

A Visible Force for Change



**Women's Resource and Development Agency
Response to PMB on Period Poverty
Issued by Pat Catney MLA
January 2021**

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Registered Charity No. NIC100149

WRDA is a registered company limited by guarantee in Northern Ireland (NI22541)

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Introduction:

The Women's Resource and Development Agency ([WRDA](#)) is a membership organisation that supports women's groups and networks across Northern Ireland. Our members are a key part of WRDA, they keep us relevant and ensure we are working on the issues which really matter to grass roots women. We keep our members up to date with the latest developments in the wider women's sector and provide them with opportunities to publicise their own work.

We also act as an information hub for the women's sector, while also striving to raise the profile of women's issues in the wider media. WRDA carries out regular policy work and lobbies decision makers on behalf of women. We work to enhance how the women's sector and women on the ground are communicating with all levels of government, ensuring women have their rightful say in the policies affecting them, including the development of measures to tackle period poverty

As part of our vision to make women a visible force for change in Northern Ireland, we are actively lobbying and campaigning on issues that affect women. Despite almost 50 years of equality legislation, women continue to face many barriers, we are disadvantaged in economic, political and social life and we are not adequately protected from gender-based violence and misogyny.

We work with politicians, policy makers and influencers to advocate for law and policy that promotes women's rights and equality and for services that meet women's needs. We take a participative, grassroots approach to this work – all women have the right to be involved in decision-making and we aim to amplify the voices of the women who engage with the women's sector. WRDA are also the lead partner in the [Raise Your Voice](#) campaign against sexual harassment. We also work on a range of initiatives relating to health, including breast, cervical and bowel screening awareness and the Maternal Advocacy and Support project.

WRDA is submitting a response to consultation on your Private Member Bill on Period Poverty Paid as we have supported campaigns to tackle period poverty for several years. We work with women's organisations, LGBT+ organisations, trade unions, the human rights sector, individual women and the broader voluntary and community sector to ensure that women are a visible force for change.

We also provide the secretariat for the [Women's Policy Group](#) which is a platform for women working in policy and advocacy roles in different organisations to share their work and speak with a collective voice on key issues. WRDA were heavily involved in the development of the [WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan](#), which was launched in July 2020 and provided a comprehensive overview of the economic, social and health impacts of the pandemic on women in Northern Ireland and their civil, political, economic and social human rights. WRDA were also involved in the development of the WPG [General Election Women's Manifesto in 2019](#). In both of these publications, we advocated for the urgent implementation of adequate legislation to address the disproportionate impact of austerity

and poverty on women in Northern Ireland. We will, therefore, be submitting both a WRDA response and a Women's Policy Group response to this survey.

WRDA is also one of the seven established women's sector organisations in the [Women's Regional Consortium](#) (WRC). The WRC is committed to working in partnership with each other, government, statutory organisations and women's organisations, centres and groups in disadvantaged and rural areas, to ensure that organisations working for women are given the best possible support in the work they do in tackling disadvantage and social inclusion. We would, therefore, like to endorse the response from WRC to this survey.

Any questions or queries relating to these responses or endorsements can be directed to Rachel Powell, Women's Sector Lobbyist, rachel.powell@wrda.net.

Both Rachel Powell, Women's Sector Lobbyist, and Elaine Crory, Good Relations Coordinator, are WRDA staff members on the Women's Policy Group NI and are both heavily involved in writing both WRDA and Women's Policy Group NI publications, briefings and consultation responses. Therefore, WRDA would like to fully endorse the Women's Policy Group response as it is fully in line with the response WRDA would like to provide as an individual organisation.

WRDA: Putting Women at the Heart of Public Consultations:

In the current political climate, there has been unprecedented numbers of public consultations, surveys to support private members bills and calls for evidence submissions to a range of committees in relation to various forms of legislation. The Women's Sector has faced funding challenges for many years, alongside additional challenges in working to support women throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. WRDA produced a guide for public authorities on 'Putting Women at the Heart of Public Consultations', and we would like to take this opportunity to share this resource again.

