



Bureau du président du conseil de l'AEUM

Située sur les territoires traditionnels des collectivités Haudenosaunee et Anishinaabe.

SSMU Office of the Speaker

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MOTION REGARDING FREE MENSTRUAL HEALTH PRODUCTS ON CAMPUS 2022-12-01

Submitted for: 2022-12-01

Submitted to: SSMU Legislative Council **Document no.:** LEG-PUB-MOT-2022-12-01-001

Moved by: Kerry Yang
Vice-President (University Affairs) **Current Status:** FOR APPROVAL
 APPROVED
 POSTPONED
 COMMITTED
 NOT APPROVED

Seconded by: Angelica Voutsinas
Arts Representative

Issue

The cost of buying menstrual products is a large financial burden placed on many people who experience menstruation. To help address menstrual poverty and help move towards menstrual equity, the SSMU should establish itself as a leader in providing free menstrual health products on campus.

Background and Rationale

In 2016, the SSMU created a fee to be used to provide free menstrual health products to students on campus through a \$0.90 non-opt-outable fee. In 2020, the fee was increased to \$2.40 a semester in response to the increased expansion and focus on accessibility, allowing a substantial increase in the scope of the project. This has led to the ability to provide biodegradable and reusable menstrual products to students on campus, improving the SSMU's commitment towards sustainability.

In 2021, the Free Menstrual Product Policy expired, and was unable to be rewritten and renewed in time. This means there has been the collection of the Menstrual Health Fund without a mandated means of spending the money. To help remedy the expiry, a modernized version of the Free Menstrual Hygiene Products Policy has been drafted, keeping in mind the new initiatives taking place, and moving things in a more sustainable direction.



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Alignment with Mission

This Initiative aligns with SSMU's equity policy, especially its commitment to having programs and activities that are devoted to the well-being of a group that is marginalized. It also demonstrates SSMU's commitment to leadership in matters of human rights, social justice, and environmental position.

Consultations Completed

The Menstrual Health Commissioner, the Menstrual Health Coordinators, the Building Director, the Vice-President (Finance), the Union for Gender Empowerment, Queer McGill, the Sustainability Commissioners.

Risk Factors and Resource Implications

Should the policy fail, the SSMU Menstrual Health Project would exist without a mandate, meaning there would be no direction to spend the money accumulated within the Menstrual Health Products fund.

Sustainability Considerations

This policy looks at various aspects of improving sustainability. In terms of social sustainability, this Policy works to provide products that are more accessible, and work towards addressing period poverty. In terms of economic sustainability, this Policy is committed to reducing the financial burden on those who menstruate. In terms of environmental sustainability, this Policy seeks to reduce the usage of single use menstrual products and move towards options that use less energy and create less waste.

Impact of Decision and Next Steps

Should this Policy pass, the Menstrual Health Products Fund will receive a specific mandate on the purpose of the money and how to spend the funds. This would allow the SSMU to put more focus towards increasing accessibility, sustainability, and equity by providing free menstrual products, while reducing costs for people who menstruate.

Motion or Resolution for Approval

Be it resolved that the Legislative Council approve the Free Menstrual Health Products Policy in Appendix A.



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Be it resolved, that the Legislative Council recommend the ratification of the Policy in Appendix A to the Board of Directors.

Be it further resolved, that the Free Menstrual Health Products Policy be in effect as of the ratification date of the Board of Directors, and expire on January 1, 2027.

Results of the Vote

In favour	(UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED)
Opposed	()
Abstain	()

APPROVED



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Appendix A : Free Menstrual Health Products Policy

FREE MENSTRUAL HEALTH PRODUCTS POLICY

1. Scope

This Policy shall apply to Directors, Councilors, 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 free menstrual products.

2. Definitions

All terms used in the Free Menstrual Health 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. **Menstrual Health: refers to** a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in relation to the menstrual cycle.¹
 - 2.1.1. Achieving menstrual health implies that people who experience a menstrual cycle, throughout their life-course, are able to:
 - 2.1.1.1. Access accurate, timely, age-appropriate information about the menstrual cycle, menstruation, and changes experienced throughout the life-course, as well as related self-care and health practices.
 - 2.1.1.2. Care for their bodies during menstruation such that their preferences, health, comfort, privacy, and safety are supported. This includes accessing and using effective and affordable menstrual materials and having supportive facilities and services, including water, sanitation and hygiene services, for washing the body and hands, changing menstrual materials, and cleaning and/or disposing of used materials.
 - 2.1.1.3. Access timely diagnosis, treatment and care for menstrual cycle-related discomforts and disorders, including access to appropriate health services and resources, pain relief, and strategies for self-care.

