

Period Poverty in New Zealand

Date:	7 June 2019
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Purpose

The purpose of this briefing is to inform you of the issue of period poverty in New Zealand, and to provide you with three policy initiative options to combat this.

Executive summary

This briefing proposes the provision of free sanitary items in all New Zealand schools following evidence provided of the effect of period poverty on educational outcomes and students' wellbeing. This follows similar provisions in the UK, Wales and Scotland to provide free access.

Currently in New Zealand there are a myriad of period poverty initiatives, however these exist in silos and are not consistently reaching the communities that lack access.

An all of government, national strategy to combat period poverty would give students dignity, access and support for such a natural part of their lives. This accompanied by consistent, professional and inclusive education as well as included reusable period products means the long-term savings in this area would be realised.

We also support the proposal put forward by NZUSA towards providing free sanitary items in all tertiary institutions.

Recommended action

This Discussion Paper recommends that we:

- a **Note** that period poverty is an increasing issue in New Zealand;
Noted
- b **Note** that in New Zealand, a number of social enterprises, charities and businesses currently provide a range of sanitary items to those below the poverty line;
Noted
- c **Note** that UK, Wales and Scotland have recently enacted legislation that provides free sanitary items to girls in schools;
Noted
- d **Note** the three policy interventions, and their corresponding costs and benefits, that aim to target this increasing period poverty in New Zealand; and
Noted
- e **Agree** to meet with officials and experts to discuss these policy interventions.
Agree / Disagree

Background

1. Evidence regarding the prevalence of period of New Zealand:

Almost a quarter of New Zealand women who responded to a KidsCan survey have missed school or work because they have been unable to afford sanitary items.

*The charity undertook the survey, thought to be the first of its kind in New Zealand, to understand the level of period poverty Kiwi girls and women are experiencing. The topic struck a chord, with more than 5,000 responses nationwide.

- 53.1% said they had found it difficult to access sanitary items due to cost at some point (8.6% frequently, 44.5% occasionally).
- 23.6% said they had missed school or work due to a lack of access to sanitary wear.

One in three respondents said they had had to prioritise buying other items, like food, over sanitary items. When they couldn't afford them, most (53.8%) resorted to toilet paper, but 7.7% had used rags, 3% old cloths and many mentioned using disposable or cloth nappies. KidsCan is particularly concerned by what teenagers are reporting. 27% of the survey respondents were aged 15-17 years. In the under 17 age group:

- 7% were currently struggling frequently to afford sanitary items.
- 29% said they had missed school or work due to having their period and lack of access to sanitary wear.

Overall, 6% of respondents said they were currently struggling to afford sanitary items. Of those:

- 84% had had to prioritise other items such as food over buying sanitary wear.
- 65% said they had missed school or work due to a lack of access to sanitary wear.

Dignity research:

Period poverty is a complex problem that manifests itself in a myriad of ways and the impact of Dignity in schools has been multifaceted. Since the beginning, the reduction of absenteeism has been recorded. During Term 1 2019, 72% (21) of schools mentioned that a core outcome of having free sanitary items meant their students were able to stay in school during their period.

Other outcomes of the initiative include:

- 81% felt it reduced feelings of shame for students.
- 87% of schools felt it improved their students' self-esteem.
- 69% felt it improved their ability to partake in sport.
- Donations resulting in teachers/nurses no longer paying for the items themselves occurred in 85% of schools.

Other anecdotal outcomes:

- Relief and happiness
- Improved cleanliness (not having to use toilet paper as pads)
- Less visits to the school nurse
- Reduced cost to families

Current policy initiatives

2. The government currently gives some funding to KidsCan for provision of sanitary items.

Private sector initiatives

In New Zealand a similar movement is bubbling. Dignity's mission has always been to make sanitary items accessible to all women in New Zealand. The vehicle for this is a women's wellbeing initiative for sanitary items in the workplace with a buy one give one model giving items to high schools around New Zealand. Currently they have 10 corporate partners helping to support over 95 schools from Invercargill to Northland have free, sustainable access to sanitary items each term - a total of 22,000 girls have access. Dignity are now looking to increase their beneficiary base to provide impact to the Red Cross, Family Planning clinics and the Pacific Islands.

Other initiatives fighting against period poverty include KidsCan and Salvation army, who use a traditional charity grant and donation-based model. There are alternative products on the market such as period underwear from I am Eva who have started a buy one give one initiative where they provide the give one product to the charity Shine. Several menstrual cup companies such as MyCup, Wā Collective and Hello Cup have impact initiatives with each purchase. Other groups such as Nope Sisters and The Period Place support and promote these initiatives through feminist clothing and period marketplaces.

There are also private citizen initiatives such as Zonta fundraising for items and supporting 25 schools in Northland. Another citizen Gus Row has been given donations to assist with him providing sanitary items to over 30 high schools in the Waikato and Tauranga region.

What all of these groups have in common is a collective goal to eradicate period poverty from New Zealand. Work has begun to bring these groups together, alongside the government to create an equivalent movement in New Zealand for free sanitary items.

New Zealand may not be able to be first or second in this movement, but being third is better than not at all.

