

Promising programs and initiatives to increase menstrual equity: Inside and outside Canada

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Menstrual Cycle Research Group
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We would like to acknowledge that Douglas College campuses, where we live, learn, work and play, are located on the unceded traditional territories of the Coast Salish Peoples of the QayQayt and Kwikwetlem First Nations.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The following report, prepared for Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), provides a high-level environmental scan of promising programs and initiatives to increase menstrual equity and address period poverty. The report shares findings from programs and initiatives both inside and outside Canada. The current report is one of three submitted to WAGE: Literature review, Qualitative research and High-level environmental scan.

For the purposes of this report, a **program** is defined as an established plan of action that does not have a specific end date. An **initiative** is defined as a one-off project that has a defined timeline, budget or goal. Initiatives often lead to programs and many programs include initiatives. Programs and initiatives can involve a range of actors, including individual activists or advocates, community-based or grassroots organizations, not-for-profit groups/organizations, institutions, government agents (e.g. municipal, provincial, federal), or businesses and corporations. The present scan was limited to materials located via publicly available online information. As such, we recommend future research to capture the full range of programs and initiatives currently operating in Canada. As we note in this report, many menstrual equity initiatives and programs are run by volunteers or as part of other services to the community. Therefore, many promising programs and initiatives fell outside the scope of the present report.

The report begins with a summary overview of relevant context factors which informed the methodology and analysis. Findings are broken down within and outside Canada across four main categories: distribution (of menstrual supplies), education, advocacy and research. We conclude with a section on the strengths and limitations of the present research.

There are a growing number of promising programs and initiatives advancing menstrual equity and addressing period poverty within and outside Canada. Many more programs and initiatives are being researched, designed and conceived, both in Canada and elsewhere in the Global North.

The increase in programs and initiatives reflects the growing momentum resulting from changes to taxation law and international collaborations between researchers and advocates, including, but not limited to, work in the United States, the United Kingdom, Scotland, England, India,

Australia, New Zealand and France.

As reflected in the Literature review, knowledge and awareness of period poverty are growing, and there is a marked proliferation of individuals, groups and organizations who are eager to take action in support of menstruators and menstrual equity. Initiatives supported by provincial governments have drawn criticism, in some cases, for not adequately addressing the needs of menstruators (1). As policy is introduced at the federal level, it will be key to look to examples of policies that meet immediate needs and address underlying systemic factors. Recent research from Schmitt et al. highlights the importance of engaging community members and using pilot projects to introduce programs in such a way that ensures long-term impact and sustainability (2).

As we highlight in this report, as well as the Qualitative research, menstrual equity advocates face many challenges, some of which are unique to the menstrual justice movement. Existing research and reports from the not-for-profit sector have begun to describe promising programs and initiatives; however, there is no unified review structure. Going forward, it will be important to employ frameworks, informed by research expertise and community knowledge, that will help to evaluate the strengths and limitations of programs and initiatives.

NOTES FOR THE READER

Throughout this report, we employ the term **menstruators** to acknowledge that not all people who menstruate identify as women or girls, and that not all women and girls menstruate, unless it is a direct quote.

In order to disrupt the commodification and gendering of menstruation, we employ the term **menstrual** or **period supplies**, instead of menstrual products or feminine hygiene products, unless it is a direct quote.

For the purposes of this report, we understand **menstrual supplies** as a range of devices and techniques that menstruators employ to manage menstrual blood. This could include reusable supplies, such as period underwear/briefs, pads, liners or menstrual cups. This could also include disposable supplies, such as pads, tampons and liners. This could also include techniques, such as free bleeding or allowing menstrual blood to flow without obstruction. We also identify that menstruators employ other items, such as hormonal contraceptives and hormonal intrauterine devices. Menstrual supplies could also include items used during menstruation to manage pain or discomfort, e.g. hot water bottles. Where appropriate, we refer to the specific item(s) in question, e.g. disposable tampon, period underwear, hot water bottle.

REVIEWING PROMISING PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

REVIEWING PROMISING PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

Recently, in Canada and around the world, there has been a rising interest in the development of programs and initiatives to address period poverty and advance menstrual equity. As noted in the Literature review, in Canada, there is a need for further research into the prevalence and intersectional impacts of period poverty. There is also a need to foster knowledge that identifies the factors which contribute to menstrual taboo and stigma, as well as menstrual-related inequities, including access to menstrual supplies and menstrual health support, services and education. Outside of Canada, the extent and impact of period poverty on vulnerable and marginalized populations is well-documented. The growing body of menstruation studies literature at the international level, as well as research from the community, grassroots and not-for-profit sectors, have been key in the establishment of nascent programs and initiatives in Canada.

As much as programs and initiatives related to menstruation are new, interest in and awareness of sexual and reproductive health as key factors in feminist activism and movements to advance gender equity and reproductive justice have a long and established history (3,4). Referring back to the **Key frameworks** outlined in the Literature review, contemporary menstruation activism is increasingly attuned to intersectionality, gender equity, menstrual health, global perspectives of human rights, decolonizing menstruation and cultural reclamation, and sustainability.

As menstrual equity and period poverty become part of policy discussions, there is a need for a reflective eye on programs and initiatives. For example, campaigns advocating for menstrual supplies can potentially reinforce stigma, such as the need to stay clean or hide menstrual blood (5). In other cases, distribution initiatives exclude trans and non-binary menstruators or fail to fully consider what marginalized or vulnerable groups need most acutely. Addressing period poverty and advancing menstrual equity means providing necessities in the short-term in a manner that is responsive to the needs of menstruators as a broadly defined group, as well as engaging in ongoing work to address systemic factors.

Existing examples of evaluation

Existing research highlights that the lack of evaluation frameworks within menstrual equity and period poverty programs and initiatives is a significant point of concern. Policy and programming are being developed in the absence of research (6). In addition, there is a lack of consistent terminology and application of concepts (7). At the same time, it is worth underlining why there is no research, which is, in and of itself, a gender equity issue. The sexual and reproductive health of women, girls, trans and non-binary people has long been a neglected field of study, and is only now becoming an established site of policy, programming and scholarly inquiry. As noted by Hennegan et al., interdisciplinary research and collaboration are a key element in building frameworks for review (8).

The need for research often places historically marginalized groups at a disadvantage, many of whom already know, through their own lived experience, the equity issues they face. Demands for formalized scholarly research also place marginalized groups and organizations at a disadvantage, particularly those seeking to support cultural reclamation, including Indigenous groups, as well as racialized menstruators impacted by colonialism. For example, the need to 'prove' that traditional knowledge ought to be restored reinforces colonial power relations. Further, we understand through informal discussions that, in many instances, Elders and Knowledge Keepers are actively working with traditional knowledge related to rites of passage, including practices related to the menstrual cycle. These practices are not likely to be widely shared through public means given the sacred nature of the teachings. To this end, inclusive, culturally attuned, community-based knowledge gathering has been identified as a key factor contributing to lasting outcomes (9). As we discuss in the presentation of results, the Period Poverty Task Force model, which includes a pilot project where evaluation of programming is carried out and directed by community groups and organizations, is an example of such an initiative.