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8098749/>



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- 2.1.1.4. Experience a positive and respectful environment in relation to the menstrual cycle, free from stigma and psychological distress, including the resources and support they need to confidently care for their bodies and make informed decisions about self-care throughout their menstrual cycle.
 - 2.1.1.5. Decide whether and how to participate in all spheres of life, including civil, cultural, economic, social, and political, during all phases of the menstrual cycle, free from menstrual-related exclusion, restriction, discrimination, coercion, and/or violence.
- 2.2. **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.
- 2.3. **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.²
- 2.4. **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. This term is also used by some to describe individuals who do not conform to the traditional expectations of binary genders. People who identify as “gender nonconforming” or “gender variant” may or may not also identify as “transgender.”
- 2.5. **Non-Binary or Gender Queer:** umbrella terms for gender identities that are not solely male or female — identities that are outside the gender binary norms.
- 2.6. **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 masculinity and femininity.
- 2.7. **Cisgender:** Cisgender refers to a person whose gender identity coincides with their sex at birth.
- 2.8. **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

² <https://www.glsen.org/GSA/making-your-club-inclusive-transgender-and-gnc-students>



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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.

- 2.9. **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.
- 2.10. **Menstrual Health 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:
 - 2.10.1. **Disposable Menstrual Products:** products that are only used once and disposed of.
 - 2.10.2. **Reusable Menstrual Products:** products that can be used repeatedly and are not disposed of.
 - 2.10.3. **Tampons:** a plug of soft material inserted into the vagina to absorb menstrual blood, which must come in a variety of sizes.
 - 2.10.4. **Pads:** an absorbent item worn by a person who is menstruating.
 - 2.10.5. **Menstrual cups:** a reusable product made of medical grade silicon, latex or thermoplastic isomer in the shape of a bell with a stem or ring that is inserted into the vagina to collect menstrual fluid.
 - 2.10.6. **Period underwear:** a reusable product that absorbs menstrual fluid in the same manner as a pad but in underwear form.
 - 2.10.7. **Reusable pads:** a reusable version as a disposable pad and is usually made of cotton or an absorbent fabric.
- 2.11. **Menstrual Equity:** refers to affordability, accessibility and safety of menstrual products. It is not restricted to just products but overall menstrual health such as reproductive care and education.
- 2.12. **Pink Tax:** refers to the discrimination against femme non-male identifying/defining people that manifests itself in an increased expense on products typically labelled, explicitly or implicitly, “for women.”
- 2.13. **Economies of Scale:** a proportionate saving in costs gained by an increased level of production and purchasing.



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- 2.14. **Luxury Goods:** products which are not necessary but which tend to make life more pleasant for the consumer.
- 2.15. **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 on campus that seek to combat some of the financial burden on any person or peoples that experience menstruation. Both the Union for Gender Empowerment (UGE)³ and the Shag Shop provides tampons to students on a pay-what-you-can basis. Recently, Sex and Self has been providing provides tampons, pads, and some reusable period products for free as well. This policy seeks to support and build upon the work done by front-line community members who have fought and continue to fight for gender, and sex, and menstrual equity and equality.
- 3.2. **Price Discrimination:** in the study From Cradle to Cane: The Cost of Being a Female Consumer⁴, a comprehensive study that looked into “gender pricing of goods in New York City across multiple industries,” on average feminine gendered products are women pay 7% more expensive for all goods they consume. The study showed that in some areas, in particular personal care products, the cost is, women can also pay, on average, 13% more expensive. As well, , 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 discrimination sexist work-based issues associated with the systemic oppression in money making industries, compounds in terms of relative cost. Students who get their period unexpectedly on campus may be forced into difficult situations. In an emergency situation, some may be faced with the decision to purchase either menstrual health products and not eat lunch that day or purchase food and experience mental health related negative impacts.
 - 3.2.1. **Luxury Goods and Gender:** sexual 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

³ <https://unionforgenderempowerment.wordpress.com/>

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



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well, the McGill Wellness HubHealth Clinic offers STI testing as one of its many services to students. Menstrual healthhygiene products, however, are sparsely found on campus. This dichotomy presents an unnecessary and unacceptable fissure between sexualreproductive 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 by McGill University, menstrual healthhygiene 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 cases packages of product cost the same amount for 25% less in pad count.⁵

- 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 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 negative⁶. As well, there are documented occurrences of people in prominent positions being shamed for getting their period in public and not having any menstrual healthhygiene products.⁷ 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 healthhygiene products and not eat lunch that day or purchase food and experience mental health related negative impacts. One study⁸ 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.

⁵ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dca/downloads/pdf/partners/Study-of-Gender-Pricing-in-NYC.pdf#page=14>

⁶ <http://www.ijssh.org/papers/296-B00016.pdf#page=4>

⁷ <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/menstruation-themed-photo-series-artist-censored-by-instagram-says-images-are-to-demystify-taboos-10144331.html>

⁸ http://www.freethetampons.org/uploads/4/6/0/3/46036337/ftt_infographic.pdf



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- 3.5. **Sustainable Menstrual Equity:** according to recent surveys, 15% of people with periods in Canada have struggled to afford menstrual products and are worried about their ongoing ability to afford them; and 35% have had to sacrifice something else in their budget to afford menstrual products⁹. On top of this, most affordable menstrual products are disposable and result in a large accumulation of waste every year (outlined in 6.2). Reusable and more eco-friendly products often cost much more and are less accessible in stores as not many places carry them. Environmentally-conscious period products need to be accessible and affordable to all menstruating populations, which is what sustainable menstrual equity seeks to achieve.
- 3.6. **Degendering Menstruation:** Transgender menstruators face intersecting axes of oppression, including the inherent stigma associated with menstruation and discrimination from fellow menstruators. Masculine-presenting transgender people face discrimination in accessing menstrual health products. Furthermore, acts of solidarity and community between menstruators often exclude those who present as masculine. In pursuit of menstrual equity, menstruation must be degendered and any acts or campaigns of menstrual solidarity must be fully inclusive of masculine-presenting menstruators.

