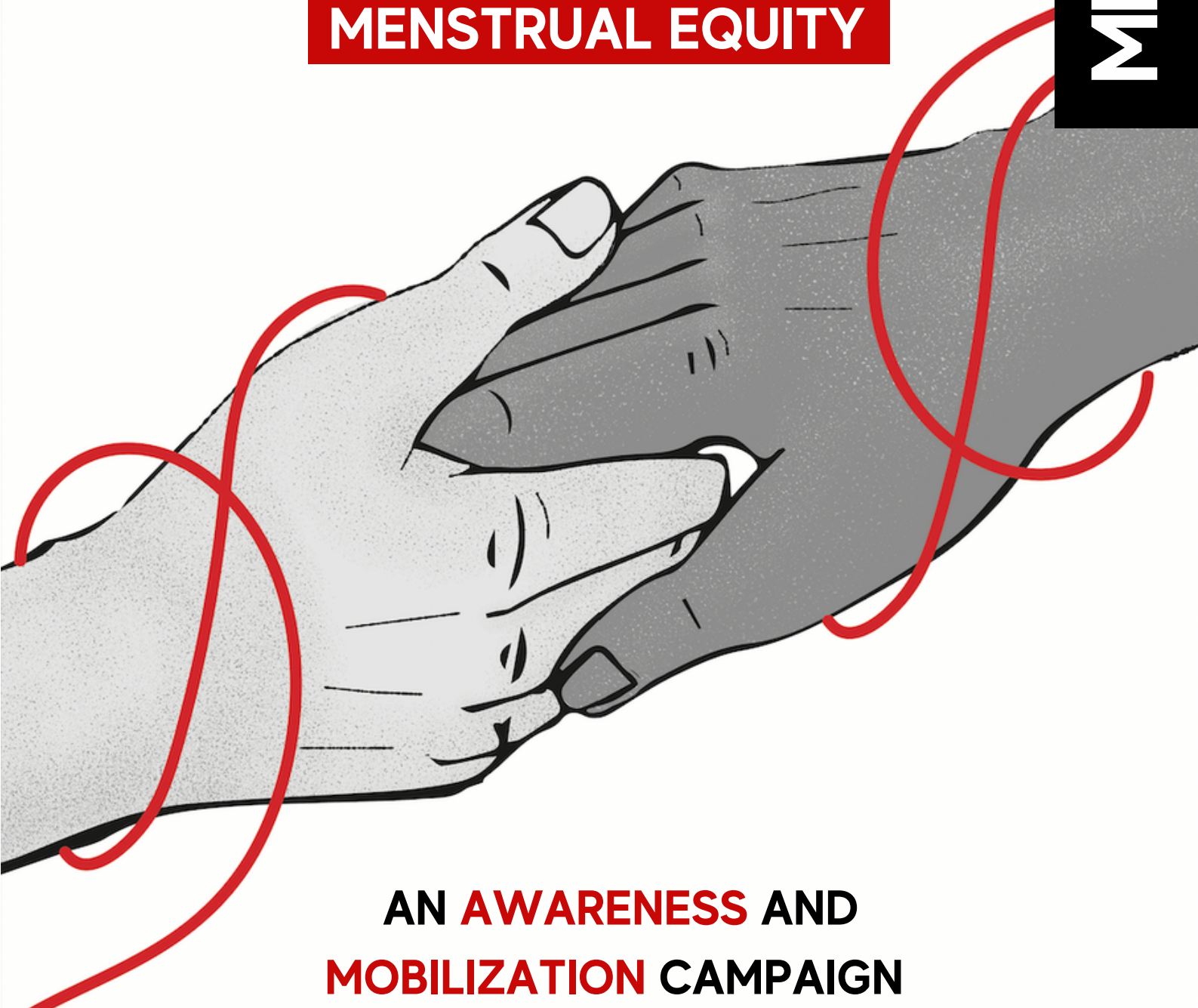




TOGETHER TOWARDS

**MENSTRUAL EQUITY**

**MEDIA KIT**



**AN AWARENESS AND  
MOBILIZATION CAMPAIGN**

by **Women's Health Action** (RQASF)



funded by



Femmes et Égalité  
des genres Canada

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Canada

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# RQASF



Women's Health Action (Réseau québécois d'action pour la santé des femmes) is a multidisciplinary organization whose mission is to **defend the rights and interests of women, and to support them in the recognition of their knowledge and the management of their health.** All this work of producing and disseminating independent information, awareness and prevention is done according to **the global and feminist approach to health.**

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## Le Fil Rouge



Le **Fil Rouge campaign** (The Red Thread campaign) (2021-2024), funded by **Women and Gender Equality Canada**, is dedicated to raising awareness for and mobilizing around menstrual health and equity. It is supported by its patron, **actress Catherine Brunet**, as well as by **its partners** **Groupe d'éducation-santé du Québec (GESQ), Monthly Dignity, Food Banks of Quebec, Moisson Rive-Sud and Öko Créations.**

# Catherine Brunet

actress and honorary patroness of Le Fil Rouge



**"How can we break the taboos surrounding period poverty? By informing yourself and talking about it as much as possible. This is the only way to move towards menstrual equity together !"**

Photo: Camille Tellier

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# Menstruation on a life-long scale

**13**

average age of menarche (first menstruation) in Canada

**52**

average age of menopause in Canada

**28 days**

average menstrual cycle length

**For 38 years or 480 times in a lifetime**

average timeframe during which menstruating people will need menstrual products, in order to live in health and dignity

**Between 10,000 and 15,000**

amount of disposable menstrual products used

**\$6 000**

total average lifetime cost of menstrual products

# Period poverty

Period poverty is the **difficulty of access to menstrual products\***, whether on a **regular or occasional basis**, due to a lack of financial means. In addition to these essential products, there is the cost of **other needs related to menstruation** such as painkillers, stained underwear and sheets that need replacing, or consultations with conventional and / or alternative medicine.