Women in Northern Ireland have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; financially, socially and in terms of health. It is crucial that legislative processes on issues relating to women are accessible and open, as women's lived experience is crucial to tackling gender-based violence.

The full guidelines can be read [here](#).

General Comments:

Disclaimer: Whilst period poverty is a gendered issue that predominately impacts cis women and girls, it is important to note that not all women and girls menstruate, and that trans men and non-binary people are also impacted by period poverty and need access to people products. WRDA is a trans inclusive organisation, and we work to represent the needs of all women. This response will focus on the existing research on the specific and predominant impact period poverty has on cis women and girls, while also making recommendations for a trans inclusive approach to tackling this issue.

i. Poverty and Stigma Surrounding Periods

A period is a natural and biological function for women and girls and many trans men and non-binary people. Despite the fact that periods are a natural bodily function that cannot be controlled, they continue to be a taboo subject with high levels of stigma attached and are rarely discussed nor given the attention they need. On this island, this is evident in the recent backlash and decision to ban an advertisement for Tampax tampons in July 2020, which explained how to properly insert tampons¹. The advert received 84 complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland (ASAI) for being “crude”, “vulgar”, “disgusting”, “offensive” and allegedly “unsuitable for children” and was subsequently banned, despite the fact it simply emphasised the need to properly insert tampons for them to be effective.

Due to the levels of stigma around periods, this further prevents necessary discussion around the barriers in accessing products, including unaffordability and the social implications this creates in the everyday lives of those who struggle to access period products. This stigma around periods and the barriers attached to accessing period products can further exacerbate gender inequalities that are prevalent in Northern Ireland.

Period poverty references the lack of access to period products due to financial constraints. Therefore, those impacted by period poverty are those who need period products and are unable to afford them. The reasons for this can include low income, homelessness, abuse, health conditions which make periods more painful/heavy or because they have no income of their own. An average period lasts around five days and can cost about £8 per month for tampons and pads, with some being unable to afford this cost. As a result, some women and girls are forced to use alternatives such as toilet roll, socks or even newspapers as they are unable to afford the sanitary products they need. Furthermore, some may need to avoid educational, work or recreational activities altogether due to the lack of products. This is clearly not acceptable and is detrimental to daily functions, in particular, impacting the ability to learn, work, concentrate and participate in everyday life.

These issues are worsened significantly for those with conditions such as endometriosis. Endometriosis is a condition that affects 1 in 10 women with symptoms of pain and heavy periods and costs the UK economy £8.2 bn a year in treatment costs healthcare and loss of work². The average diagnosis time from first experiencing symptoms and receiving a diagnosis is 7.5 years, this is compounded by societal stigma around periods as well as a lack of awareness and effective treatment. Many women and girls suffer in silence for many years with bleeding that is difficult to control. There is no doubt that the consequence is increased costs impacting on the extent of period poverty experienced with missed days from school

¹ O'Connor, R. (2020), “Demeaning’ and ‘Offensive’ tampon ad banned in Ireland after 84 complaints’, *The Irish Post*, (available online): <https://www.irishpost.com/news/demeaning-and-offensive-tampon-ad-banned-in-ireland-after-84-complaints-190042>

² See more: Endometriosis UK: <https://www.endometriosis-uk.org/get-support>

and work, damage to clothes, fear of leaking and increased expense with sanitary products. If the stigma and expense was eliminated it would not only reduce expense and period poverty but bringing the topic of periods into the public domain could increase endometriosis diagnosis and enable women to control symptoms more effectively.

For schoolgirls in particular, this can have an extremely detrimental impact on their wellbeing, ability to study or concentrate as they are worried about the lack of products and how to afford them. Access to these products is essential to the health and wellbeing of women and girls across the world. In addition, trans people can also face particular stigma in purchasing period products, especially for trans children who may be “outed” or “clocked” as trans when purchasing them in shops.

