



FREE MENSTRUAL HYGIENE PRODUCTS POLICY

Adopted by Legislative Council: 2016/10/26

Expires: 2021/10/20

[Adopted Motion \(Link\)](#)

1. Scope

This Policy shall apply to Directors, Councillors, Executive Officers, Senators, committee members, staff (employees), and all others involved in Society decision-making processes for the duration of their formal involvement with the Society. It shall be used as a guide for decision-making and a plan for taking action on providing menstrual hygiene products to those who need it.

2. Definitions

All terms used in the Free Menstrual Hygiene Products Policy shall adopt the same definitions as those given to similar terms previously defined in the Constitution. In addition, the following terms shall be defined herein:

- 2.1. **Sex:** refers to the social, legal, and medical classification assigned to one's body at birth. Sex, unlike Gender, is not self-defined, though it can be changed.
- 2.2. **Gender:** a set of cultural identities, expressions and roles, codified as feminine or masculine, that are assigned to people based upon the interpretation of their bodies, and more specifically, their sexual and reproductive anatomy. Since gender is a social construct, it is possible to reject or modify the assignment made, and develop something that feels truer and just to oneself.¹
- 2.3. **Gender Non Conforming (GNC):** a descriptive term and/or identity of a person who has a gender identity and/or expression that does not conform to the traditional expectations of the gender they were assigned at birth. People who identify as “gender nonconforming” or “gender variant” may or may not also identify as “transgender.”

¹ <https://www.glsen.org/GSA/making-your-club-inclusive-transgender-and-gnc-students>



- 2.4. **Gender Binary:** the Gender Binary, also referred to as “gender binarism” or “binarism”, is the incorrect classification of sex and gender into two distinct, opposite and disconnected forms of masculine and feminine.
- 2.5. **Cisgender:** Cisgender refers to a person whose gender identity coincides with their sex at birth.
- 2.6. **Transitioning:** the process in which a person goes from living and identifying as one gender to living and identifying as another, GNC or non-binary. Transition is a process that is different for everyone, and it may or may not involve social, legal, physical or medical changes. There is no one step or set of steps that an individual must undergo in order to have their gender identity affirmed and respected.
- 2.7. **Transgender:** encompassing term of many gender identities, some binary and some nonbinary, of those who do not identify or exclusively identify with their sex assigned at birth. The term transgender is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life.
- 2.8. **Menstrual Hygiene Products:** any products used during a person's menstrual cycle in order to assist them with the experiences and/or difficulties of menstruation. Persons may choose in some cases to not use these products at all, a decision that is entirely theirs to make and one that should be respected as such. For the sake of this policy, such products may include, and shall be defined as, but are not limited to:
 - 2.8.1. Tampons: an unscented and hypoallergenic plug of soft material inserted into the vagina, using a plastic applicator, to absorb menstrual blood, which must come in a variety of sizes.
 - 2.8.2. Sanitary Pads: an absorbent item worn by a person who is menstruating.
- 2.9. **Pink Tax:** the Pink Tax refers to the discrimination against non-male defining people that manifests itself in an increased expense on products typically labelled, explicitly or implicitly, “for women.”
- 2.10. **Economies of Scale:** a proportionate saving in costs gained by an increased level of production and purchasing.
- 2.11. **Luxury Goods:** products which are not necessary but which tend to make life more pleasant for the consumer.



- 2.12. **Necessary Goods:** goods or service whose consumption is essential to human survival, or which is considered indispensable for maintaining a certain minimum standard-of-living

3. Background

- 3.1. **History** the SSMU recognizes that, prior and throughout the drafting of this legislation, there exist programs that seek to combat some of the financial burden on any person or peoples that experience menstruation. Both the Union for Gender Empowerment (UGE)² and the Shag Shop provide tampons to students on a pay-what-you-can basis. This policy seeks to only support and build upon the work done by front-line community members who have fought and continue to fight for gender and sex equity and equality
- 3.2. **Price Discrimination** as shown in the study From Cradle to Cane: The Cost of Being a Female Consumer³, a comprehensive study that looked into “gender pricing of goods in New York City across multiple industries,” on average women pay 7% more for all goods they consume. The study showed that in some areas, in particular personal care products, women can also pay, on average, 13% more, and products labeled “for women” in general costing more than others 42% of the time. This fact, in combination with the recognition that people that experience menstruation are generally economically vulnerable due to patriarchal hiring practices, amongst other sexist work-based issues associated with the systemic oppression in moneymaking industries, compounds in terms of relative cost.
 - 3.2.1. **Luxury Goods and Gender** reproductive health is widely promoted on the McGill campus in various existing capacities: free condoms can be found at large-scale events, in residence halls, and elsewhere on campus. As well, the McGill Health Clinic offers STI testing as one of its many services to students. Menstrual hygiene products, however, are sparsely found on campus. This dichotomy presents an unnecessary and unacceptable fissure between reproductive health and menstrual health given that both of which are related to one’s reproductive organs. As well, while commonplace necessary goods, such as toilet paper, are supplied in public washrooms for free, menstrual hygiene products maintain a cost and can be labeled as “Luxury”; a clear marker of the discrimination faced against products deemed “feminine” in nature. One study compared the cost of “Pads for [Elderly] Women” with equivalent “Guards for [Elderly] Men” and found that in some