Period poverty also exists when people have **no place to change, no access to information about their cycle, and no space to talk about it.**

# Menstrual equity

Menstrual equity is **free and safe access to menstrual products**, whenever and wherever you need them, **to reduce gender inequities, ensure menstrual health and dignity for all menstruators\*\*.**

**Worldwide, 500 million people cannot afford menstrual products.**

\* Disposable or washable pads, tampons, menstrual underwear, menstrual cups. We prefer to avoid the terms "protection" and "hygienic", which imply that menstruation is "dirty".

\*\* Cisgender women, trans men, non-binary, gender fluid and menstruating intersex people

# Menstrual taboos

The natural and positive phenomenon of menstruation (it is the 5th vital sign!) often takes the form of myths presenting menstruation as dirty or even evil. **This negative view of menstruation has generated many false beliefs as well as persistent shame and taboos.**

How can we live with this phenomenon and not consider it with a certain contempt, since it has been internalized for centuries as harmful? Is it viewed positively only when it is related to fertility and procreation? **There is enough to feed ambivalent feelings about menstruation**, but, fortunately, nothing is set in stone. A real "menstrual revolution" is taking place today around the world: it was time!

**To speak freely about menstruation, whether you are menstruating or not, to become aware of the importance of menstrual health, is to contribute to a major systemic change** by slowly, but surely breaking the double taboo of blood and money that has for a very long time invisibilized **the major issues of equality, dignity and health surrounding period poverty.**

**Two-thirds of Canadian girls and women (66%) have heard insults related to having a period or PMS (premenstrual syndrome).**

**¾ of those who menstruate acknowledged that they felt compelled to hide menstrual health products in public.**

**In Canada, 6 in 10 menstruating people have tried to hide their tampon or pad at work or school and 46% don't feel supported when they have their period.**

[Plan International Canada, Menstruation in Canada - Views and Realities, 2022](#)

# All allies

The myths and taboos surrounding menstruation and the ignorance of the issues related to period poverty generate stigma as well as a lack of involvement and solidarity.

In 2023, it's time for a change and for everyone to become an ally in the fight for menstrual equity.

*Period poverty is not a "feminine" issue: it is a question of human rights and gender equality, which makes it a subject that must be addressed by society as a whole. Men and non-menstruating people must therefore be included in the awareness-raising and mobilization work implemented to rally them to the cause. \**

Here is a short FAQ to debunk some myths and misconceptions.

## Is menstrual blood dirty ?

No, menstrual blood is a mixture of blood, vaginal secretions, and mucosal tissue from the inner lining of the uterus. In addition, **menstruation is a natural phenomenon, a good health indicator**: having a menstrual cycle is essential because the hormones secreted contribute to the proper functioning of the body at multiple levels (cardiovascular and nervous systems, metabolism, bone, and breast health, etc.).

## Can menstrual flow be controlled ?

**Menstruation is unpredictable: it does not happen on a specific date or at a fixed time**, and each menstruating person has their own cycle and menstrual duration. Once started, the discharge from the vagina will last between 3 to 7 days, **without being able to be stopped. It must therefore be managed with respect for their health and dignity.**

\* All texts in italics are from the "Panel on Period Poverty, Best Practices and Recommendations", [available online](#).

## Menstrual products and razors, same situation ?

No. If a man doesn't have a razor, **he can still go to class, go out with his friends and show up for a job interview.** This is not the case, for example, for a woman who has her period and no menstrual products available, either from lack of financial means or products where she is.

However, an analogy can be drawn with **other products considered essential.** Indeed, laws state that toilets must be equipped with soap and paper in order to guarantee the health and dignity of the population. As for masks, they were deemed essential during the COVID-19 pandemic and were therefore massively distributed.

**Shouldn't menstrual products, by virtue of their essential nature, be able to benefit from the same treatment?**

## Phone versus menstrual products ?

We often hear that if a person can afford to have a phone and a phone subscription, they can afford menstrual products. It is worth remembering that nowadays the telephone is an indispensable tool, whether in one's personal or professional life. **Having to choose between two basic needs is a dilemma that no one should have to go through.**

**Knowing someone has their period makes ¼ of Canadian men uncomfortable. Although, more than half of them are ready to have a conversation about menstruation, and 65% feel comfortable purchasing menstrual hygiene products for a family member.**

[Plan International Canada, Menstruation in Canada - Views and Realities, 2022](#)

***It's About Bloody Time***, by **Shed Red**, is a mission-driven card game that seeks to ignite conversations surrounding menstrual health and educate the new generation on the issues of period poverty.