If we really want to tackle stigma around periods then sanitary products should be made visible, accessible in communal places with posters, information about provision. For too long, we have been indoctrinated to hide our tampons/pads as they are seen as a source of embarrassment. We don't need to conceal this as there is no need to hide the natural process of a period cycle. If we continue to whisper about periods and sanitary products then we add to a sense of unnecessary shame and stigma.

ii. Measures Taken Elsewhere – Scotland

In November 2020, Scotland became the first country in the world to make it a legal right to have access to period products³. This Member’s Bill, introduced by Monica Lennon MSP, requires that under the Bill:

- The Scottish Government must set up a Scotland-wide scheme to allow anyone who needs period products to get them free of charge,
- Schools, colleges and universities must make a range of products available for free, in their toilets,
- The Scottish Government will have the power to make other public bodies provide period products for free.

Within the Bill, it was recognised that period poverty can have a detrimental effect on the health and wellbeing of women, girls and trans people⁴. In particular, this Bill recognised that:

“Scottish Government statistics illustrate that, since the recession of 2008, relative poverty levels in Scotland have been slowly rising, with figures demonstrating that after housing costs, 19% of Scotland’s population, or 1 million people each year, were living in poverty in 2014- 17.

The effect of this is evidenced in figures from the Trussell Trust which show that food bank use in Scotland is rising at a rapid pace, with 170,625 emergency supply parcels handed out in 2017-18 compared to 14,332 in 2012-13.² Many are finding it difficult to afford basic necessities, including period products.

³ The Scottish Parliament (2020), Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill.

⁴ The Scottish Parliament (2020), Period Products (Free Provision) Policy Memorandum: <https://beta.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/current-bills/period-products-free-provision-scotland-bill/introduced/policy-memorandum-period-products-scotland-bill.pdf>

Further Trussell Trust research shows that, in addition to food parcels, there is significant demand from users for other essential items, including period products.

Using period products for longer periods of time than is recommended or using unsuitable alternatives can lead to infections and health issues. Additionally, women, girls and trans people may feel they have no choice but to miss out on educational activities, work or recreation due to not having appropriate products.

The impacts of period poverty can be exacerbated where there are period-related health issues, such as endometriosis or polycystic ovary syndrome which can mean heavier or irregular periods and, as a result, an increased number of products might be needed each month.

Where people do not have access to their own income, they may struggle to access period products – for example, if a partner withholds money for products or if a young person is embarrassed to ask a parent or carer or is worried about the impact on the household budget and does not feel that they can ask for them⁵.

iii. The Gendered Nature of Poverty

Similar to Scotland, poverty rates have also been steadily increasing in Northern Ireland after a decade of harsh austerity and cuts, that have disproportionately impacted women. This has been compounded by the disproportionate economic impact of COVID-19 on women. The Women's Sector in Northern Ireland have completed several extremely comprehensive pieces of research and publications on the issue of poverty in Northern Ireland and the disproportionate impact on women. For instance:

- Women's Regional Consortium Research on Ongoing Austerity and the Impact on Women in Northern Ireland – available [here](#).
- Women's Regional Consortium Research on the Impact of Universal Credit and the Impact on Women – available [here](#).
- Women's Policy Group NI COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan – available [here](#).
- NIRWN Publication on Poverty and the Economy – available [here](#).

It is particularly important to note that women have been the hardest hit by austerity, with 86% of tax revenue savings by the HMRC in the decade following the financial crash came from women⁶. The economic impact of COVID-19 on women has also been comprehensively covered in the WPG Feminist Recovery Plan, as many families are struggling due to furlough, redundancies, increased food poverty and more. Women have been disproportionately impacted by all of these economic factors, with lone parents (91% women in NI) and disabled people the worst hit by austerity measures. Women face much greater financial insecurity than men in Northern Ireland, with women undertaking the vast majority of low-paid, part-time, insecure and precarious work. Much greater work is needed to address the disproportionate impact of economic crises in Northern Ireland; however, it is welcome that steps are being taken to begin addressing the impact poverty has on accessing period products.