Across published reports, there are a few instances of evaluations related to pilot projects designed to distribute menstrual supplies and address period poverty. The Access to Sanitary Products Pilot: Evaluation Report (10), produced for the Scottish Government in 2018, provides detailed information about the structure of the pilot project and documents the impact of the initiative on participants and groups/organizations responsible for distributing supplies. The evaluation model considered a range of factors on participants, such as finances, well-being, comfort and the reduction of menstrual stigma. For organizations, the evaluation model considered the ways that the initiative strengthened relationships between community members

and the centre or distribution site. Other factors considered included preference around the site for distribution and access to menstrual supplies. In a similar fashion, the Period Promise Research Report (11) highlights the experience of menstruators to assess impact, as well as the accounts of community organizations involved in distribution.

The Period product scheme: the learner perspective (12) reports research from an initiative by the Department of Education in England. The research focused on the experience of menstruators and the impact of the distribution initiative. The report centres the experience of menstruators in the research and review of the initiative. While this report did lead to recommendations related to the best way to distribute supplies, the aforementioned reports provided a more global view, where organizations involved in distribution were part of the reported results and research. All three reports are examples of evaluation related to an initiative which aims to simultaneously understand and address period poverty.

A recent report, *Advancing Menstrual Health, Education and Economic Progress*, provides a high-level overview of menstrual health initiatives from a global perspective. The report details the overall status of menstrual health, existing data related to educational impact, laws, policies/programs in schools and organizations engaging in advocacy. The report also highlights the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on period poverty, including associated programs and initiatives. The report is a useful starting point for considering the prevalence of period poverty through a global comparative scope. It also emphasizes the strong connection between advocacy, education and policy to address period poverty (13). Another recent report published by the government of Québec, by the Conseil du Statut de la Femme, provides an excellent and detailed overview of a range of existing menstrual supply distribution strategies (see pages 38-61) (14); however, the report echoes our findings that there is an absence of evaluation mechanisms.

Challenges facing menstrual equity advocates and organizations

The menstrual equity movement shares struggles with other related social movements. Many individuals seeking to address sexual and gender-based violence, advance reproductive health and rights, fight for trans inclusion and push for disability rights are doing so because they have lived experience of these inequities. As we note in the Qualitative research, many menstrual

equity advocates have experienced period poverty; however, through connecting with others, they became empowered to push for change. In addition, there are specific challenges that shape the work of menstrual equity advocates and organizations, as outlined below.

Periods are stigmatized, but have gone through a dramatic and radical transformation in a relatively short time frame.

Possibility for 'quick fixes' (e.g. giving someone a disposable tampon) can make period equity relatable, but can also lead to over simplification of 'the' issue.

While menstrual equity is an emergent field, there is a lot of information and knowledge that does exist. There is a need to address duplication and build networks for information and knowledge sharing.

The menstrual equity movement is fast-paced and ever changing.

Many individuals and organizations involved in menstrual equity advocacy are volunteers, e.g. students, activists, working in the not-for-profit sector and volunteering in addition to

- while passion for change may be unlimited, capacity is not
- impact on length of involvement, e.g. capacity to develop and sustain programming
- impact on structure of organizations, especially grassroots community initiatives, e.g. some groups have access to greater resources to promote or share information about their work

Steps taken, versus the ideal

- in an ideal world, programs and initiatives would align perfectly with definitions of menstrual equity; would be intersectional, culturally attuned, decolonizing, sustainable and completely reflect a holistic understanding of menstruation and menstruators
- many individuals or organizations are taking initial steps in what they know is a much longer process

Questions to consider when reviewing programs and initiatives

With the above challenges in mind, and drawing from the literature, our team developed the following questions as a working guide to review programs and initiatives. As information was not always readily available, these questions were not employed in a systematic fashion. Instead, we refer back to them, where possible, as we present the program or initiative in question. Where relevant, we also include connections to the literature or broader context.

Who is involved and why?

Specific considerations:

- Are menstruators involved? If yes, how?
- Is intersectionality reflected in the constitution of the group/organization and/or in the population supported?
- What kind of position or role do individuals in the group/organization have within society and/or the broader menstrual equity movement?
- Is the program or initiative driven by menstruators themselves OR engaging menstruators and those with lived experience as part of development of programming or initiatives?
- Who are they partnering with? Why?
- Why is the individual/group/organization invested in advancing menstrual equity and/or addressing period poverty? Are vested interests transparent/identified?

What frameworks underpin the program or initiative and how are they connected to the actions being taken?

Specific considerations:

- Are actions informed by research, community knowledge or other forms of knowledge?
- Are actions taken cognizant of and reflective of the Canadian context? e.g. impact of colonialism, sustainability and menstrual health, impact of regional differences in access to supports
- Are actions targeting surface level or systemic change? e.g. poverty, need for supplies versus understanding need to address systemic factors
- If actions are surface level, is it because doing more is not currently possible?

Where does the program or initiative seek to have an impact and for how long?

Specific considerations:

- What region or area does the individual/group/organization focus on? Why?
- Is the program or initiative scalable/replicable to other regions or areas with similar populations or characteristics?
- How long has the program or initiative been in place? Where does the present work fit within the larger picture of the individual/group/organization?

Does the program or initiative reflect a holistic understanding of menstruation and/or menstruators?

Specific considerations:

- Does the program or initiative acknowledge menstruators as a broad group with diverse needs? e.g. employ inclusive language, such as menstruators and menstrual supplies/products, as opposed to feminine hygiene; e.g. design of inclusive programming, including culturally sensitive materials, reflecting differential impact of menstrual stigma
- Does the program or initiative seek to acknowledge menstrual health as a broad category, even if they are potentially only addressing one dimension? e.g. extends across the life course, including a range of experiences, pain, overall health, mental well-being, as well as menopause, puberty, menstrual cycle, as a whole
- Does the program or initiative foreground the autonomy of menstruators? e.g. menstruators know what works best for them, but have right to knowledge that can support their decision making; e.g. understand importance of cultural identity and context

The following section presents the methodology guiding the search and structure for the discussion of findings.

METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

In this section, we present the methodology that guided the High-level environmental scan presented in this report, which included targeted internet searches. We focused on the following four categories in our search: distribution (of menstrual supplies), education, advocacy and research. Example searches included: **menstrual equity, period poverty, distributing period products**. In order to capture a broad landscape of programs and initiatives, we searched each province and territory across the aforementioned categories. For the international scan, we searched countries with similar landscapes and systems as Canada, such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States, the United Kingdom and France.

For this scan, we define a program as an already established plan of action that does not have a defined end date. We define an initiative as a one-off project that has a defined timeline, budget or goal. In selecting programs and initiatives, we aimed to reflect different kinds that operate in a range of sectors/levels and target general or distinct populations. Information about programs and initiatives was gathered, where possible, directly from the organizational websites or reports; however, we have also supplemented this with public presentations, communications and news media reports, as needed.

In presenting the results from the scan, we begin with a high-level overview of the different kinds of programs and initiatives commonly found across the sector. In each category, for both the Canadian and international contexts, we provide a detailed overview of two programs or initiatives.

PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES IN CANADA



PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES IN CANADA

In Canada, there are a growing number of programs and initiatives aimed at increasing menstrual equity and addressing period poverty. Our research revealed that there are a range of individuals, groups and organizations, both formal and informal, across the various provinces and territories. Our high-level scan indicated a concentration of programming and policy in Québec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. Other regions of the country have nascent programs and initiatives that are more disparately distributed and/or were not readily searchable. As noted above, programming and initiatives may exist, but may not be readily discoverable through the internet, social media, etc.

Overall, we noted a concentration of programs and initiatives within the education sector, both K-12 and post-secondary. The inclusion of free disposable menstrual supplies in the education sector has been impactful and has raised the profile of menstrual equity as a policy issue (2). At the same time, there have been instances where menstrual supply distribution strategies at the provincial level in the K-12 sector do not include all sites, e.g. reserves and private schools. In addition, there are many cases where the distribution of menstrual supplies only includes disposable pads and tampons.

Another key sector of emerging programming lies within the community-based and not-for-profit sectors. Several organizations are operating at a high-level with representation across a few provinces. For example, Moon Time Sisters have chapters in Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Ontario and Manitoba, as well as distribution channels in other regions. United Way's Period Promise campaign is well-established within British Columbia and has an increasing presence in other regions, including Alberta. There are a number of individuals or community groups engaging in menstrual supply distribution within a local, yet broadly defined region, e.g. Ayesha Ahmad and Abeer Ahmad created a free period pantry to increase access in the Yukon (15) and Hovak Johnston and the Arctic Teen Pad Challenge, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories (16).



Several initiatives have emerged from partnerships between a range of actors, including community and grassroots organizations, the private sector, and government or institutions. For example, many not-for-profit organizations involved in the distribution of supplies in Ontario have partnered with Diva Cup, and the Réseau Québécois d'Action pour la Santé des Femmes (RQASF) engages with a range of local and regional organizations as part of programming and outreach, such as Monthly Dignity, Changing the Flow, local food banks, and student societies. RQASF has announced a more recent collaboration with Université Québec à Montréal (UQAM) and the Institut Santé et Société and the Collectif Genre, santé et environnement. The new initiative will bring together a range of groups to increase knowledge and access to reusable menstrual supplies for students and individuals facing menstrual precarity (17).

In the following section, we present research findings that reflect programs and initiatives in Canada across the four categories: distribution, education, advocacy and research. In each case, we begin with a high-level overview of programs and initiatives, including descriptions of a range of strategies. We then provide two detailed descriptions for each section, as well as related link(s).



Distribution

Distribution of menstrual supplies is a major component of the menstrual equity movement in Canada. As we will note in the Qualitative research, many advocates began their involvement through engaging in local action to gather and distribute supplies. Across Canada, there are many examples of organizations, student groups, government bodies, etc. who are involved in the distribution of supplies. The Qualitative research provides additional details related to different procurement and distribution methods.

In brief, for groups and organizations providing menstrual supplies directly to community groups, common distribution methods include the procurement of menstrual supplies through donations or direct purchasing and delivery to organizations (who subsequently transmit the supplies to community members). Other programs include the installation of barrier-free disposable menstrual supply dispensers directly within public institutions, such as schools or community centres. The latter strategy has the capacity to meet immediate needs for emergency menstrual supplies in restrooms and, if intersectionality is taken into account, can provide support for many menstruators as part of their daily life. Key considerations to support gender-diverse menstruators and persons with disabilities are outlined in the Literature review; however, it is worth underlining that while the provision of free supplies in restrooms can be impactful, such an approach reaches a limited range of menstruators and does not address period poverty within the broader context of an individual's life.

Distribution strategies that are developed with a view to providing support for the long-term will consider the fact that the need for menstrual supplies is ongoing, particularly if individuals are using disposable supplies. Effective programs will consider programming that is cognizant of the needs of gender-diverse menstruators (18), responsive to distinct cultural experiences related to menstruation (19) and provide choice/diversity relative to supplies offered. Furthermore, robust distribution methods will account for regional inequities in gaining access to necessities and ensure that menstruators can access supplies in an individualized fashion (20) (e.g. mailing programs), especially for rural and remote communities. Below, we highlight two programs that provide strong examples of distribution strategies that take steps to address the unique needs and systemic factors that contribute to menstrual inequities.



Québec Subsidy Program, Sustainable Feminine Hygiene Products, Municipal

In 2020, Mme. L'Ovary, a registered non-profit in Québec, presented a list of recommendations surrounding a subsidy program for reusable menstrual supplies in Montréal. The subsidy program proved successful and dozens of other municipalities in Québec have followed suit. Although variable across municipalities, the subsidy generally reimburses menstruators for a percentage (or the entirety) of the cost of reusable menstrual supplies, such as menstrual cups, reusable underwear, reusable pads/liners, etc. Completion of a form, proof of residence and invoices are generally required for this subsidy. The program is an excellent example of one that centres sustainability while seeking to address period poverty. Sustainable menstrual supplies provide ongoing support for menstruators and break the cycle of needing to purchase disposable pads and tampons every month.

This subsidy program is unique in Canada and represents a replicable model that has been adopted by more than 50 municipalities across the province. There are a few components that make this program unique, also referring back to our questions for consideration. The development of the subsidy program was led by menstruators. As mentioned previously, the program centres sustainability within menstrual policy development, and a central goal is relieving the burden of monthly cost for purchasing supplies. The program takes into account personal preferences by including a range of options for the subsidy program, e.g. menstrual cups, washable pads. The program reinforces the importance of a menstruator's right to choose how to meet their needs. By centering the need for supplies, while recognizing the awareness of larger systemic inequities such as poverty, sustainability and menstrual health, this robust program advances menstrual equity in Canada.

Related link(s):

[Mme. L'ovary website](#)

[Example from Lévis, Québec](#)



Moon Time Sisters

Moon Time Sisters is a volunteer-led initiative which supports northern Indigenous communities in Ontario, Quebec, Nunavut, Newfoundland and Labrador, the North West Territories, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Alberta and Manitoba. This initiative is associated with the registered charity, True North Aid. To date, they have shipped over two million menstrual supplies to these communities, completely free of cost. They build connections with public schools, midwifery institutions, Friendship Centres, food banks and other community programs to distribute menstrual supplies. Moon Time Sisters focuses on building long-term connections with the communities where they distribute supplies. Their programs have four main target areas: education (sharing Indigenous knowledge), distribution, spiritual advocacy (e.g. supporting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, amplifying Indigenous voices) and emotional empowerment (e.g. celebrating/honouring the moontime). To receive support, communities can apply for menstrual aid through their online portal.

Groups such as Moon Time Sisters speak to the importance of an intersectional lens when designing menstruation advocacy programming - i.e. one that centres location, Indigeneity, community needs and structural change. In addition, Moon Time Sisters highlights the importance of moving beyond a one-dimensional understanding of the cultural impact of menstrual stigma, which can fail to acknowledge the impact of colonialism on menstruation experiences (21). As distribution of menstrual supplies is one part of a much larger program, Moon Time Sisters is an example of a menstrual supply distribution program that extends beyond a surface-level response. In addition, the group has played an important role in highlighting the needs of Indigenous communities, especially in rural and remote regions, within the popular news media (22,23).