The French version of ***It's About Bloody Time, Bon sang qu'il est temps***, was produced by the organizations **Changing The Flow** and **RQASF**.

**The pack is designed for teenagers but can be used by everyone. It is a real tool for kickstarting uncomfortable conversations about limiting stigma, shame and inequalities experienced by all menstruating people.** Both versions of the game will allow an even wider audience to benefit from this awareness and commit to menstrual equity!



**Find out more [here](#)**

# Should menstrual products be free in Québec?

**Access to menstrual products and information about menstruation is a fundamental human right.**

Menstrual products are **basic needs**, just like toilet paper. They should, therefore, be made available free of charge everywhere, all the time, because **they are essential in managing menstruation, which is experienced by half the population.**

Between menarche and menopause, the cost of menstrual care (menstrual products, underwear and sheets, healthcare providers services, pain medication) is shouldered mainly by menstruating people. **As everyone, who menstruates or not, is born thanks to this faculty of the human body, it is necessary to show solidarity by guaranteeing menstrual equity and, thus, the possibility of living menstruation positively, and that is, with respect for their health and dignity.**

**It is estimated that the average person who menstruates will spend up to \$6,000 in their lifetime on menstrual products.**

[Period Poverty in Canada, NUPGE, 2022](#)

**One-quarter of Canadian women have had to choose between purchasing menstrual products and other essential items such as food or rent.**

[Plan International Canada, The Hidden Cost of Periods, 2023](#)

**Almost 1 in 2 people (48.7%) in Quebec finds menstrual products not affordable.**

[Portrait du vécu des menstruations au Québec, RQASF, 2021](#)

To do this, **a global awareness-raising work must be carried out.** In fact, as long as menstruation is not a known and demystified subject, it will remain difficult to address and make heard the issues surrounding period poverty.

*No program or policy can function without the educational support needed to accompany change. **The destigmatization and demystification of menstruation must go through the education of society.** This concerns the public, decision-makers, policy implementers such as school boards or healthcare providers.*

This awareness will make it possible to provide support to menstruating people, **and in particular to those who are most affected by period poverty:**

- People in difficult economic situations: low income, single parents, immigrants, refugees, homeless, students, people with disabilities
- Indigenous, Black and People of Colour (BIPOC)
- Prisoners
- People belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community

***Not all women menstruate, and not all menstruating people are women.** It is therefore essential not to neglect the diversity of people who live and are affected **by the different issues surrounding menstruation** (for example, trans men, non-binary and menstruating intersex people, incarcerated people, and Indigenous people, to name a few).*

*If menstrual equity is to be achieved, **it is essential to address this issue through an intersectional approach.** It is therefore necessary to bring visibility to this diversity which is not represented in traditional communications and to show the multiplicity of realities and experiences of menstrual poverty.*

In another comparison, the reality of period poverty can be represented by **the dilemma between eating or buying menstrual products. No one should have to make that choice.**

According to the latest Hunger Report of Food Banks of Quebec, **requests for food assistance are exploding throughout the province, with 2.2 million monthly requests**, 20% more than in 2021. This sad situation continues to worsen with current inflation and its impact on the grocery bill.

*The pandemic highlighted the essential character of menstrual products and **the stress of having to sacrifice them in favor of other basic needs** (food, rent, etc.). It also helped to realize that it is necessary to be ready to deal with situations of restricted access to products such as quarantine, isolation, stockouts and supply chain disruptions, etc. This awareness must therefore lead **to the implementation of new policies and programs (accessibility of sustainable menstrual products for example).***

**12 to 34% of the surveyed Quebecers would have had either to choose between buying menstrual products and other essential products or sacrificing other expenses to be able to afford these products.**

Faciliter l'accès aux produits menstruels : mesures possibles, Conseil du statut de la femme, 2021

**Menstrual products can cost up to twice as much in rural or remote areas as in large cities.**

**\* In Indigenous communities, a box of tampons costs between \$16 and \$45.**

Period Poverty in Canada, NUPGE, 2022

**Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, 1/4 of people aged 13 to 35 years have found it more difficult to manage their periods, mainly due to a lack of money to buy menstrual products.**

WASH United, World Association of Girls Guides and Girls Scouts (WAGGGS) et UNICEF

## Multiple potential consequences of period poverty :

- Use of alternative solutions for dealing with period flow:
  - Use of menstrual products longer than recommended;
  - Use of fabrics, stockings, toilet paper, newspaper, etc.

➔ **Health risks: irritations, infections, toxic shock syndrome in rare cases.**

- Disqualification from the public sphere, absenteeism at school and at work (and consequently educational and professional penalties)
- Consequences on mental health: loss of dignity, anxiety, shame, exclusion

**Menstrual poverty is therefore a major issue of equality, dignity, and health.**

**19.6% of people surveyed in Quebec have occasionally used alternatives (toilet paper, fabric) as protection during menstruation due to the high cost of menstrual products and 2% report doing this regularly.**

Portrait du vécu des menstruations au Québec, RQASF, 2021

**The free provision of menstrual products by the government would therefore represent a concrete solution to this essential step forward in favor of menstrual equity.** However, it cannot stand on its own and must be guided and accompanied by the recommendations issued by period poverty experts.