⁵ *ibid*, pp.2-3.

⁶ See WRC Research on 'Ongoing Austerity and the Impact on Women', p.18.

Further, trans people are also disproportionately impacted by rates of homelessness and poverty which can exacerbate the barriers in accessing period products, which should be recognised in the aims of creating a meaningfully inclusive strategy to address period poverty.

iv. UK Government Actions and the ‘Tampon Tax’

Most of the UK Government’s action in relation to period products deals with the so-called ‘tampon tax’, which is the Value Added Tax rate on period products in the UK. Since 2001, the UK government had a VAT rate of 5% on period products, which was the lowest in the EU. From 2018-2020, the revenue raised from this VAT was allocated to a ‘Tampon Tax Fund’ in which the money raised through VAT on period products was used to provide funding to women’s organisations and charities⁷. Despite the 5% VAT being applicable in Northern Ireland, it is important to note that no women’s organisations in Northern Ireland benefited from this fund.

It is welcome that this 5% tax was abolished on 1st January 2021, however, much more action is needed to address period poverty in Northern Ireland. Whilst Scotland was the first country in the world to make period products free for all, it is worth noting that England and Wales also introduced funding to provide free period products in school and colleges; which left Northern Ireland as the only place in the UK without free products in schools. We welcome the news that Education Minister Peter Weir announced a pilot programme for free period products in primary and secondary schools lasting three years starting in the 2021/22 academic year⁸. This is a positive announcement following years of campaigning on the issue, particularly as this will be supported by curriculum materials and communications on this scheme, which will hopefully address some of the stigma surrounding period products in schools.

However, much more is needed to tackle period poverty in Northern Ireland. In particular, this scheme is only available to schools with female learners and there needs to be broader access to free period products for trans people and those experiencing period poverty outside of schools. It would be preferable for a Bill similar to the Period Products (Free Provision) Bill in Scotland to be introduced in Northern Ireland instead as a matter of urgency to address the broader nature of the problem of period poverty.

v. Trans Inclusion:

As stated throughout this response, we welcome the opportunity to respond to the proposal for a Bill to ensure free access to sanitary products, including in schools, colleges and universities. Period poverty is a gendered issue and can create financial and wellbeing challenges for women, girls, trans men and non-binary people seriously impacting on their ability to participate in society and reach their full potential.

WRDA is a [trans inclusive](#) organisation, and we would like to stress the importance of ensuring that this proposed Bill is inclusive of the needs of not only cis women and girls, but also trans men and non-binary people, in a manner that tackles the stigma and barriers of all

⁷ UK Government (2018), ‘Women and girls set to benefit from £15 million Tampon Tax Fund’, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/women-and-girls-set-to-benefit-from-15-million-tampon-tax-fund>

⁸ Northern Ireland Executive (December 2020), ‘Weir outlines plans to end period poverty in schools’, <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/node/48647#:~:text=Education%20Minister%2C%20Peter%20Weir%20has,the%202021%2F22%20academic%20year.>

who menstruate and face period poverty. It is also important to note that while the issue of period poverty predominately impacts cis women and girls, not all those who have periods are women and girls. For instance, many trans men and non-binary people also menstruate, whilst trans women do not. It is important that any Bill that is developed is inclusive from the outset and does not create further barriers for trans and non-binary people in accessing period products.

When deciding where free period products will be available, it is important to consider if they are accessible to all. For instance, will a trans boy in an all-boys school be able to access these products? Will these products only be available in girls' bathrooms in mixed gender schools? Will students or workers have to ask members of staff (and subsequently "out" themselves) for access to products? These are all important factors to consider in making period products free and accessible, so that all who need these products can readily access them.

