

Provision of menstrual products in
federally regulated workplaces

Summary of Findings



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Summary of findings from the roundtable of experts: Provision of menstrual products in federally regulated workplaces

On June 8, 2021, the Labour Program convened a roundtable of experts. The Labour Program has committed to assessing potential regulatory amendments to require federally regulated employers to provide menstrual products for their employees. These amendments would be made to the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Regulations made under Part II of the *Canada Labour Code*.

During the roundtable, experts shared how other jurisdictions are implementing existing initiatives in terms of accessibility of products and distribution. The roundtable also helped to inform the Labour Program's policy and framework for consulting with stakeholders from various industries in fall 2021.

Canadians have raised concerns to the Labour Program that the absence of menstrual products in the workplace could lead to hygiene and health issues. When employees, including those who are gender diverse, find themselves without access to menstrual products, they may turn to unsuitable improvised solutions. Others may extend the use of products beyond their recommended timeframe. This may pose a health hazard due to the increased risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome. Some employees may also avoid the workplace due to the shame and stigma that often surrounds menstruation.

Background

In May 2019, the Labour Program published a **Notice of Intent (NOI)**. The NOI outlines a proposal to amend regulations to require employers to provide menstrual products in the workplace for use by their employees. The NOI provided stakeholders and members of the public the chance to provide input on the proposal. Most individuals who responded to the NOI support the proposal.

Stakeholders and members of the public shared opinions on what type of menstrual products should be provided. They also shared opinions on where the products should be located in the workplace. Respondents also commented on the importance of creating safe and fair access to menstrual products. They highlighted the need to consider potential financial implications of providing menstrual products in the workplace. For more information, please see the **What We Heard Report** on the Government's website.

Roundtable participants

During the roundtable, the Labour Program engaged with experts who have experience in developing, implementing and/or evaluating policies or initiatives. These initiatives aim to increase access to menstrual products in workplace, community or government settings. Twelve experts attended the roundtable from the following groups:

- United Way (Period Promise campaign)
- Period Packs
- The Period Purse
- Monthly Dignity
- City of Hamilton - Children's Services and Neighbourhood Development
- Professors from Douglas College and Concordia University
- Canadian Women's Foundation
- Fédération des femmes du Québec

What we heard – by topic

This section provides an overview of the common themes discussed during the roundtable of experts. Information shared by the experts supplements the feedback the Labour Program received following the NOI.

Impacts of Provision of Menstrual Products

Introducing the menstrual products initiative will reduce barriers for employees who menstruate. It will also allow them access to products in an emergency while continuing to engage in their work. This will increase productivity; increase economic gains; protect employees' dignity; and help employees feel more supported, valued, important, and seen.

The Labour Program should keep in mind the intersectional experiences that exist among people who menstruate in the workplace. Examples of intersectional experiences in the workplace include:

- individuals living with disabilities who may have challenges with dexterity or mobility (reaching products on counter or from dispenser)
- comfort with using single-use products
- cultural differences surrounding the use of menstrual products

One expert shared that about 50% of employees who menstruate will utilize menstrual products provided by the employer. Menstruators ranging from the top 1% income earners to those on social assistance have reported needing menstrual products in emergencies.

Providing Menstrual Products

Suggestions included dispensers and the possibility to repurpose existing coin dispensers. Experts mentioned that baskets on counter tops were helpful for quick roll out in the interim, but not for permanent purposes. The Labour program could consider a phased approach and require wall-mounted dispensers in all women's and all-gender washrooms. The Labour Program could later consider requiring menstrual products in men's washrooms.

General consensus was that all washrooms (men's, women's and all-gender) should have menstrual products. Experts discussed the importance of considering the following:

- the method of dispensing menstrual products
- the disposal method of products
- overall sanitation
- mobility challenges
- privacy matters

Procuring Menstrual Products

Experts shared that the Labour Program should encourage federally regulated employers to consider environmentally sustainable menstrual product distributors who ethically produce quality products. Employers may wish to consider reaching out to large-scale producers to see if they have any extra products. The most frequent suggestion for who should be responsible for putting the menstrual products in designated spaces was the custodial staff. In smaller offices, suggestions included having the owners stock the menstrual products, or having the employees trade off.

Non-Traditional Workplaces

Employers could provide menstrual products in mandatory first aid kits, to address the barriers of providing menstrual products in non-traditional workplaces¹. Staff rooms may also be an option on airplanes, trains, and boats. Another expert suggested that menstrual underwear for situations where there may not be access to washrooms for extended periods of time.

Cost

Several experts provided an estimated cost break down. Menstrual products (pads and tampons) for 1 full-time employee who menstruates would range between \$10.25 and \$25.00² per year. In addition to the cost of menstrual products, basic dispensers range from \$20 to \$300 and disposal bins are around \$70 each. On average, people who menstruate use approximately 2 menstrual products every 8 hours. Some experts noted that although there was a high take-up rate at first, over time the products were used less frequently.

¹ A non-traditional workplace can be interpreted as not being in a building or office setting. It includes the air (airplanes), rail (trains) and marine (ships) industries. It can also cover mobile employees that are not bound by a central physical location such as the telecommunication and trucking industries. Remote workplaces can be defined as workplaces for which the ambulance response time is more than 2 hours.

² The range reflects the cost for workplaces where employees rely on menstrual products supplied by the employer only in emergency situations versus where employees rely on menstrual products supplied by the employer for the duration of their 8-hour shift.