

HALIFAX

P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 15.1.2
Halifax Regional Council
October 29, 2019

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed by 

SUBMITTED BY: _____
Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: July 1, 2019

SUBJECT: Menstrual Products in HRM Facilities

ORIGIN

Motion from Councillor Nicoll requesting a staff report to explore the option of providing free menstrual products in HRM Facilities as a pilot project. If approved, all community centres, pools and arenas will be stocked with free menstrual products. This would make menstrual products easily accessible and free in HRM-owned community centres, pools, and arenas.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39

7A The purposes of the Municipality are to

(b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and...

79A(1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4), the Municipality may only spend money for municipal purposes if

(a) the expenditure is included in the Municipality's operating budget or capital budget or is otherwise authorized by the Municipality;

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to include in the preparation of the 2020/2021 operating budget the cost of the installation of menstrual dispensers and disposal containers in sixteen HRM owned and operated facilities for one year as part of a pilot project to provide free access to menstrual products in HRM operated facilities.

BACKGROUND

Regional Council requested a staff report to explore the option of providing free menstrual products in HRM Facilities as a pilot project. If approved and the one year pilot project is successful, Regional Council could choose to implement this in all HRM operated facilities and 26 community operated facilities including, pools arenas and multi district facilities, stocking them with free menstrual products.

Staff chose sixteen HRM operated facilities for the Pilot Project.

The sixteen facilities are:

Acadia Centre
Bedford Hammonds Plains Community Centre
Beechville Lakeside Timberlea Community Centre
Captain Wm. Spry Community Centre
Chocolate Lake Community Centre
Dartmouth North Community Centre
Findlay Community Centre
George Dixon Centre
Gordon R. Snow Centre
LeBrun Community Centre
Needham Centre
North Preston Community Centre
St. Andrew's Community Centre
Sackville Sports Stadium
Long Track (Emera) Oval
St. Mary's Boat Club

DISCUSSION

Over the last year, British Columbia School Boards, the City of London, and various Universities across Canada have introduced free menstrual products in public washrooms in their facilities. All British Columbia schools will have free menstrual products by the end of 2019. London, Ontario, City Council has recently approved a pilot project introducing the concept in their community centers and arenas. This past year, Halifax Public Libraries have introduced a program in all washrooms, including male. In September 2019, The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development announced that all Nova Scotia schools (grades four and up) will be provided universal access to menstrual products.

Evidence Report provided by Public Health – Attached.

Some key findings from the Public Health report are:

- “A recent survey of over 2000 women and girls by Plan International – Canada found that 35% have had to sacrifice something else in their budget in order to afford menstrual products.”
- “When students who menstruate cannot access menstrual products, it can prevent them from participating in sports or extra-curricular activities. Indeed, 63% of girls and women reported that they have regularly (12%) or occasionally (51%) had to miss out on an activity because they were concerned about the lack of access to menstrual products.”

Recreation and Facilities Management staff can monitor usage throughout the one-year pilot to determine the need and to advise Regional Council the possibility of expanding the program to include all HRM owned recreation centres. Current staff and/or cleaning contractors will fulfill the required tasks. Additional staffing costs are not anticipated.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The estimated costs to implement the Pilot Project from April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021 is \$271,973 for 16 Facilities under Municipal Facilities Maintenance & Operations budget (W211). Each dispenser holds 22 Tampons and 15 pads; we anticipate filling each dispenser once per day. If approved, this will be an added budget expense for the upcoming 2020-21 Operating Budget.