We recommend that the development of this Bill is done through an approach of co-design with women's organisations and organisations such as Transgender NI, who are experts in inclusive language and appropriate measures to ensure accessibility of period products.

vi. Existing Period Poverty Research

There is a wealth of research available on period poverty that highlights the impact it has. For instance, Plan International UK research on period poverty and stigma amongst 1,000 girls and young women aged 14-21 found that⁹:

- One in ten girls (10%) said that there had been unable to afford sanitary wear,
- One in seven girls (15%) said that they had struggled to afford it,
- One in five girls (19%) have changed to a less suitable sanitary product due to cost,
- More than one in ten girls (12%) has had to improvise sanitary wear due to affordability issues.

Plan International UK also provide further statistics on taboo and stigma surrounding periods and menstruation:

- Nearly half (48%) of girls aged 14-21 in the UK are embarrassed by their periods,
- One in seven (14%) girls admitted that they did not know what was happening when they started their period and more than a quarter (26%) reporting that they did not know what to do when they started their period,
- Only one in five (22%) girls feel comfortable discussing their period with their teacher,
- Almost three quarters (71%) of girls admitted that they have felt embarrassed buying sanitary products,
- One in ten had been asked not to talk about their periods in front of their mother (12%) or father (11%),
- 49% of girls have missed an entire day of school because of their period, of which 59% have made up a lie or an alternate excuse,
- 64% of girls have missed a PE or sport lesson because of their period, of which 52% of girls have made up a lie or excuse.

⁹ Plan International UK (2017), 'Plan International UK's Research on Period Poverty and Stigma', (available online): <https://plan-uk.org/media-centre/plan-international-uks-research-on-period-poverty-and-stigma>

It is clear that the unaffordability of period products is an issue alongside the deep stigma surrounding periods. Both issues must be addressed simultaneously when addressing period poverty; through providing free period products to all who need them alongside an educational programme to tackle taboos and stigma around periods.

Locally, the [Homeless Period Belfast](#) have been extensively campaigning on the issue of period poverty for several years and recently delivered a petition with over 5,000 signatures to the Department of Education and NI Executive calling for free products in NI schools¹⁰. In their research of 200 school students, the Homeless Period found that:

- 74% had to leave a lesson, school or miss a day entirely due to lack of access to period products,
- 53% had to ask their teacher for period products due to not having any themselves,
- 87% said that a lack of access to period products had negatively impacted their attention in class and/or school attendance,
- 91% had to use toilet roll as a temporary measure at school,
- 89% stated that a lack of access to period products has affected their mental and emotional wellbeing.

In additional research surveying 100 teachers across Northern Ireland, the Homeless Period Belfast found that:

- 84% said that they have witnessed how the ongoing pandemic has exacerbated the need for period products in schools,
- 60% of teachers have had to buy period products out of their own wages.

They asked teachers who had used their own money to stock period products in their classrooms how they felt about this and were told:

'It made me realise that families are really struggling to buy basic products for their daughters.'

They also asked students how access to free period products in toilets would impact their experience at school and found that:

'I wouldn't miss as much class time and I would feel a lot happier knowing the products are in toilets, so I don't have to feel embarrassed approaching the school nurse or my teachers.'

Finally, they received the following testimony from a 15-year old girl:

'I dread getting my period in school. I have to make up that I am sick so I can go home because I'm too embarrassed to tell my friends that I don't have any money for pads and I can't ask my mummy because she's just lost her job and she's already struggling to do a food shop for me and my younger brother. I use toilet roll instead and I'd much rather use that at home and risk leaking in my own house than in school where everyone could see.'