Related link(s):

[Moon Time Sisters Website](#)



Period Promise

The United Way's Period Promise Campaign, or Period Promise engages in the collection and distribution of menstrual supplies across a range of sectors, political advocacy at the municipal, provincial and federal levels, community mobilization and research. While Period Promise primarily targets period poverty, the program is wide-ranging and its impact extends to the general population, in addition to reflecting key elements of intersectionality. The Period Promise collection campaign runs between May and June each year, gathering monetary donations, and menstrual supplies, which are then distributed to community partners. This campaign leverages United Way's existing resources such as personnel and infrastructure to implement the campaign at a large scale. In addition, Period Promise also organizes regular meetings and brings together a diverse group of menstrual equity advocates, including British Columbia-based businesses and not-for-profit organizations. Period Promise engages a range of advocates through innovative means. For example, the Period Promise Policy agreement is signed by businesses and institutions as a commitment to provide free menstrual supplies to their employees. This campaign is an example of an initiative that has a direct impact on the experience of menstruators in a range of public sites, while simultaneously encouraging a conversation about the general needs of menstruators.

The Period Promise research report surveyed 1,600 British Columbians and 12 community organizations that support equity-deserving groups. The report is an excellent and unique source of data for understanding the extent of period poverty in British Columbia. Based on our survey of existing grey literature, this report is also the only research study that presents disaggregated data specific to the Canadian context, including a range of intersecting forms of inequity, e.g. disability, Indigeneity, race, socio-economic status, age, education, gender identity. Additionally, the report includes valuable insights from community service providers about different menstrual supply needs and distribution strategies. In the Period Promise program, research is a key feature that strengthens overall program efficacy, helps to build sustainable relationships within the community, and supports policy change.

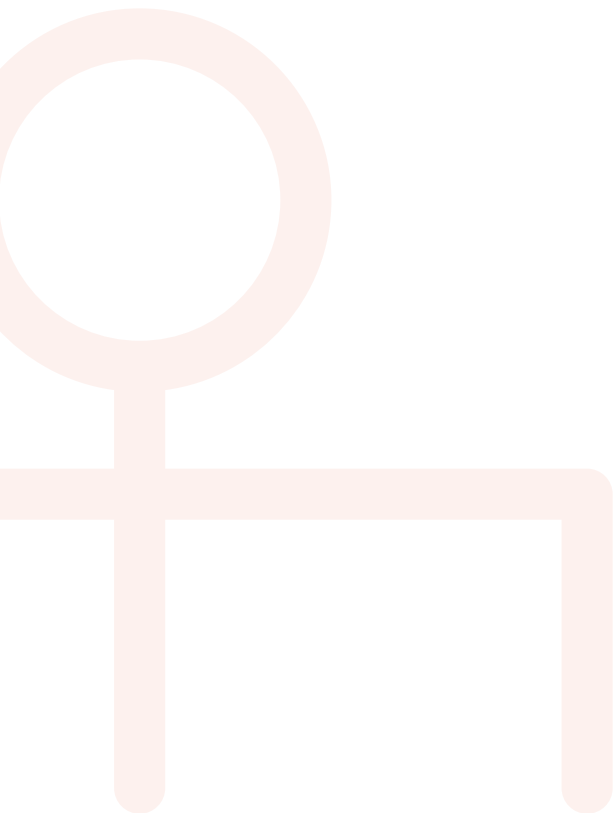


The United Way's Period Promise campaign is also present in Alberta, where a similar model of supply collection and distribution is followed. With funding from the provincial government, United Way Alberta is also providing menstrual supplies in provincial public schools. Other Period Promise campaigns are operating in a range of sites including Northern British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario. Campaigns largely focus on menstrual supply distribution, with a lesser focus on education and research.

Related link(s):

[Full Research Report](#)

[Period Promise](#)





Education

Education related to menstruation has been identified as a key component of the menstrual equity movement. Education can support information sharing and knowledge mobilization for menstruators and non-menstruators alike. In Canada, existing education initiatives include workshops related to types and availability of various menstrual supplies, importance of inclusion of trans and non-binary menstruators and much more. Research highlights the importance of comprehensive menstruation education (6,24) across the school system (24) in order to dismantle menstrual stigma, provide knowledge for menstruators and include non-menstruators (25) within destigmatization efforts. Education informed by intersectionality and directed towards menstruators, as well as those providing services, is key for ensuring the full range of experiences and needs are included (26). Robust education programs and initiatives will work to address underlying systemic causes of menstrual inequities, specifically period stigma, and identify diversity amongst menstruators.

In Canada, menstruation education is not a dominant feature in formal sexual and reproductive health curricula. Through informal discussions, we have come to learn of cases where specific individuals, such as teachers or school employees, have developed or included knowledge about the menstrual cycle or menstrual supplies as part of education. We have also come to learn of ongoing efforts to bolster traditional knowledge and teachings about rites of passage and menstruation within Indigenous communities. In our scan, we also found that menstruation education can take other forms, e.g. podcasts, blog posts, interactive modules, toolkits. As noted in the Literature review, the internet and social media have been identified as key sites for accessing information about the menstrual cycle (27), and can be particularly impactful for groups who have experienced menstrual exclusion (28). Below are detailed descriptions of two educational programs that utilize education to support menstruators and address the root causes of menstrual inequities.



Period Purse

Period Purse is a registered Canadian charity with chapters in Ontario and other provinces. This charity focuses on providing menstruators with supplies, as well as education and advocacy to end stigma. A unique component of their organization is the Menstruation Nation program. This educational program was launched in 2017 to address the need for a more systemic approach to reducing menstrual inequities; and, therefore, focuses solely on the reduction of stigma surrounding menstruation.

The topics covered in this program address menstrual health, menstrual equity, and menstrual sustainability (e.g. Periods 101, Period Poverty, Reusable Period Products, Advocacy for Period Equity in Canada, and Planet Positive Periods: Sustainable Periods). Teachers or students in middle or high schools can send a request to Period Purse to start a Menstruation Nation in their school, inviting trained educators to host on-site sessions.

Currently, this program is focused on the eastern region of Canada; however, it is a replicable model that can be scaled across the nation. The topics explore a range of information regarding health, sustainability and equity. One suggested area for expansion is the decolonization of menstruation, as well as intersectionality and its impact on the menstrual experience. This is especially relevant when discussing scalability, as the content must be appropriate to the geography and population in question. Overall, this programming addresses a major gap in the system and uses education as a means to address the root of period poverty.