Building	Number of Washrooms/ Dispensers *	Cost to Install/Replace Dispensers in each Washroom (@ \$297.16/unit)	Daily Cost to Fill Units (once per day @ \$8.50/fill)	Annual Cost to Fill Units (once per day x 365 days)	YEAR 1 COST (Dispenser + Supplies)
Acadia Centre	4	\$1,188.64	\$34.00	\$12,410.00	\$13,598.64
Bedford-Hammonds Plains Community Centre	4	\$1,188.64	\$34.00	\$12,410.00	\$13,598.64
Beechville Lakeside Timberlea Community Centre	2	\$594.32	\$17.00	\$6,205.00	\$6,799.32
Captain Spry Community Centre	5	\$1,485.80	\$42.50	\$15,512.50	\$16,998.30
Chocolate Lake	6	\$1,782.96	\$51.00	\$18,615.00	\$20,397.96
Dartmouth North Community Centre	4	\$1,188.64	\$34.00	\$12,410.00	\$13,598.64
Findlay Community Centre	3	\$891.48	\$25.50	\$9,307.50	\$10,198.98
George Dixon	6	\$1,782.96	\$51.00	\$18,615.00	\$20,397.96
Gordon R Snow	5	\$1,485.80	\$42.50	\$15,512.50	\$16,998.30
LeBrun Community Centre	4	\$1,188.64	\$34.00	\$12,410.00	\$13,598.64
Long Track (Emera) Oval	3	\$891.48	\$25.50	\$9,307.50	\$10,198.98
Needham Centre	6	\$1,782.96	\$51.00	\$18,615.00	\$20,397.96
North Preston Community Centre	6	\$1,782.96	\$51.00	\$18,615.00	\$20,397.96
Sackville Sports Stadium	12	\$3,565.92	\$102.00	\$37,230.00	\$40,795.92
St. Andrew's Community Centre **	8	\$2,377.28	\$68.00	\$24,820.00	\$27,197.28
St. Mary's Boat Club	2	\$594.32	\$17.00	\$6,205.00	\$6,799.32
TOTAL	80	\$23,772.80	\$680.00	\$248,200.00	\$271,972.80

* washroom = male, female or gender neutral washroom

** location currently under construction, estimated to reopen Sept 2020; # of washrooms is an estimate

RISK CONSIDERATION

Supply and Demand - Costs could escalate due to higher than projected usage in some facilities.

Control/Monitoring - Difficult to control and monitor usage.

Operating Budgets - Costs for products and dispensers are currently not included in the operating budget for 2019/2020.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Public Health (Division of Capital Health)

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A

ALTERNATIVES

1. Council could choose to implement immediately. Staff due to the projected deficit on the Facilities' operating budget do not recommend this.
2. Council could choose not to provide free menstrual products in HRM operated facilities.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Evidence Report: Menstrual Products in HRM Facilities submitted from the Nova Scotia Health Authority, Public Health Division.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Diane Chisholm, Manager, Municipal Facilities Maintenance & Operations,
Corporate & Customer Services, 902.490.1536



Evidence Report: Menstrual Products in HRM Facilities

Background

On April 30, Halifax Regional Council voted to request a staff report to explore the option of providing free menstrual products in HRM Facilities, including community centres, pools, and arenas, as a pilot project. The purpose of this report is to highlight key health and equity considerations associated with providing freely accessible menstrual products, and provide support for this initiative.

Key considerations

Diversity & Inclusion

In providing freely accessible menstrual products, it is important to recognize that transgender and non-binary people also experience menstruation, and should be considered in this initiative. One can look to recent news of Halifax Libraries offering free menstrual products in *every* bathroom as an example to emulate. If HRM does decide to stock all washrooms with free menstrual products, it will be important to also consider installing appropriate disposal receptacles in bathrooms that do not already provide them (i.e. men's washrooms).

Relatedly, it is essential to ensure the language used in describing this initiative is inclusive. We encourage HRM to use the term "people who menstruate" as a descriptor for the target population, rather than "women" or "girls"ⁱ. However, much of the available research has been conducted with women and girls, so the language used in this report to describe this evidence will refer to those research participants when applicable.

Accessibility & Affordability

Poverty is an ongoing issue in Nova Scotia, and a key determinant of health. Statistics Canada data released earlier this year indicates that Nova Scotia is the only province in which child poverty has increased between 2015 and 2017, to its current rate of 17.1%ⁱⁱ. Increasingly, "period poverty" – defined here as inadequate access to affordable menstrual hygiene products - is being recognized as a source of inequity among people who menstruate. A recent survey of over 2000 women and girls by Plan International – Canada found that **35% have had to sacrifice something else in their budget in order to afford menstrual products**ⁱⁱⁱ. Recognizing that Nova Scotia has the highest rate of food insecurity in Canada^{iv}, Feed Nova Scotia has said "when people with periods can't afford food, they can't afford other necessities. They likely have to choose between groceries and period products, often putting their children's needs ahead of their own."^v Although increasing availability of menstrual products in public spaces will not solve the problem, it is a step in the right direction and a show of leadership by the Municipality. This initiative aligns with HRM's previous commitment to reducing poverty, as demonstrated by the *Building Poverty Solutions* report developed in collaboration with United Way Halifax and approved by Council in January 2018.

The aforementioned Plan International study found that **over 80% of participants supported making menstrual products free in public spaces**^{vi}. This is reflected in a growing movement across the country, toward providing free menstrual products in workplaces, schools, and public spaces. Municipal examples can be found in London, Ontario and Victoria, B.C., and we would encourage municipal staff to reach out to these exemplar municipalities to gain insight into their process and lessons learned.