WRDA supports the aims of the Homeless Period Belfast to fully eradicate period poverty. In doing this, it is necessary to consider the needs of all who need access to

¹⁰ Uplift.ie, (2020) 'Free Period Products in NI Schools #MenstruationMatters' Petition: https://my.uplift.ie/petitions/free-period-products-in-ni-schools-menstruationmatters?fbclid=IwAR3tHEzT4Xmn01jSGeM_NwAI_K7-EjB-ddHlKhzdJpoanXPPqmh_UzwOCUo

essential period products. In the creation of any Bill to tackle period poverty, we would call for an accessible approach that benefits everyone that needs access to period products.

vii. COVID-19 and Period Poverty

WRDA have been extensively involved in highlighting the disproportionate economic impact of COVID-19 on women and marginalised groups in Northern Ireland, as highlighted comprehensively in the WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan. In the context of period poverty, additional research from Plan International UK found that period poverty is an issue that has also been exacerbated due to the pandemic, as schools and youth centres were forced to close, many could no longer avail of free period products that had been made available in Great Britain¹¹. Although these measures taken across GB were never implemented in Northern Ireland, this research shows the need to address period poverty beyond the implementation of free period products in schools with female learners.

This research found that during the initial lockdown due to COVID-19:

- 30% of girls aged 14-21 have had issues either affording or accessing sanitary wear in lockdown,
- Over half (54%) of these girls used toilet paper as an alternative to period products,
- However, one in five (20%) also said that their periods have been harder to manage due to the lack of toilet roll available,

Of the 17% of girls who said they were unable or struggled to afford period products in lockdown:

- Over a third (37%) did not try to access any free sources of products,
- Two fifths (42%) of those said they did not know where to go to get them,
- A third (30%) felt too embarrassed to seek out a source of free products,
- 30% did not know who to ask.

The necessary lockdown measures across the UK also created problems in accessing period products for those who could afford them, as this research found that 22% of girls struggled to access products (but could afford them). Of these:

- 64% said they could not find them in their local shops,
- 17% said they feared catching coronavirus if they left the house,
- 15% have been unable to leave the house to go shopping during lockdown.

In addition to this research, the Homeless Period Belfast experiences three times the usual demand for their packs in 2020 than they had in previous years.

This is clearly an issue that will have been exacerbated for those with caring responsibilities (64% of carers in NI are women); single parents (91% of whom are women); key workers (79% of HSC staff in NI are women) and disabled or high risk people who were shielding. Women are also disproportionately represented in sectors that have been hardest hit by the pandemic, such as retail, hospitality and travel, and whilst gender-disaggregated data on redundancies is not recorded in Northern Ireland, redundancies have increased by over 74%

¹¹ Plan International UK (May 2020), '3 in 10 girls struggle to afford access to sanitary wear during lockdown', <https://plan-uk.org/period-poverty-in-lockdown#:~:text=New%20research%20from%20Plan%20International%20UK%20reveals%20true,by%20global%20children%E2%80%99s%20charity%20Plan%20International%20UK%20reveal>

in Northern Ireland in 2020¹² and around 133,000 more women were furloughed than men across the UK in the first wave of the pandemic¹³. This shows just some of the increased financial constraints facing women in Northern Ireland and the likelihood that many more will struggle to afford period products. COVID-19 has clearly exacerbated the already prevalent problem of period poverty in the UK, and although Northern Ireland never implemented free products in schools, the experiences in GB show the need for a Bill to tackle period poverty that looks beyond schools in order to make period products accessible for everyone that needs them.

Questions:

Section 1 – About You

1. Are you responding as:

- An individual

- On behalf of an organisation – in which case go to Q3

3. Please select a category which best describes your organisation (If you are responding as an individual, please go to section two)

- Public sector body (NI/UK Government or local authority)

- School, college or university

- A commercial organisation (company, business)

- Representative organisation (trade union, professional association)

- Third sector (charitable, campaigning, social enterprise, voluntary, non-profit)

- Other (e.g. club's local groups, groups of individuals, etc.)

