://uwbc.ca/program/period-promise/#policy-agreement>; and see also United Way Southern Vancouver Island. (n.d.). "Period Promise." Available at <https://uwsvi.ca/periodpromise/policy-promise/>

⁶ See UWSVI (n.d.), "Make Your Period Promise Today." Available at <https://uwsvi.ca/periodpromise/policy-promise/>

- Serves as a moment for reflection and celebration: The signing of the Period Promise Policy Agreement serves as an opportunity to celebrate the steps taken by the District toward menstrual equity, and helps with the overall goal of destigmatizing menstruation.

Menstrual Equity Across BC and Canada

This progress adjoins the wave of menstrual equity happening in BC and Canada. Since 2019, thanks to the advocacy of many students, schools in BC have free menstrual products in their washrooms.⁷ In December 2023, the federal government adopted a policy that would ensure that menstrual products were made freely available in the washrooms of all federally regulated workplaces (such as banks, airlines, Crown corporations, broadcasters and telecommunications companies, railways, postal and courier services).⁸ This policy is gathering momentum and popularity, a 2023 Leger poll found that “over eight in ten (82%) women agree that period products should be available for free in public washrooms.”⁹

In BC, the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction has partnered with United Way BC in 2019 to produce a Period Promise Research Project to get a profile of period poverty in BC.¹⁰ A few years later, the Government of BC established a multi-sector Period Poverty Task Force to further advance the Province’s goal to end period poverty and remove the stigma associated with menstruation.¹¹ This included the roll-out of pilot project grants to test out short-term, impact-focused models for increased access to free menstrual products in BC.¹² The time is ripe to continue the momentum towards addressing period poverty in BC communities.

⁷ Schmunk, R. (2019 April 5). “B.C. public schools must provide free menstrual products for students, government orders.” *CBC*. Available at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/free-menstrual-products-bc-1.5086346>

⁸ Government of Canada. (2023 December 15). “Menstrual products now available at no cost to employees in federally regulated workplaces.” Available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2023/12/menstrual-products-now-available-at-no-cost-to-employees-in-federally-regulated-workplaces.html>

⁹ Leger. (2023 May 19). “The Hidden Cost of Periods: A Canadian Perspective.” Available at <https://plca-p-001.sitecorecontenthub.cloud/api/public/content/be4eb4c962c14eb5b87f3f7d210004d4?v=7042f8f7>

¹⁰ United Way. (2021 January). “United Way Period Promise Research Project Final Report.” Available at https://uwbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Period_Promise_Research_Project_Final_Report_-_Errata_May_28_2021.pdf

¹¹ United Way British Columbia. (n.d.). “Period Promise.” Available at <https://uwbc.ca/program/period-promise/#policy-agreement>

¹² *Ibid.*



**United Way
Southern
Vancouver Island**

Period Promise Policy Letter of Agreement – **MONTH DATE, YEAR**

Between

**United Way Southern Vancouver Island
201-633 Courtney Street, Victoria BC V8W 1B9**

And

**The District of Saanich
770 Vernon Ave.
Victoria BC, V8X 2W7**

Introduction

Congratulations! By signing this agreement you've agreed that it's vital to make menstrual products more accessible for anyone who menstruates. You've recognized that menstrual health is a right, not a privilege.

United Way Southern Vancouver Island's (UWSVI)'s Period Promise campaign generates public conversations to destigmatize menstruation and collects products and cash donations to supply local social service agencies with menstrual products.

The third plank of the campaign is reflected here, in this agreement: celebrating local organizations that have adopted a policy to provide free products for their staff, clients, customers, and/or members of the community at large.

This document is an agreement between UWSVI and the undersigned to join the Period Promise campaign by signing the policy below and committing to its implementation.

The District of Saanich will:

- Provide, free of charge, a selection (e.g., tampons, pads, and panty liners) of menstrual products in women's and gender-neutral washrooms* to all of the eligible following categories:
 - o Your employees
 - o Your clients/customers
 - o The public at large

**Providing the same range of free products in the men's washroom(s) is up to your discretion.*

- Confirm, every two years, that you continue to provide free, accessible, and diverse menstrual products in your washroom(s).
 - o A representative from UWSVI will contact your organization biannually to confirm your continued involvement and, if available, collect data and stories related to the implementation of the Period Promise Policy.

Territorial Acknowledgment

United Way Southern Vancouver Island serves communities located on the traditional territories of the Coast Salish people, including the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Lekwungen) people, today represented by the Songhees Nation and the Esquimalt Nation, the WSÁNEĆ people, the Scaí'new (Beecher Bay), T'souke, Pacheedaht, MÁLEXEḲ (Malahat) and Penelakut Nations. We are honoured to live, learn and work on their territories every day.



**United Way
Southern
Vancouver Island**

UWSVI will:

- Recognize your leadership by identifying you on our online list and map of signatories.
- Provide you with UWSVI-branded signage that identifies your organization as a signatory, and messaging to help you and your staff explain why menstrual products are available for free in your washroom(s).
- Invite you to public events highlighting the policy and the Period Promise campaign.
- Invite you to be involved in policy consultation and discussion opportunities with other signatory partners and advocacy strategy meetings where signatories, activists, and local leaders can share ideas and discuss the next steps for policy implementation.

The Period Promise Policy Agreement

This agreement is signed on the ____ (day) of ____ (month), ____ (year)

Follow-up reporting and a recommitment to the Period Promise Policy Agreement will be explored in the year [DATE HERE].

Signed on behalf of

United Way Southern Vancouver Island

Print Name

Signature

Title

Signed on behalf of

The District of Saanich

Print Name

Signature

Title

Thank you for uniting with us.

Please contact [PERSON] for additional information about the Agreement, including guidance on calculating the cost of purchasing free products for your washrooms and some practical recommendations about policy implementation.

Please visit uwsvi.ca/periodpromise for more information about menstrual equity, period poverty, and the Period Promise campaign.