**86% and 75% of Canadian women and men, respectively, support free menstrual products in public buildings.**

Plan International Canada, Menstruation in Canada - Views and Realities, 2022

*It is essential to ensure that young people and different marginalised populations not only have their basic needs met, but also **that their choices are considered and respected** (different types of menstrual products and any other menstruation related needs such as painkillers, medical consultations, etc.).*

## Focus on sustainable menstrual products

**Democratization and availability of reusable menstrual products represent a sustainable solution to reduce period poverty.**

Reusable menstrual products can **stem period poverty for several years** due to their long lifespan (from 3 to 10 years) and **make the user independent from monthly donations and consequently increase their sense of empowerment.**

In addition to the economic aspect, the success of sustainable menstrual products in recent years is from ecological awareness as well as from the growing concern about the potentially harmful effects of single-use menstrual products on health.

*« (...) disposable pads occupy the largest share of the menstrual products market in Canada, at approximately 70% according to market research conducted by Markets and Markets (2020). Pads are followed by tampons (15%) and panty liners (10%), while reusable products hold less than 5% of the share. However, reusable products have grown in popularity in recent years, due, in large part, to the growing interest in menstrual cups and environmental issues. »*

[Faciliter l'accès aux produits menstruels : mesures possibles, Conseil du statut de la femme, 2021](#)

The ecological impact of single-use menstrual products is enormous. In Canada, there are **771 million menstrual products used annually**. Let's assume that, in Quebec, every woman per year used 3 kg of menstrual products (before use), which equals **a total of 6,000 tons of waste and will take between 400 to 500 years to decompose in the environment.**

Plastic tampon applicators alone have a major impact: they are the 5th most common type of waste on beaches.

**Individually, these products could have a short or long term impact on health.** For instance, toxic substances present in menstrual products can pass directly through the vaginal mucous membranes, which are particularly permeable, and thus have both a local and general impact on the body.



More specifically, the chemical risk associated with the use of these products on a recurring basis for many years may include the occurrence of allergies, irritations, cancers and reproductive and endocrine system disorders. **According to several studies conducted in France between 2016 and 2019, residues of potentially toxic substances are found in tampons, pads, and panty liners.**

Among the most alarming, there are traces of dioxins, pesticides, insecticides, endocrine disruptors, or particles of silver and volatile organic compounds. The presence of these substances is frequently linked to the quality of the raw materials (e.g. traces of pesticides), manufacturing processes (e.g. bleaching agent, perfumes) or added purposely such as nanosilver, used as an antibacterial agent.

Even if in a recent American study, the presence of toxic PFAS (forever chemicals) was detected in some reusable menstrual products, **sustainable solutions are relatively safer in terms of chemical risk.**

***There is too little research on menstrual health and women's health in general. It is therefore essential to encourage change at this level. This research must be conducted in a comprehensive and intersectional approach so that the data and analyses collected enable the implementation of coherent, effective, and egalitarian public health policies.***

Therefore, it is recommended **to give preference to the most natural disposable products possible** (in organic cotton, unscented and chlorine free – labels can guide your choice) if you can afford them. You can also turn to sustainable menstrual products while remaining vigilant to the transparency of manufacturers on the materials they use.

For example, the menstrual cup, made of 100% silicone, does not spread any chemicals in the body and does not alter the vaginal flora as tampons can.

***In France, the United States and Canada, women's organizations, and various consumer associations advocate for more transparency on the composition of menstrual products.***

However, even if reusable products are found to be more accessible in the long term than single-use pads and tampons, **the upfront cost of sustainable menstrual products is an obstacle to their use for many and an insurmountable difficulty for the most vulnerable people.**

Others may lack information or even don't know about reusable options. Therefore, they might not have access to their full economic and health benefits.

**66% of surveyed people believe that reusable menstrual products are more affordable over the long term and 86% say they should be made available at a low cost to help low-income individuals**

[Plan International Canada, Menstruation in Canada - Views and Realities, 2022](#)

**Here are some examples of menstrual products, marketed by Canadian businesses and Quebec companies, and their costs:**

### **Reusable period underwear**

« The Basic Kit » - Madame L'Ovary  
2 daytime underwear with 6 removable inserts  
+ 1 nighttime underwear,  
+ 3 wet bags : **\$184,85 - \$194,85**

« The Starter Kit Öko-Flow » - Öko Créations  
4 period underwear with 8 removable inserts  
+ 1 waterproof pouch  
+ 1 stain remover : **\$219,92**



**Lifespan: 2 to 5 years**

### **Reusable pads**

« The Starter Kit Öko-Pads » - Öko Créations  
2 super trim panty liners  
+ 3 light panty liners  
+ 3 regular pads  
+ 2 long pads/nighttime  
+ 4 storage pouches : **\$160,30**



Pads sold individually - Marie Fil :

- Regular short pad : **\$11,99**
- Regular long pad : **\$12,49**
- Maxi pad : **\$18,49**

**Lifespan: 2 to 5 years**

## Menstrual cups

Nixit : **\$54,00**

Diva Cup : **\$39,25**

Madame L'Ovary : **\$29,95**



**Lifespan: 5 to 10 years**

### Notes:

- Menstrual products are zero-rated under the GST/HST since 2015, just like other essentials (milk, bread, and vegetables);
- The number of period products needed varies greatly from one person to another. It depends on the flow and the duration of menstruation;
- The prices quoted were observed on the companies' websites on July 11, 2023.