Related link(s):

[Period Purse](#)



Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights (ACSHR) is a Canadian organization that builds on the work of the Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada, Canadians for Choice and others who have paved the way for sexual health and rights (29). The organization works through a collaborative approach to provide direct and indirect support and/or information, advance progressive policies, develop inclusive sex-ed, etc. As menstruation health and sexual health are intertwined, the organization also provides educational material relating to reproductive health on their website. In a section specific to menstruation, the website details information regarding the menstrual cycle, tracking the cycle, premenstrual syndromes, polycystic ovary syndrome, endometriosis, perimenopause and menopause. This information is presented in a clinical fashion, providing menstruators with vital information regarding menstruation. The website is designed to break down barriers to information across Canada. As such, it is a strong example of sexual and reproductive health information that includes menstruation, broadly, in line with current definitions (8).

As judgment-free information can be difficult to access in school systems, the utility and reach of this platform is commendable, as well as the strong network of collaborators across the nation. Other notable components include the usage of non-gendered language, discussing related conditions, such as premenstrual dysphoric disorder, and highlighting that menstruation should not cause one to frequently miss work or school. Going forward, there is a potential to strengthen resources, such as ACSHR, to provide barrier-free information and resources directly to menstruators and non-menstruators.

Related link(s):

[Action Canada Website](#)

[Reproductive Health](#)



Advocacy

As Scala's research documents, the tampon tax was removed in Canada as a result of the efforts of a range of individuals and groups working together over time (30). As menstrual equity policies are introduced in Canada, it is vital that the work of advocates to bring about these changes is not lost. Many actions that have led to changes within institutions and municipalities have involved one-time demands for change and, as a result, are difficult to capture.

In Canada, there are a growing number of individuals and groups involved in menstrual equity advocacy. As advocacy efforts expand with policy, there is a need to avoid the duplication of efforts. Many groups lack sustained funding or struggle with capacity limits as they rely heavily on volunteer labour. As we cite in the Qualitative research, while some advocates are collaborating with others, there are many cases where individuals are working with limited support. Location has often been a key factor in determining collaborations, with many advocates working together within a defined region. However, the internet has been a key tool for allowing more extensive collaboration across different regions in Canada. To this end, there is a need for inter-regional structures that will support networking, resource sharing and potentially collaborative work. Two recent examples worth underlining are the online event series, Share the Platform, and CHARMS.



Share the Platform

Share the Platform is a recently launched online event series. The series began in 2020 and reflects a collaboration between three organizations working to advance menstrual equity in distinct but related ways: Changing the Flow, Days for Girls and Red Dot Project. Changing the Flow is an Ontario-based social enterprise that has been involved in a range of advocacy efforts, including the distribution of menstrual supplies, policy advocacy and research (31). Days for Girls Canada Society is a registered Canadian not-for-profit that is affiliated with Days for Girls International (32). The aim of the organization is to address menstrual inequity through increasing access to menstrual supplies and reproductive health information. Red Dot Project is based in Toronto and seeks to 'provide people who are experiencing homelessness in Toronto the opportunity to manage their periods in a safe and hygienic way' (33). These three organizations engage in a range of activities on their own; however, the Share the Platform series reflects an important instance of collaboration to grow the movement, centre menstruators and acknowledge intersectionality/context as part of programming.

This initiative currently involves three events under the umbrella of Menstrual Ed 101. The topics covered reflect key areas for advocates, both experienced and novice, including 'Politics and Policy', 'A student perspective' and 'An Indigenous Lens'. Each event is built in collaboration between the organizations and the participants. Events are open to the public, free and virtual. The events are meant to connect with those already in the menstrual equity space, but draw in others as well. This is a promising nascent initiative with the potential to expand and/or be replicated at the local or regional level. The event series provides an important opportunity for cross-country capacity and knowledge mobilization, and also serves to include diverse menstruators in an intentional and direct fashion, as well as organizations with the capacity to effect change at a variety of levels.

Related link(s):

[Changing the Flow](#)



Collaborative hub: advocacy for reproductive and menstrual services (CHARMS)

CHARMS stands for 'Collaborative Hub: Advocacy for Reproductive And Menstrual Services'.

'CHARMS is a network for the reproductive & menstrual health ecosystem. We bring together, connect and amplify students, professionals, advocates in the space and create opportunities for collaboration' (34).

CHARMS was developed by Free Periods Canada, recognizing the utility of digital tools to support access to menstrual health education, encourage sharing and collaboration amongst menstruators and menstrual equity advocates (28) and the need for increased awareness about activities in different regions across Canada. CHARMS is a nascent promising initiative. The initial design allows members to connect through a closed space and has the capacity to grow to include additional opportunities for network building and resource sharing.

Related link(s):

[Free Periods Canada](#)



Research

Research is a vital force in advocacy as it can identify gaps in knowledge and provides a platform for gathering evidence to push for policy change. As noted in the Literature review, existing research in Canada is in a nascent stage. Important initiatives to advance knowledge have emerged within the community and not-for-profit sectors. Many organizations have carried out research with a view to pushing for specific policy changes at the municipal, provincial or federal level. In addition, there is a nascent body of scholarship that situates menstrual equity within the Canadian context.

As policy expands, it is important that community groups and organizations have access to data that is specific to the region and context they are working in. The Literature review provides a detailed overview of areas for further research. In Canada, two programs that are worth underlining are research carried out as part of Campagne Rouge by the Réseau Québécois d'Action pour la Santé des Femmes (RQASF) and the Period Poverty Pilot Project Fund by the Government of British Columbia.



Campagne Rouge, RQASF

The RQASF is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing the rights and interests of women, broadly conceived, but with a focus on health and health rights. The organization has a broad mandate and has been an important site for the publication of barrier-free reports and information related to a range of issues related to women's health and well-being. Notably, RQASF has published reports related to menopause, mental health and menstruation, as well as reports on general health and social factors impacting the condition of women. Many publications are available in French and English, making RQASF one of few organizations functioning in both official languages.

Campagne Rouge included many dimensions, such as knowledge mobilization, public engagement, but also research. The Campagne Rouge is now closed and has become Le Fil Rouge, a separate program dedicated to advancing menstrual equity (35). The Campagne Rouge research project is one of a few far-reaching research studies in Canada. It involved a survey with more than 3,000 responses, including quantitative and qualitative data. The project gathered data about the prevalence of menstrual precarity, the medicalization of menstruation, as well as the persistence of stigma and negative stereotypes. The research is a unique instance of a holistic and global account of menstrual precarity that takes into account the broader social context. For example, the survey asks about a range of menstrual supplies and includes questions about the use of hormonal contraceptives and other devices. In addition to the research report, RQASF also produced additional outputs to ensure the findings reached a broad audience and employed social media campaigns to raise awareness.

Related link(s):

[Campagne Rouge](#)



Period Poverty Pilot Project Fund, Government of British Columbia

In May of 2022, the Government of British Columbia announced an investment of \$750,000 to 'end period poverty and remove the stigma associated with menstruation' (36). The task force falls under the mandate of the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction and includes individuals from a range of sectors. The development of the task force can be situated as part of the broader menstrual equity advocacy organizations operating in British Columbia. The Chair of the task force, Nikki Hill, was the previous co-Chair of the United Way's Period Promise Campaign. Overall, the task force is a promising initiative that has the capacity to generate sustainable support for those facing menstrual precarity. In part, this is because the pilot builds on previous policy changes at the municipal and provincial level, as well as ongoing advocacy involving a range of actors.