² <https://unionforgenderempowerment.wordpress.com/>

³ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dca/downloads/pdf/partners/Study-of-Gender-Pricing-in-NYC.pdf>



cases packages of product costed the same amount for 25% less in pad count.⁴

- 3.3. **Product Gendering** the act of gendering a product, in which a Gender identity is attached to the packaging and marketing of a good, an act that usually subscribes to pricing discrimination in favor of men and perpetuates/creates some of the gender based segmentation and assumptions we have present today. The SSMU has taken similar prior stances against gendering of products through its section 2.7 of the Equity Policy, in which the SSMU established its commitment to “gender-neutral language in its documents, in all electronic and written correspondence from SSMU addresses, and in the workplace.
- 3.4. **Menstrual Stigmatization and Shaming** studies show that 62% of women who were asked the question, ‘Do you feel comfortable talking about menstruation with males?’ in a survey answered in negative⁵. As well, there are documented occurrences of people in prominent positions being shamed for getting their period in public and not having any menstrual hygiene products.⁶ Students who get their period unexpectedly on campus may be paying for their own education and lifestyle. In an emergency situation, some may be faced with the decision to purchase either menstrual hygiene products and not eat lunch that day or purchase food and experience mental health related negative impacts. One study⁷ showed that 35% of women caught in public without the supplies they needed when they unexpectedly started their period would feel panicked, and 43% would feel anxious/stressed.

4. Product Subsidizing

- 4.1. **Fee** The Vice-President Finance shall, in consultation with the President, draft a Referendum Question to be considered by the Legislative Council with the intent that the SSMU establish a Free Menstrual Hygiene Products Fee mandating the Society to purchase and freely distribute Tampons and Sanitary Pads, of various width and thicknesses, in order to leverage Economies of Scale to reduce the overall cost through buying in bulk.
 - 4.1.1. **Renewal** The SSMU will continue to bring this fee back to the membership for renewal, at the initially passed price per student or higher, until McGill, or the Municipal, Provincial or Federal Government recognize that these products

⁴ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dca/downloads/pdf/partners/Study-of-Gender-Pricing-in-NYC.pdf#page=14>

⁵ <http://www.ijssh.org/papers/296-B00016.pdf#page=4>

⁶ <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/menstruation-themed-photo-series-artist-censored-by-instagram-says-images-are-to-demystify-taboos-10144331.html>

⁷ http://www.freethetampons.org/uploads/4/6/0/3/46036337/ftt_infographic.pdf



must be classified as Necessary Goods and pass a subsidy program to eliminate their cost and/or supply them publicly.

- 4.1.2. **Surplus Fund** If, at any point, the SSMU finds itself running a surplus with the funds collected, those surplus moneys collected will be pooled into a fund (to be referred as the Health and Hygiene Products Fund) to be reserved for the purchasing of alternative health and hygiene products, including, but not limited to, Diva Cups.

5. Distribution

- 5.1. **Provision of Products to Students** The SSMU shall seek to provide menstrual hygiene products through as many prominent access points on campus as are outlined, but not limited to, herein.

- 5.1.1. **SSMU Building** The Vice-President Operations shall establish dispensaries at key access points in the building, namely in, but not limited to, the two gender neutral washrooms in the SSMU Building. The Vice-President Operations will also create and maintain clear signs on the first and fourth floor indicating where these products are, and shall coordinate with the VP External's annual awareness campaign (outlined below) to promote the existence of these free products in the building.

- 5.1.2. **McGill Campus** The Vice-President Internal will be responsible for coordinating with Healthy McGill to distribute these products as widely as possible through their kiosks on campus. As well, the VP Internal shall contact all other groups they feel would be interested in working with the SSMU on providing free menstrual hygiene products, in order to promote the creation of more access points across campus into this Policy.

6. Advocacy

- 6.1. **Expansion of Policy** The SSMU will advocate for similar policies to be adopted at all higher levels of governance, including, but not limited to, at McGill, Municipal and Provincial Government

- 6.1.1. **Campus-Wide Advocacy** The Vice-President University Affairs shall advocate for the McGill administration to adopt a similar Policy, as well as establish similar dispensaries to those outlined in section 4.1.2, through any official capacity they have, such as, but not limited to, Senate and its Committees. The President shall advocate the McGill administration, as well as faculty associations, to adopt similar policies and establish dispensaries, through



any official capacity they have, such as, but not limited to, Senate and its Committees, the Board of Governors and its Committees, and the Presidents Round Table.

- 6.1.2. **External Advocacy** The VP External and the President shall both be tasked with the joint responsibility of advocating for the expansion of those adopting this, or similar, policies at the Municipal, Provincial or Federal level, through media relations, provincial associations, as well as personal outreach to the city of Montreal by the VP External in specific.

7. Education

- 7.1. **Awareness** The SSMU recognizes that many McGill and Quebec students are uninformed on issues of economic discrimination against individuals who experience menstruation, and will actively participate in local communities to increase awareness.

- 7.1.1. **Gendering of Products** The SSMU recognizes and denounces any gendering of products, which further contributes to societal pressures associated with Gender, that constantly negatively impacts and pressures people to fit a Gender mold that is deemed “normal.”

- 7.1.2. **Annual Awareness Campaign** The VP External shall put on, in coordination with the Office of the VP Operations, an annual awareness campaign that aims to both explain the Pink Tax and educate people about how it negatively effects and discriminates against GNC, Transitioning, Transgender, and Cisgender people that experience menstruation. The predominant role of the VP Operations in this is outlined in 4.1.2, but they will also act as a general support to the VP External throughout the campaign.