There are many advantages of reusable menstrual products, but their high up-front costs are their main shortcoming. Therefore, **it is essential to expand, sustain and simplify subsidy programs, and to include reusable products in the free provision of menstrual products policies for the most vulnerable populations.** Contrary to popular belief, **these products are the best option for people living in financially difficult situations**, as proven, for example, by the initiatives of organizations such as Days for Girls and Wallah We Can with its Ecolibree project.

***Our health and the Earth's health are closely linked. It is essential to expand and sustain subsidies for purchasing reusable menstrual products and also support companies that manufacture and market quality products in Canada.***

## Companies offering products made in Québec



## Quebec companies offering products made outside of Canada

Eliza (Asia - not specified), La petite Ourse (China), Mme L'Ovary (Colombia), Newex (abroad - not specified), Ora Protections (China), Viita (abroad - not specified).



Ta grand-mère Approuve website (in French only) makes it easy to find companies from Quebec and to have access to free virtual workshops on how to choose the right products according to their body, flow, and needs.

## Evolution of the number of refund programs in Quebec

### 2020

11 municipalities and cities and boroughs of Montréal

### 2023 (as of August 3)

229 cities, municipalities, parish municipalities and unorganized territories, and 19 Montréal boroughs

In June 2021, 25% of women in Quebec could claim a subsidy from their municipal administration covering a portion of the cost of reusable menstrual products.

[Faciliter l'accès aux produits menstruels : mesures possibles, Conseil du statut de la femme, 2021](#)

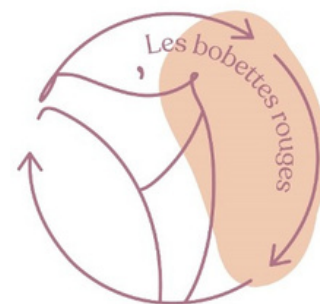
**CHECK OUT THE LIST ON OUR WEBSITE**



***To go further: check out our “How to choose your menstrual products” leaflet***

## « Les bobettes rouges » (red panties), very inspiring initiative from Québec !

At the MRC du Granit, there is no subsidy for reusable menstrual products and yet residents will have access to free sustainable menstrual products starting in the fall of 2023 !



The Corporation de développement économique de la MRC du Granit, the Constellation du Granit in Estrie, and a textile company in the region join forces to offer **menstrual pads made locally from upgraded textile scraps**.

**Therefore, young women aged 10 to 20 from local municipalities will be able to benefit from free, reusable, unique, and zero waste pads.**

This initiative has multiple virtues:

- The health of menstruators will be protected from harmful substances contained in certain disposable menstrual products;
- It is eco-friendly: textile scraps from initial production will be transformed into new products, reducing along the way significant amounts of waste that would have been generated using single-use products;
- Local economic actors and workforce will be mobilized because pads are designed and made locally;
- Finally, the project tackles period poverty in the region.

The Bobettes rouges project has also, beyond the material assistance, **opened the conversation on menstruation** among all members of the community, menstruating or not, and has **raised the awareness about period poverty issues**.

# Inspiring initiatives

**In Quebec, period poverty is a very recent political concern.**

It follows the unanimous adoption by the Scottish Parliament, in the midst of the pandemic, on 24 November 2020, of the Period Products (Free Provision) Act which introduces a legal obligation for local authorities to ensure that free menstrual products such as tampons and pads are available to anyone who needs them.

**Ten days later, the Quebec parliament unanimously adopted a motion calling on the Quebec government to study the possibility of making menstrual products available free of charge in public institutions, such as schools.**

The "Government Strategy for Gender Equality (2022-2027)" devotes its Orientation 4 to women's health and well-being, and more specifically, its Objective 4.2 facilitates access to menstrual products. The Quebec government announced its intention to "*ensure interministerial consultation to improve access to disposable or reusable menstrual products*" and to "*make disposable menstrual products accessible to girls and women living in intermediate and family-type resources*".

Last fall, three of the main provincial parties committed to facilitating access to menstrual products: the Parti Québécois wants to make them available "to anyone who needs them" in schools and community and social organizations, the Quebec Liberal Party, "on all campuses", and Québec solidaire promises to make all products "reusable or not" free of charge.

*A close link between menstrual equity organizations and decision-makers, parliamentarians or ministries is essential for the effective policies implementation.*

***Each stakeholder needs to be guided and reassured in order to give programs the chance to succeed and achieve their goals.***

**In other Canadian provinces and various foreign countries, the process has been underway for several years and, therefore, provides possible ideas and frameworks of action.**

**Countries that have introduced measures allowing access to free menstrual products (most often disposable) have made it possible through:**

- A legal act
- A temporary or experimental regulations before passing a final law
- Private initiatives

**Target populations and distribution locations:**

- Primary and secondary schools (e.g. British Columbia, Nova Scotia, United Kingdom, New Zeland, Kenya, Switzerland cantons of Vaud and of Geneva, Wallonia in Belgium, Spain)
- Campuses (e.g. France)
- Workplaces (e.g. federally regulated workplaces in Canada, private companies)
- A variety of public places such as libraries, leisure centers, community centers, municipal swimming pools, administrative buildings, museums, etc. (e.g. cities of Monreal, Halifax, and Winnipeg in Canada, Nantes et Grenoble in France, Geneva in Switzerland, Melbourne in Australia and State of New York in USA)
- Prisons (e.g. USA, United Kingdom)
- Organizations that help women in financially precarious situations (e.g. State of Maryland and NYC in USA)
- Public hospitals (e.g. United Kingdom)

**Tampon tax abolition:**

Some countries decided to abolish the value-added tax on menstrual products by including them in basic necessities, including Kenya (2004), Canada (2015), South Africa (2018), Australia (2019) and the United Kingdom (2021).