4. Product Subsidizing

- 4.1. **Fee:** The Vice-President Finance shall, in consultation with the President, maintain the Referendum Question to be considered by the Legislative Council with the intent that the SSMU establish a Free Menstrual HealthHygiene 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 must be classified as Necessary Goods and pass a subsidy program to eliminate their cost and/or supply them publicly.
 - 4.1.2. **Surplus Funding:** If, at any point, the SSMU finds itself running a surplus with the funds collected, the surplus collected will roll over into next year's budget

⁹ <https://www.csu.qc.ca/sustainability/menstrual-equity/>



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for the purchasing of more sustainable health and hygiene products, including but not limited to, menstrual cups, reusable pads, period underwear, and biodegradable projects and use them for initiatives such as free monthly pick ups, as well as the maintenance and improvement of existing initiatives and projects.

5. Distribution

- 5.1. **Provision of Products to MembersStudents:** The SSMU shall seek to provide menstrual health products through as many prominent access points on campus as are outlined, but not limited to, herein. These access points shall be easily accessible to students, regardless of gender presentation.
 - 5.1.1. **SSMU Building:** Building Services 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 SSMU will also create and maintain clear signs 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. Furthermore, the menstrual health team will work closely with the Building services team to improve and manage products in locations with products
 - 5.1.2. **McGill Campus:** The SSMU will be responsible for distributing these products as widely as possible through their kiosks on campus. As well, the SSMU shall contact all other groups they feel would be interested in working with the SSMU on providing free menstrual health products, in order to promote the creation of more access points across campus into this Policy. This includes collaborating with building directors and porters around campus to implement the project and maintain it.
 - 5.1.3. **Monthly Pickups:** using the yearly budget from student fees, the SSMU will provide free products that can be picked up by any student once a month on campus. Products will range from disposable to reusable and cater to a range of flows and sizes. The distribution of tampons, pads, underwear, cups, and reusable pads will be coordinated under the VP University Affairs.



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6. Sustainability

- 6.1. **Move towards Sustainability:** In accordance with the SSMU Sustainability Policy, the SSMU is strongly committed to the core principles of sustainability, especially along economic, social, and environmental lines. Sustainability is a core component of the SSMU's mission, and the SSMU will strive to integrate it within as many aspects as possible with regards to menstrual equity.
 - 6.1.1. **Accessible Sustainability:** In accordance with menstrual equity, the SSMU will work to provide accessible sustainable period products on campus because it can be difficult to access menstrual products in physical spaces on campus. Sustainable products are more expensive up front, pricey and inaccessible due to various reasons such as differing socioeconomic statuses and ability. Also, to address this, the SSMU will provide biodegradable tampons and pads, menstrual cups, reusable pads, and period underwear at no cost to students through a monthly pick up service as outlined in 5.1.3.
 - 6.1.2. **Environmental Sustainability:** To help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, energy wastage, and to help divert waste, the Vice-President University Affairs will look into more sustainable and environmentally friendly companies to work and partner with, and help increase the adoption and utilization of their products.
 - 6.1.3. **Economic Sustainability:** The SSMU will help reduce the financial burden on people who menstruate. Not only does this include providing free disposable products to members, this also includes providing reusable products, which are often substantially cheaper in the long run compared to disposable ones.
 - 6.1.4. **Social Sustainability:** The SSMU will be committed to providing affordable, and easily accessible products to all people who menstruate to help improve wellbeing and overall quality of life. The SSMU will be cognizant of these various factors and aim try to find and distribute high quality products to all members who menstruate, especially the most marginalized. The SSMU will try to stock as many bathrooms as possible with products. The SSMU will also run an educational campaign in conjunction with the monthly pick-ups.

7. Advocacy

- 7.1. **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



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- 7.1.1. **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.
- 7.1.2. **External Advocacy:** The Vice-President External Affairs 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 Vice-President External Affairs in specific.

8. Education

- 8.1. **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.
 - 8.1.1. **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.”
 - 8.1.1.1. **Monthly Campaigns:** In conjunction with monthly pickups (outlined in 5.1.3) the SSMU will run a campaign that provides information on periods that includes destigmatization, gender inclusive language, and addresses specific topics each month that focuses on an aspect of menstrual health. Topics can range from period poverty, the pink tax, gender, discrimination, and more.
- 8.2. **Normalization:** The normalization of periods will be a priority using educational initiatives (outlined in 8.1.2.) led by the SSMU. These educational initiatives will include posts and pamphlets about the social justice issues surrounding menstruation. Educational initiatives will be used to help provide more information on the language, practices, and general education around what periods are the nature of periods, the



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use of gender neutral language, terms that encompass the realistic experience of a period, and also normalize discussions around menstrual health.

APPROVED