In addition, it provides an example of an important model to consider for new initiatives. Part of the work that will inform the recommendations made by the task force involves funding for 'short-term, impact-focused pilot projects testing out models for increasing access to free menstrual products in BC'. The call for projects invited community-based organizations and independent community-based researchers to propose projects. The call also underlines the importance of reducing stigma in a 'manner that is culturally relevant', increasing awareness, and highlighting intersectionality (37). This initiative has the potential to foster innovative ways of addressing period poverty, reducing stigma, and centring culture and intersectionality. In addition, this initiative embeds community mobilization as part of research which has been demonstrated as an impactful path to improving sexual and reproductive health outcomes (9).

Related link(s):

[Period Poverty Pilot Project Fund](#)

[BC Gov News Release](#)

PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES OUTSIDE CANADA



PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES OUTSIDE CANADA

Outside of Canada, there are many well-established programs that seek to increase menstrual equity and address period poverty. As noted in the Literature review, within global population health, there is a well-established network of researchers and advocates seeking to address period poverty through increasing access to menstrual supplies, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). More recently, global attention has been directed towards Scotland and the Period Products Act. The introduction of policy in Scotland is connected to a range of initiatives at the local, regional and national levels that seek to target menstrual shame and stigma through a gender-inclusive and culturally sensitive lens, e.g. Bloody Good Period (38).

Many other countries are exploring initiatives that aim to increase access to period supplies and address period poverty, such as New Zealand and Australia. Programming and initiatives in these countries would be of interest to Canada, as distribution, research, education and advocacy have often included or centred the experience of Indigenous menstruators and included Elders and Knowledge Keepers in an intentional fashion. In the United States, several states continue to push for the removal of the tampon tax and introduce legislation under the broad umbrella of menstrual equity. Within the American policy context, there has been a tendency to focus on several key populations, including those facing homelessness or housing precarity and incarcerated menstruators. Overarching international organizations, such as the World Health Organization and Days 4 Girls, have provided global reports and statements related to advancing menstrual equity.

In the following section, we present research findings across the four categories: distribution, education, advocacy and research, that reflect a scan of programs and initiatives outside Canada. In each case, we begin with a high-level overview of programs and initiatives, including descriptions of different broad strategies. We then provide two in-depth examples in each section and link(s) to further information.



Distribution

Around the world, there are a growing number of examples of distribution programs for menstrual supplies. In some cases, distribution focuses on specific sectors or institutions, such as the K-12 system or government buildings. In other cases, there is a focus on broadly defined need for marginalized or vulnerable populations within local or regional sites. As with the Canadian context, programs and initiatives to distribute menstrual supplies on a global scale, are evolving on a daily basis. Countries such as Scotland and New Zealand have made great strides in establishing policies for the free mandated distribution of menstrual supplies, generally, including a range of public settings. The development of programs related to these policies have been slowly rolling out in recent years and are constantly evolving. These case studies can offer guidance for Canada on the development, implementation and operationalization of a federal menstrual equity policy that goes beyond distribution of supplies.



The Period Products, Free Provision Scotland Bill, Scotland

The Scottish Government established a nation-wide program to provide free access to menstrual supplies for all who need it through **The Period Products, Free Provision Scotland Bill**, which passed on January 12, 2021 (104). The bill includes schools, colleges and universities, as well as other public bodies. Scotland is not the first country to provide free menstrual supplies, but it is the first to declare provision as a universal and legal requirement. The **Kenyan Basic Education Act** of 2017 was the first national law to provide free menstrual supplies, but it was limited to schools. Furthermore, universal refers to provision of menstrual supplies in all public buildings, but does not prevent shops from selling menstrual supplies to consumers (105). The Scottish bill employs gender-inclusive language and explicitly mentions the presence of trans and non-binary folks amongst menstruators. Additionally, the bill provides supplies universally, not just based on socio-economic status.

The wave of changes that took place in Scotland reflects the culmination of a growing menstrual justice movement across a range of sectors, including direct action within communities and schools, advocacy efforts to change law and policy, as well as the establishment of research networks to inform needed social change. Widespread campaigns against the 'tampon tax' were successful in Scotland and many other countries, including Canada. In 2017, the government announced that menstrual supplies would be free in Scotland's schools. Following this announcement, other Scottish public institutions followed suit. Research in 2019 by Zero Waste Scotland gauged the current state and acceptance of reusable menstrual supplies and found significant gaps and potential for integration in the future. In 2022, the PickupMyPeriod app was launched to link to over 700 community locations where folks could access free menstrual supplies (39). Addressing accessibility and the urgency of need represents a massive step forward in the implementation of the bill.

Related link(s):

**Zero Waste Scotland
Report**



Ikura | Manaakitia te whare tangata, New Zealand

The Government of New Zealand introduced legislation to provide free menstrual supplies to students in public schools and kura (Māori-medium based schools). This initiative was, in part, informed by research reported by the Youth19 survey, which '12% of New Zealand year 9-13 students who had had their period reported having had difficulty getting menstrual items due to cost' (40). Justification for the initiative includes: eliminating barriers to education and participation in sports, better health outcomes for children and youth, poverty reduction for families and children, and reduction of menstrual stigma and promotion of gender equity (40). Similar to other legislative initiatives, the Government of New Zealand cites increasing access as part of the work to make period supplies essential. Of note, the justification embeds intersectionality in many ways, including the naming of gender diversity and range of needs, the inclusion of 'cultural perspectives' and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the pilot program, the Ministry of Education reports on the work undertaken to support culturally attuned programming within kura and the program as a whole. The overall program is entitled Ikura, which 'means menstrual blood that comes from kurawaka (the vaginal area of Papatūanuku)' (41).

The program began with a pilot project where schools were invited to join. The original pilot reported a 90% participation rate. The next iteration of the program will be adapted based on evaluations of the pilot project. The initial program focused on disposable menstrual supplies with the intent to explore ways to offer reusable menstrual supplies. Initial reports have identified age and cultural views/beliefs as barriers to the use of reusable menstrual supplies. The initiatives of the Government of New Zealand are notable for the inclusion of intersectionality within the design of the program, as well as highlighting socioeconomic status, Indigeneity, and gender-diversity. The programming also indicates connections to and identifies the interconnected nature of poverty for families and children. Programming in New Zealand is emerging in conversation with research, in particular, the Youth19 research project (42). The initiative also builds evaluation into the roll out from the initial pilot stage.

Related link(s):

**New Zealand Ministry
of Education**



Education

There are many examples of promising programs and initiatives that aim to increase knowledge about menstruation and reduce stigma in a manner that is culturally relevant. There are also many examples of education initiatives that seek to include non-menstruators, specifically men and boys. There are also an increasing array of resources related to improving knowledge and understanding of sustainable menstrual supplies, and/or the general use of menstrual supplies and related supports. Many of these international initiatives are free on the internet and are produced by groups, such as Period.org. Many educational initiatives also pull together a searchable bank of resources, such as the Menstrual Health Hub. Below, we highlight two notable educational programs outside Canada that develop menstrual equity education through an intersectional lens.