Health & Social Impact

Freely accessible menstrual products have positive implications for mental and physical health, as well as participation in school and community activities. Research demonstrates that lack of access to menstrual hygiene products may put people who menstruate at greater risk of mental health issues. In one survey, **nearly two-thirds of people who experienced period poverty said they lack confidence because of bullies at school and 39 percent reported experiencing anxiety and depression**^{vii}. Period poverty can also have serious implications for physical health. People who cannot afford menstrual products have been found to use rags or toilet paper, and to prolong use of pads and tampons, all of which can result in increased risk of infection or toxic shock syndrome^{viii}.

In addition to the mental and physical health impacts, period poverty can affect participation in community opportunities. When students who menstruate cannot access menstrual products, it can prevent them from participating in sports or extracurricular activities. Indeed, **63% of girls and women reported that they have regularly (12%) or occasionally (51%) had to miss out on an activity because they were concerned about a lack of access to menstrual products**^{ix}. This is especially relevant to the proposed pilot, as increasing access to affordable products in recreation settings will support all genders' equal participation in sport and recreation. Period poverty also has effects on education; according to a 2018 study, **one in seven girls in Canada have either left school early or missed school entirely because they did not have what they needed to manage their periods**^x.

Stigma

Despite the fact that menstruation is a normal experience, it remains a widely stigmatized issue, leading many people who menstruate to feel embarrassed or ashamed. The 2019 Plan International Canada study revealed that despite growing public conversation about menstrual products and menstruation, social stigmas strongly persist. **Almost half (41 per cent) of female respondents have been teased about being on their period**, including by friends, colleagues and relatives^{xi}. Providing universal access to menstrual products in HRM facilities – just as we do with toilet paper and soap – helps normalize these products as everyday hygiene items, thereby reducing the associated stigma.

Recommendations

Based on the aforementioned evidence, **Public Health strongly supports the proposed pilot**, and recommends the following be taken into consideration:

- *Providing free menstrual products in public washrooms for all genders, as demonstrated by Halifax Public Libraries*
- *Ensuring inclusive language when discussing menstrual equity (e.g. “people who menstruate”)*

As always, Public Health CZ is pleased to support the Municipality on endeavors of mutual interest which improve the health and well-being of Halifax residents.

ⁱ Bell, Jen. (2017, April 26). Talking about periods beyond gender. *Clue*. Retrieved from <https://helloclue.com/articles/cycle-a-z/talking-about-periods-beyond-gender>

ⁱⁱ Cited in Nova Scotia Finance & Treasury Board. (2019, February 26). *Canadian Income Survey*. Retrieved from https://novascotia.ca/finance/statistics/topic_news.asp?id=14591&fto=24x&rdval=2019-02

- ⁱⁱⁱ Plan International. (2019). Female and male views on menstruation in Canada. Retrieved from: <https://plancanada.ca/file/downloads/Plan-International-Canada---Female-and-male-views-on-menstruation---May-2019.pdf>.
- ^{iv} Sriram, U., & Tarasuk, V. (2015). Changes in household food insecurity rates in Canadian metropolitan areas from 2007 to 2012. *Canadian Journal of Public Health, 106*(5), 322-327. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.17269/cjph.106.4893>
- ^v Feed Nova Scotia. (2018, October 12). Dignity. Period. Retrieved from <https://www.feednovascotia.ca/blog/dignity-period>
- ^{vi} Plan International. (2019). Female and male views on menstruation in Canada. See above link.
- ^{vii} Cited in Ellsworthy, E. (2018, July 18). Lack of access to sanitary products has long-reaching effects on women's lives. *SWNS Digital*. Retrieved from <https://www.swnsdigital.com/2018/07/researchers-find-lack-of-access-to-sanitary-products-has-long-reaching-effects-on-young-womens-lives/>
- ^{viii} House, S., Mahon, T., & Cavill, S. (2012). Menstrual hygiene matters: A resource for improving menstrual hygiene around the world. Retrieved from http://www.susana.org/_resources/documents/default/3-2210-21-1426498269.pdf
- ^{ix} Plan International. (2019). Female and male views on menstruation in Canada. See above link.
- ^x Procter & Gamble. (2018). Always Confidence & Puberty Study. Retrieved from <https://www.pgeveryday.ca/wellness/family-health/always-helps-end-period-poverty>
- ^{xi} Plan International. (2019). Female and male views on menstruation in Canada. See above link.