The European Union imposes on member countries to apply a minimum 5% tax, except in Ireland, which did not tax menstrual products when the EU introduced the minimum rate.

On June 1st, 2023, the City of Montréal announced the launch of the Menstrual Products Accessibility Program in municipal buildings' public washrooms. Tampons and pads will be made available free of charge in all Montreal boroughs to women and any menstruator who might require them.

This program is being implemented following the success of the pilot project set up in 2021, which offered these products at the Botanical Garden, the Jean-Claude Malépart centre, the town hall and the Ahuntsic library.

List of public spaces equipped with vending machines.

## Canadian Government

### First Nation School Students

On November 5, 2021, the Minister of Indigenous Services announced that students in First Nations-operated schools on First Nations reserves and in federal schools would have access to free menstrual products (tampons and pads). Thus, funding was allocated to First Nations and First Nations-designated education organizations on reserves to purchase menstrual products. They are the ones who determine how to obtain these period products and distribute them to their students.

**The Government has committed \$2.5 million to increase access to menstrual products for First Nations and Inuit students across the territories and Inuit Nunangat.**

In Nunavut, a territory inhabited by 85% Indigenous population, the price of a 40 tampons box can reach \$20. **Almost half of Indigenous survey respondents said they were rationing or using products longer than they should because they cannot afford more.**

Regarding menstrual products to be distributed free of charge to students in First Nations operated schools, the funding to Indigenous partners and

territorial governments in Yukon, Northwest Territories and Inuit Nunangat began in March 2022 and the roll-out of this initiative is underway.

## **National pilot for the Menstrual Equity Fund**

Budget 2022 allocated \$25 million over two years for Women and Gender Equality Canada to establish **a national pilot for the Menstrual Equity Fund (MEF), which will help make menstrual products available to people who struggle to afford them** including women's shelters, non-profit organizations, charities, community organizations and youth-led organizations.

After conducting research and consultations to better understand the menstrual equity landscape in Canada, efforts are now focused, in mid-2023, on selecting one national non-profit organization to lead the MEF pilot.

To do so, this organization will test approaches to distribute free menstrual products to community organizations serving diverse low-income populations in various locations across Canada. It will create partnerships with a small number of grassroots organizations across Canada that are already advancing menstrual equity to scale up education and awareness activities to inform Canadians about period poverty and reduce stigma around menstruation.



*No one in Canada should worry about accessing menstrual products. Something as natural as a period should not prevent anyone from going to work and participating fully in society. Menstrual products are not a luxury. They are essential to people's health and well-being. Let's lead by example and make a measurable difference in advancing menstrual equity in Canada.* – **Jenna Sudds, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth**

## **Project to Provide Free Menstrual Products in Federally Regulated Workplaces**

**Canada Labour Code to ensure access to menstrual products at work starting December 15, 2023.**

All the employers of federally regulated private and public sector workplaces would be required **to make menstrual products available to their employees free of charge** along with other necessities in the workplace existing already in the Code, such as toilet paper, soap, warm water, and means of drying hands.

This initiative is inclusive of **all workers who menstruate, such as cisgender women, non-binary people, transgender men, and intersex people**, about 470,000 people (out of 1.3 million in total).

Assuming all of these individuals would use the tampons and pads provided, the total costs including products, distributors, containers for used products and human resource costs would be approximately \$116.6 million over the period 2024-2033.



*Tampons and pads are basic necessities. So we're making sure they're provided to workers at no cost, because it'll make for healthier and safer workplaces."* – **Seamus O'Regan Jr., Minister of Labour**

## Other Canadian provinces or territories

### British Columbia

Under a ministerial order issued on April 5, 2019, all public schools in British Columbia are now required to provide free menstrual products for students. It is the first province in Canada to make it mandatory.

School boards must have policies and procedures in place for the provision of menstrual products in school washrooms. These procedures should incorporate student feedback and be evaluated to ensure they meet their needs. Relevant product information should be made available to all students. **Menstrual products must be free, continuously available, barrier-free, and easily accessible to students of all gender identities and expressions, and in a manner that protects privacy and is non-stigmatizing.**

In 2022, the province decided to support a task force and grant it with \$750,000 to eliminate the stigma associated with menstruation and explore the various factors that contribute to period poverty and find solutions to end it.

### Alberta

In October 2022, the Government of Alberta decided to fund United Way's Period Promise project with \$260,000. The free menstrual products will be distributed to 50 schools across the province for one year. The installation will be accompanied by an education campaign around women's health.