Menstrual Dignity for Students Toolkit

Upon the passing of the Menstrual Dignity Act of 2021 in Oregon, United States, public school bathrooms for all genders were mandated to have free menstrual supplies. After this bill passed, there was recognition that the provision of supplies is not sufficient, and should be accompanied with education to reduce stigma and increase understanding of menstrual equity. The collaborative toolkit, Menstrual Dignity for Students, was developed in partnership with five government and community groups, including Indigenous representatives. This novel toolkit is centred on four pillars of menstrual dignity: privacy, e.g. space, autonomy, inclusivity, e.g. gender, cultural sensitivity, access for students of all abilities and languages, providing options and education, e.g. menstrual health, usage of supplies, stigma-reducing.

The educational component of the toolkit focuses on menstrual supply options and usage, as well as classroom education on menstruation. It is mandated that this education must be affirming of transgender, non-binary, Two Spirit and intersex students. Program emphasizes that education must not be fear/shame-based, and it must be age appropriate, medically accurate, culturally responsive and accessible for students of all abilities. They have gone further to note that menstruation should be celebrated, discussions surrounding supply choice should be value-neutral and Indigenous folks/communities should be affirmed for their honoring of this milestone. The toolkit then provides recommendations on how to put these provisions into action through the provision of language suggestions and overall instructions on how to deliver the education. The education is divided into guidance according to student age range and provides advice on how to engage students, families and communities in the program.



The toolkit involves government bodies, educational sites, students, families and communities. There is recognition of how many stakeholders are involved in upholding the stigma of menstruation for the student, and how engagement with these groups can have a major impact on the menstruator's experience. This initiative is backed by a bill which allows for sustainable funding, monitoring and evaluation of its progress. Furthermore, there is a clear awareness of systemic inequities, as period poverty, colonialism, differing abilities and cultural nuances are all acknowledged. The toolkit also takes great strides by providing distinct examples of language, the importance of medical accuracy, and how to remain neutral in the delivery of vital information to respect autonomy of choice. This program is specific to the state of Oregon, but has the potential to be replicated in different regions with similar characteristics.

Related link(s):

**Menstrual Dignity for
Students Toolkit**





PERIOD. Education

PERIOD. is a global youth-led non-profit that has been advocating for menstrual equity for years. Although they started with menstrual supply distribution, they have now expanded to the promotion of youth leadership, championing menstrual equity policy and developing robust educational resources and platforms (43). They recognize the need for education to shift the culture around menstruation, which will then support policy change.

The education platform contains multiple components. In collaboration with Madami by Menstrual Health Hub, they developed a comprehensive glossary for terminology in the menstrual movement space. With recognition that language holds power in the culture surrounding periods, this glossary is an integral piece of education for menstruators and non-menstruators. Furthermore, in collaboration with Period Aisle and Green Periods, PERIOD. developed Planet-Positive Periods: The Toolkit for Sustainable Menstruation. This toolkit contains all of the components needed for a facilitator to fully execute a workshop with menstruators regarding sustainable menstruation choices. Another component of their education is the recording and publicizing of previous panels and spotlights that they have held, all of which cover topics such as inclusive sex ed., periods in the military, pro-athletes on their periods and endometriosis. Lastly, they also have a PERIOD TALK education program that provides content to facilitate conversations with both menstruators and non-menstruators regarding menstrual equity.

There are multiple components of PERIOD.'s educational platform that should be noted. Firstly, their attention to language and its impact on culture is of vital importance in all menstrual equity contexts. They also have a large focus on educating through collaboration, especially at an international level. Collaboration increases the spread and breadth of the educational reach, resulting in globalization of the movement.



Recording of previous events and posting them online allows for teachers to showcase these conversations to their students, and for menstruators and non-menstruators to view the information at their leisure. A sustainable approach to knowledge translation allows for more cohesiveness in the movement and less duplication of efforts. Lastly, toolkits are important for the menstrual equity movement as they reduce barriers for educators and advocates to provide information to the public.

Related link(s):

Period-Action





Advocacy

When compared to Canada, advocacy at the international level is far more established in many regions of the world. There are countless examples of established menstrual equity advocacy organizations that have been instrumental in ensuring policy changes proceed and programming is enacted. In the global public health context, there is a focus on increasing access to WASH. Several groups in the American context have been key in identifying the unmet needs of menstruators in carceral settings. Globally, many groups are involved in the development of programming and initiatives related to decolonizing menstruation and cultural reclamation, as well as pushing for culturally relevant policies and programming. Two advocacy programs to underline are the Menstrual Health Hub and an initiative involving The Legislation Clinic and BRAWS.



Menstrual Health Hub (MH Hub)

The MH Hub is a unique and important resource built by advocates to support a range of activities related to menstrual equity advocacy.

“The MH Hub is the world’s first digital networking and knowledge platform that unites and strengthens the global menstrual community. The platform provides an online space to connect with those working on menstrual and female health, and hosts free access to a database of relevant menstrual health resources around research, education policy and innovation.” (44)

The MH Hub is a promising program for Canada to consider as it utilizes a digital tool to build capacity, awareness and knowledge of existing efforts. The Hub is designed to be of use to a range of actors within the menstrual equity space, including individual activists, as well as important actors in specific sectors, including but not limited to, education, policy, healthcare and fem-tech. MH Hub supports the sharing of resources and information about menstruation in a broad sense. In addition, the structure of MH Hub supports collaboration and effective resource sharing. The Knowledge Hive is a section of MH Hub and is a searchable database with an incredible array of resources across the four pillars: education and learning, policy, innovation and research. A tool like MH Hub, specific to Canada, would be an important innovation as policy and programming expands.

Related link(s):

[Menstrual Health Hub](#)



The Legislation Clinic and BRAWS

The Legislation Clinic was a program operating out of the University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law. The program was designed with a view to developing law students' capacity to engage in legislation and law through partnerships with not-for-profit organizations. In May of 2018, the Legislation Clinic partnered with BRAWS (Bringing Resources to Aid Women's Shelters) to develop a report on menstrual inequity in the United States, Period, Poverty, and the Need for Policy (45). The collaboration between the Legislation Clinic and BRAWS, and the ensuing report, is a promising model to consider. The final report provides important insights and context from an organization directly supporting those facing menstrual precarity, as well as those with legal insight and policy expertise. Reflecting a collaborative approach, the report details the role of community organizations in addressing menstrual equity. It goes on to identify needs across key sectors, e.g. schools, shelters, carceral settings. The report features insights and expertise from a range of individuals working in the highlighted community sector. In this way, the report is designed to engage a range of individuals across sectors and promote advocacy in a broad fashion as policy grows.

Related link(s):

[BRAWS Website](#)[Legislation Clinic](#)[Menstrual Inequity Report](#)



Research

Major research groups, such as the American-based Society for Menstrual Cycle Research (46), have provided platforms to conduct menstrual research and translate findings. Additionally, research from Dr. Marni Sommers advocates for addressing period poverty and provides salient solutions on how to promote menstrual equity (47). In addition to publishing, Dr. Sommers engages in a range of activities to support knowledge mobilization within the community. The Period Posse series is a unique initiative featuring regular webinars that are open to the public and recorded. The webinars feature a range of topics related to policy and menstrual equity, research in menstrual health and global efforts to address access to water, sanitation and hygiene. Programs such as this are an important complement to scholarly research, ensuring that barriers to accessing academic knowledge are broken down for activists and community groups.