Support currently:

KidCan schools: Undisclosed

Dignity: 101

Gus Row: 30

Zonta: 25

SPINZ: 36

Between these initiatives overlap exists between the different schools as they receive from multiple organisations due to need. Dignity has put together a spreadsheet of all New Zealand schools to understand schools that are not receiving support and this is estimated at:

Social Enterprises:

- Dignity
- Flow
- Wā Collective
- Necesses
- MyCup

Alternative reusable period products:

- I am Eva

Charities:

- Salvation Army
- KidsCan

Private citizen initiatives:

- SPINZ
- Go With The Flow
- Days for Girls
- The Period Place
- Gus Row

Global movements and initiatives

3. Below is a summary of how and why Scotland, UK and Wales introduced free sanitary for all schools.

Scotland - First mover 25th August 2018 (5.4 million population)

Following the successful rollout of a scheme offering free sanitary products in educational buildings in August 2018, Monica Lennon MSP introduced the *Sanitary Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill*.

This Bill was officially lodged in April 2019 and ensures that free access to sanitary products in schools, colleges and universities is a legal requirement.

The Scottish government has pledged £4m to boost provision in public buildings, with the aim to achieve the following outcomes:

- Reduce and remove the stigma attached to periods
- Ensure gender equality with women no longer having to pay for sanitary products on a monthly basis
- Increase income equality for those on lower incomes and disability benefits, who may not have the same means to afford sanitary products
- Address age inequality by enabling younger girls to access free sanitary products which would allow them to continue with their education;

UK - March 13th 2019 (66 million population)

The UK government has announced a pledge to provide period products in all compulsory education, including primary schools, secondary schools and colleges.

Children and Families Minister, Nadhim Zahawi, confirmed that the full scheme will be rolled out nationally from early 2020 and that period products in all schools will be fully funded by the Department of Education.

This scheme would work to address the following statistics from Plan International UK, which are a quantitative estimate of the current extent of period poverty in the UK:

- One in ten girls (10%) have been unable to afford sanitary wear
- One in seven girls (15%) have struggled to afford sanitary wear
- One in seven girls (14%) have had to ask to borrow sanitary wear from a friend due to affordability issues
- More than one in ten girls (12%) have had to improvise sanitary wear due to affordability issues
- One in five (19%) of girls have changed to a less suitable sanitary product due to cost

Wales - 23rd March 2019 (3.1 million population)

As part of the Welsh Government's £1m funding to address period poverty in communities across Wales, Cardiff Council announced the roll out of a period dignity scheme. This would see local authorities across Wales will receive £440,000 over the next two years to use in schools, community groups or foodbanks, all with the aim of tackling period poverty.

This scheme would involve the following measures:

- Cardiff Council are going to supply primary and secondary schools with the products and equipment to implement the scheme which will see dispensers installed in cubicles – as privacy was a key issue highlighted by pupils who were consulted in a period dignity survey last year.
- Schools will be provided with a period dignity sticker which will be used to identify cubicles in school toilets where pupils can access the free products.
- Free sanitary products will be distributed via community groups, schools and food banks across Wales.

Options available

Assumptions

The pricing and options provided below these are taken from retail pricing including the products from Organic Initiative¹ including regular tampons and pads, I Am Eva period underwear², Nest Consulting education services³ and an average costing of \$15 per delivery of items per term.

Calculations have been based on schools and female students data provided by the Ministry of Education New Zealand Schools directory last updated as at 16th May 2019⁴. Calculations for provision of items have been banded into three categories in accordance to the decile rating of the schools.

For further pricing analysis, calculations and analysis please see the Free Periods Policy Costing attachment.

¹ Pricing from Countdown online shopping as at 5th June 2019

² Pricing from I Am Eva online website as at 5th June 2019

³ <https://www.nestconsulting.nz/school-programmes/cycle-smarter/>

⁴ <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data-services/directories/list-of-nz-schools>

It would be expected that there would be cost savings from a competitive procurement process to allow for pricing to be below what has been calculated from retail prices. We have not included non-organic, plastic products in the options due to the environmental impact of these items.

Option One: Maximum intervention

4. Free organic pads, tampons, menstrual cups and period underwear to be provided in all New Zealand primary, intermediate, secondary schools with compulsory menstrual health education, with the amount provided determined from the decile rating of the institution.

Costs: **\$11,733,000**

5. Benefits:

- Comprehensive education provided, this would allow for students to be educated on all period products available to use and would ensure consistency of delivery of information to each student.
- 25% inclusion of reusable products. The inclusion of these items would result in a 25% reduction in costs in the following year due to the items being able to be used for 5+ years. This would also result in significant waste reduction in terms of sanitary item disposal, waterways disruption and landfill usage.
- This option provides full school coverage, research has found girls as young as 8 years old are experiencing their first period and provision of items should be provided as such.

Option two: Medium intervention

6. Free organic pads and tampons to be provided in all New Zealand primary, intermediate and secondary schools with compulsory menstrual health education, with the amount provided determined from the decile rating of the institution.

Costs: **\$6,879,00**

7. Benefits

- Comprehensive education provided
- Full school coverage

Option three: Minimum intervention

8. Free organic pads and tampons to be provided in all New Zealand intermediate and secondary schools, with the amount provided determined from the decile rating of the institution

Costs: **\$4,468,000**

9. Benefits
 - Cost efficient
 - Provides access to sanitary items that is adequate

Next steps

10. Meetings with officials to discuss these policy initiatives.

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Annex One: Supplementary material

Attached is comprehensive costing using the latest school data from May 2019 figures