¹² NISRA (2020) Northern Ireland Labour Market Report:

<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/labour-market-report-december-2020.pdf>

¹³ Women's Budget Group UK (November 2020), 'HMRC data prompts concern of the 'gender furlough gap'', (available online): [https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/uk-policy-briefings/hmrc-data-prompts-concern-of-gender-furlough-gap/#:~:text=Key%20statistics%3A&text=Women%20were%20the%20majority%20\(52.1,than%20men%20across%20the%20UK.](https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/uk-policy-briefings/hmrc-data-prompts-concern-of-gender-furlough-gap/#:~:text=Key%20statistics%3A&text=Women%20were%20the%20majority%20(52.1,than%20men%20across%20the%20UK.)

4. Please choose one of the following: (Any data collected will only be used for the purpose of this consultation and will not be held when it is over).

- I am content for this response to be attributed to me or my organisation
- I would like this response to be anonymous (the response may be published, but no name)
- I would like this response to be confidential (no part of the response will be published)

Please provide the name of the organisation as you wish it to be published:

Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)

5. 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)

**Rachel Powell
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Section 2 - Your View on the Proposal

6. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill?

- Supportive
- Neutral (neither support nor oppose)
- Opposed

7. Do you believe that sanitary products should be free for those who need them?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

8. Do you agree that there should be a specific obligation on schools, colleges and universities to make sanitary products available for free?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

9. Would you support a universal sanitary proposal that would ensure that those in need of sanitary products are given them?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

10. Which best expresses your view concerning a free universal provision of sanitary products?

- Free products available to anyone
- Limited use of the system (e.g. limiting the number of products that may be claimed each month)
- Available only to those on low incomes or in receipt of benefits
- There is no need for a universal scheme

11. Do you have a view on which locations would be most suitable for dispensing free sanitary products?

- GP surgeries
- Health centres
- Community hubs
- Women's Refuges
- Homeless shelters
- Libraries

All of the above

Other (please specify):

All of the above. In addition, other locations should also be included such as Women's Organisations and Charities, Women's Centres, Sure Start Offices, Foodbanks, Migrant Organisations, LGBTQ+ organisations and Charities/Organisations that work directly with those on low incomes and in poverty.

12. Where will the Bill have the biggest positive impact?

- Equality of women and girls
- Relieving pressure on the NHS
- Schools (e.g. attendance rates)
- Workplaces (e.g. less women taking time off)
- Reducing the stigma of periods and period poverty
- All of the above

13. Do you think the coronavirus pandemic has made period products harder to access?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Yes – the disproportionate economic, health and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women was outlined in detail in the general comments at the beginning of this response. We have also referenced research from local and UK organisations that highlight the increased barriers to accessing period products and the increased financial constraints facing many. In addition, with restrictions in place, this has increased difficulties for people to access and purchase shopping, including shopping for period products. Poverty and austerity disproportionately impacts women and other marginalised groups in Northern Ireland, and women, disabled people, lone parents, low income families, LGBTQ+ people, migrants and more are in particularly vulnerable economic positions during this pandemic following ten years of harsh austerity.

14. Would you support a delivery scheme for those unable to leave their home (e.g. isolating, disability, etc.)

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

This should include help carers of those who are isolating, disabled and shielding which makes them unable to leave their home. Of the 220,000 carers in Northern Ireland, 64% are women¹⁴.

15. Do you think local councils should be involved in the management and distribution of sanitary products?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Questions 16 – 21 – Not applicable as this is a response on behalf of an organisation.

General

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

In developing this Bill and the proposals around it the NI Assembly should take a co-design approach and work with women's sector organisations, LGBTQ+ organisations such as Transgender NI, campaign groups already working on the issue such as Homeless Period Belfast, schools, councils, local authorities and those impacted by period poverty to ensure that the proposals effectively meet the needs of those who need to use period products in Northern Ireland.

23. If you do not agree with the proposed Bill can you provide an alternative that would address the issue of period poverty?

¹⁴ Carers NI (2011), 'Fact and Figures', (available online)
<https://www.carersuk.org/northernireland/news-ni/facts-and-figures>

N/A

ENDS