Within menstruation research, there are many instances of interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary research; however, it is worth underlining that broader menstrual health experiences are often reflected within specific groups. For example, the Australian National Action Plan for Endometriosis is a unique initiative that looks at those living with endometriosis and how to improve patient outcomes. The plan addresses cost equity issues surrounding endometriosis and the importance of advocacy surrounding this menstrual health issue (48).

Partnerships between community groups and researchers are a common element across menstruation research, especially research related to menstrual equity and period poverty. Research that centres community groups and organizations, as well as includes menstruators in an intentional way, are key for addressing needs of menstruators facing marginalization, vulnerability and exclusion, e.g. carceral populations, trans and non-binary menstruators.



There is a nascent but growing body of research focusing on the needs of menstruators with disabilities, acknowledging the importance of working with and alongside caregivers, community organizations and healthcare providers (49). Another site where partnerships have been key is research that seeks to understand the needs of Indigenous women, girls and Two Spirit menstruators (11). Research partnerships with community ensure that the impact of menstrual inequities are understood in a complex and systemic fashion, e.g. not just the need for disposable menstrual supplies as needs extend to addressing regional access issues, addressing lack of access to clean water (50,51) and cultural reclamation (21). Two initiatives to underline are the Menstruation Research Network (MRN) and the Bloody Good Period and Women for Refugee Women research project.





Menstruation Research Network

The UK-based Menstruation Research Network (MRN) is located at Saint Andrews University, Aberdeen. The network acts as a rallying point for researchers in menstruation studies, advocates across a range of sectors, e.g. the arts, commercial industry, as well as stakeholders in the National Health Service. The network was built with a view to creating a common and global vision for menstrual equity. The group has benefited from funding from a range of sources, including the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Wellcome Trust. Sustainable funding is key for the long-term success of projects and growth. Many members of the network have been actively involved in the advocacy that led to the Period Product Act in Scotland. The MRN carried out the Ending Period Poverty Research Project from 2020-2022. The project mapped the factors that led to the successful implementation of policy in Scotland. Specifically, the main research question was identified as: 'How did 'ending period poverty' become a policy in Scotland, and what historical factors help or hinder this campaign?' (52). Policy work to map successes is key for building long-term and impactful programs that will meet the needs of menstruators.

The group reflects an approach that is reflective, wherein the objectives and the mandate are growing over time as knowledge expands. In the early days, much of the focus of research and other activities was on period poverty, specifically, increasing access to menstrual supplies. As the group became more established, there was an awareness that the original vision needed to expand to fully address menstrual inequities, broadly conceived. For example, these days, the group's activities are shifting towards addressing and disrupting menstrual stigma, as well as sites of potential menstrual positivity through education and arts-based knowledge mobilization. In addition, more recently, the network has identified sustainability as a key theme for menstrual equity advocacy and research. The upcoming international conference hosted by the MRN in 2023 will share insights from reports commissioned by British, Scottish, Welsh and Irish governments 'into product costs, pollution, and shame' (53).



Strengths of the MRN as a model are that they have grown from, within and alongside the broader movement in Scotland. The group has also built connections and relationships within the global menstrual equity movement. The MRN is an established entity with some funding security, which has allowed members of the group to engage in the publishing of research that is interdisciplinary and capable of informing policy development over time.

Related link(s):

**RSE Ending Period Poverty
Research Project**

**Menstruation Research
Network**





Bloody Good Period and Women for Refugee Women

Bloody Good Period is a registered charity located in London, England, engaged in a range of research as part of their programming. Recent initiatives include the use of Discover Artificial Intelligence to trace experiences of menstruation in the United Kingdom across the internet (54). In 2021, Bloody Good Period initiated research into periods and menstrual well-being in the workplace (55). As noted in the literature review, menstruation experiences of migrant and refugee women is a significant knowledge gap (11,19). In October of 2019, the group carried out research to understand the 'effects of 'period poverty' among refugee and asylum-seeking women'. To carry out the research, Bloody Good Period partnered with Women for Refugee Women. As such, the research centres those who have direct lived experience of menstruation and the specific intersection in question. In addition, such an initiative lifts up and includes the expertise of groups engaged in advocating across sectors.

Related link(s):

[Bloody Good Period](#)



STRENGTHS & LIMITATIONS

STRENGTHS & LIMITATIONS

The current report presents a high-level scan of promising programs and initiatives to address period poverty and advance menstrual equity. Given the nascent nature of evaluation models for menstrual equity, the scan was designed to explore a range of examples across different regions in Canada and report on a targeted search for programs and initiatives outside Canada. The internet, including websites, social media and news media, was the primary search tool.

The strengths of the present scan are as follows:

- relied on media, social media and internet which have been key for the movement, and are a rich source of information, as well as an area for further development in terms of menstruation education and advocacy;
- situates evolving menstrual equity trends in Canada within the international context; it is important to map growth and development as new initiatives emerge and programs are established;
- highlights key gaps in programs and initiatives in Canada (e.g. education, research), but also identifies strengths (e.g. many groups actively involved in distribution and advocacy);
- highlights that, inside and outside Canada, we can identify examples of initiatives that are meeting the needs of menstruators and have capacity, drive and interest to do more;
- showcases the importance of the advocacy within high school, post-secondary and not-for-profit sectors; identifies a range of actors to highlight different starting points for initiating change and building partnerships;
- identifies a need for action at the federal level; potential for cohesion and sustained support for organizations and groups operating at the level of community; identifies a need to ensure populations not currently reflected have needs met.

The limitations of the present scan include:

- in Canada, menstrual equity programming and initiatives are in a nascent stage and the field is moving quickly; it is dynamic and difficult to capture;
- the present research reflects a high-level scan, as opposed to a systematic review of all programs and initiatives; more detailed research would reveal many additional examples that would be of interest, especially at the local or grassroots level;
- many programs and initiatives are not posting information in a format that is publicly available or easily searchable; reflects capacity limits facing advocates as noted previously; specific details about distribution strategies or even programming is often not posted or publicly available;
- information is more readily available for programs, as many initiatives are not lasting in duration;
- for international programs and initiatives, we carried out a targeted review based off of gaps reflected in the Literature review, e.g. Indigenous peoples, programs supporting those facing housing precarity, intersectional impact of menstrual stigma;
- a structured framework for reviewing programs and initiatives within the menstrual equity space does not currently exist.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

In this report, we have provided a high-level environmental scan of promising programs and initiatives to increase menstrual equity and address period poverty in Canada and internationally. As identified, there are a growing number of programs and initiatives across sectors in Canada. Additional research could delve deeper into programs and initiatives that do not have information readily available online. As policy and programming expands in Canada it is worth identifying existing sites where capacity can be amplified, replicated and scaled up for greater impact. Much can be learned from established programs from outside Canada. The present report is the final of three for this project.

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