### Ontario

In October 2021, the province of Ontario partnered with Shoppers Drug Mart pharmacies, which will provide menstrual products (pads) free of charge for three years. School boards across the province are responsible for distributing them to school washrooms.

The measure was requested by the City of Toronto's Youth Cabinet, the Ontario Human Rights Commission, Ontario's four major teachers' unions and student groups, who argued in a letter sent to the province's Minister of Education Stephen Lecce in March 2021 that menstrual products are a necessity and not a luxury.

## **Manitoba**

Several Manitoba schools already offer free menstrual products, but the agreement with Shoppers Drug Mart pharmacies aims to standardize their distribution across the province.

Under the 2022 agreement, 3.3 million products will be distributed annually over three years to schools, women's shelters and resource centers.

In September 2022, the City of Winnipeg implemented a one-year pilot project that includes a free distribution of menstrual products in a selection of community centers and municipal swimming pools. All Winnipeg Public Library branches offer free menstrual products upon request. The cost of the operation is \$58,500.

## **Prince Edward Island**

The Government of Prince Edward Island offers tampons and pads in schools, food banks, and women's shelters. The program costs \$15,000 annually.



*Menstruation isn't typically something we talk about in the house, or even in public, in general. This silence needs to end. It creates stigma and shame about a natural, biological event.”* - **Natalie Jameson, P.E.I.'s Minister responsible for the Status of Women**

## **Nova Scotia**

The city of Halifax is now offering free menstrual products at 22 city-owned facilities and Mount Saint Vincent University provides pads and tampons on campus.

Since 2019, 40,000 secondary students from grades 4 and 12 in 367 public schools have had access to free pads and tampons.



*We know that sometimes, you might forget to plan ahead, or find yourself in an emergency. This is not something over which women have a choice, this is something that happens naturally every month.* - **Kelly Regan, Minister responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women**

## **Saskatchewan**

Following a partnership with Shoppers Drug Mart pharmacies with the support of Procter and Gamble, the Government of Saskatchewan will provide 12 million menstrual products to schools, women's shelters and food banks starting in fall 2023 and for 3 years.



*This partnership will help us provide free menstrual products to those who need them in a sensitive and dignified way and that will make a big difference in the lives of women and girls in Saskatchewan.* - **Laura Ross, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women**

On August 28th, 2023, as part of University Plan 2025, the University of Saskatchewan (USask) launched the Period Equity Project. As a result, free menstrual tampons and pads will be made available to all members of the community in more than 70 women's, gender-neutral, and men's washrooms in various USask buildings.



*Every person who needs menstrual products should have access to those products. The USask Period Equity Project is about helping make that happen. Ensuring our students, faculty, and staff have the resources they need to fully participate in campus life is vitally important.* - **Dr. Airini (PhD), USask's provost and vice-president academic**

## **New Brunswick**

In New Brunswick, menstrual pads and tampons are now available free of charge in public libraries. Women and gender-diverse people can find disposable pads and tampons in washrooms at 63 facilities in both rural and urban areas across the province.

The cost of this operation, which is included in the New Brunswick Public Library Service's current operating budget, will be \$15,480 per year for small and medium-sized libraries and \$24,000 for large libraries and resource centres.

Since 2022, the provincial government has already provided \$115,000 to make menstrual products available free of charge in schools across the province as part of the new program called «Never be caught off guard». Products are available in female and gender-neutral washrooms and locker rooms in schools with Grade 6-12 students, eliminating the need for students to request these products from school administration.



*All students deserve to be able to focus on their learning, instead of worrying about how they will be able to access the essentials. By providing menstrual hygiene products, schools are fostering learning environments that are inclusive, promote equity and respect human rights. Hopefully, this project can help reduce the impact on academics and help reduce stigma and social or emotional challenges.* - **Dominic Cardy, Education and Early Childhood Development Minister**

## **Newfoundland and Labrador**

Since January 2022, at least one bathroom in every school with Grade 4 and older students is equipped with free disposable menstrual products.

The cost of the operation in 2022, \$30,000, was covered by the Ministry of Health. For 2023, \$100,000 has been allocated in the Budget.



*The lack of access to period products has been an unacceptable barrier to education that has resulted in missed opportunities, uncomfortable conversations and unhygienic solutions. This program is an investment in youth health and wellness.* - **Honourable Andrew Furey, Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador**

## **Other countries**

### **Scotland**

In 2018, all Scottish schools, colleges and universities had already provided free menstrual products to students. On 12 January 2021, Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021 received Royal assent and **Scotland became the first country in the world to make period products widely available for free of charge to anyone who needs them.**

The Act came into force on 15 August 2022 and placed legal duty on:

- local authorities to ensure period products generally obtainable free of charge
- education providers to ensure period products obtainable free of charge by pupils and students

The Act will also ensure:

- period products to be obtainable reasonably easily, and in a way that respects the dignity of persons obtaining them,
- a reasonable choice of different types of available period products.

**Considering the variability of individual needs, no limit on the number of products that can be claimed should be set, nor the frequency with which a person can request them.**

The PickupMyPeriod app has been launched to allow users to identify locations where period products can be accessed for free.

The annual cost of the measure is calculated at 24 million pounds, or approximately 38 million dollars.

Currently, in the United Kingdom, in addition to Scotland and Wales, England and Northern Ireland have made menstrual products available free of charge in schools and colleges across the country.

Great Britain's approach to delivering period products for young people has been commended globally, with countries including New Zealand, France, Zambia, and, lately, Australian New South Wales taking a similar step to meet their own needs.

**1 in 10 girls could not afford menstrual products and 1 in 6 (7 in London) had difficulty accessing them due to the cost.**

Plan International UK

**On a monthly basis, 30.4% of respondents in Quebec say they miss 2 days or less of work, school, or leisure due to menstruation.**

[Portrait du vécu des menstruations au Québec, RQASF, 2021](#)

## **France**

The Ministry of Education decided to introduce free periodic protection starting September 2021. Thus, 1,500 distributors were installed in universities and Crous (university residences, student health services and university restaurants) and they offer environmentally friendly tampons and pads.

The distribution is accompanied by a communication campaign to reach the entire student population. The cost is estimated at 15 million euros per year.

In addition, an experiment that is based on the free distribution of menstrual products in colleges (secondary schools) and actions for health education and the deconstruction of prejudices has been launched in several French departments. All period products are organic cotton or bamboo, hypoallergenic, chemical-free, and 100% biodegradable (the applicators are made of sugar cane).

In 2022-2023, the Hauts-de-Seine department, in partnership with the Institut des Hauts-de-Seine (Paris region), decided to equip students aged 11 to 15 years from 98 secondary schools with 25,000 menstrual underwear to fight menstrual poverty. The first distribution in 2021-2022 had already made it possible to offer 3,000 washable menstrual underwear and workshops to young people. The distribution of products is accompanied by a thirty-minute training course that lifts certain taboos and informs students about important concepts for their intimate life.

Finally, French prime minister Elisabeth Borne announced on March 6th, 2023, that from 2024, reusable menstrual products bought in pharmacies (without a prescription) will be reimbursed by french national health insurance for women aged 25 and under.

## **United States**

According to « Alliance for Period Supplies », as of August 24, 2023, 25 states and Washington D.C. have passed legislation making free menstrual products possible in schools (primarily middle and secondary schools, sometimes public elementary schools, colleges and universities).

The details of these laws also differ between states. For example, some only require that menstrual products be available free of charge to students, others also provide funding and finally, some propose a state funding without requiring that products be available in all schools.

## Going further: menstrual leave

Dozens of countries, cities or communities have implemented many inspiring initiatives to end menstrual poverty around the globe, enabling menstruating people to have period products at their disposal and therefore be able to focus more on their learning, work, and their well-being.

**Making these products accessible is a necessary step, but it will not end menstrual poverty in the broad sense of its definition (see page 2): menstrual health education, water supply facilities and adequate sanitation, and the elimination of sexual and sexist stereotypes are also essential to its eradication.**

**For example, some laws allow workers who experience difficult menstruation symptoms options to be absent from work.** Indeed, heavy periods and/or severe pain make social interactions complicated or even impossible and condemn the people who experience them to a recurring struggle, adding to the pain of stress and guilt.

**Menstrual leave policies vary. This leave can be granted in hours per month or in days over a year, unpaid or without loss of salary, conditional on a medical certificate or without any formality, and/or registered in the labor code or simply negotiated within the framework of a company.**

Menstrual leave exists in these different forms in Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, and Zambia. Its recourse is different according to the culture and/or the extent of the taboos surrounding the rules, sometimes condemning generous legislation to be only a dead letter in law.

**On February 16, 2023, Spain became the first European country to pass legislation allowing those with especially painful periods to take paid “menstrual leave” from work. For those who wish to use this law, they will need to produce a doctor’s note. People suffering from disabling menstrual pain will now be able to have their temporary incapacity from work recognized and benefit from sick leave financed by health insurance. The duration of sick leave that doctors may grant has not been specified.**

***"We are the first European country to recognize in law the fact that menstrual health is part of women's rights."*** Irene Montero, the Minister of Equality

**The bill is part of a broader package on sexual and reproductive health rights that includes allowing anyone over the age of 16 to get an abortion, reaffirming access to abortion in public hospitals, dispositions that strengthen sex education in schools, and establish the free distribution of contraceptives and menstrual products in high schools.**

# May 28 : a key date

**May 28 is World Menstrual Health Day.**

**Why this date?** It's symbolic: **28th day of a month** as the average length of a menstrual cycle. May is the **5th month of the year**, and the average length of menstruation is 5 days every month.

It is a very special occasion to raise awareness and to permeate society of the various issues surrounding period poverty and to mobilize for equity.

To achieve systemic change, it would, therefore, be crucial for the media, elected representatives, and community based organisations to become one on that day as the amplifiers of the voices of people affected by period poverty and those who are working to eradicate it in order for them to be heard as widely as possible.

**28 MAI - JOURNÉE MONDIALE  
DE LA SANTÉ MENSTRUELLE**



**Ensemble vers l'équité menstruelle**



Photos: Centre Entre-Femmes de Rouyn-Noranda, Vrac & Bocaux, Table de concertation du mouvement des femmes Centre-du-Québec, Emilie Ouellette, Öko Créations, Récif 02 - Table de concertation des groupes de femmes Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean.

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