



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

---

# Standing Committee on the Status of Women

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 073**

**PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT**

Monday, June 12, 2023

---

Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio





## Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Monday, June 12, 2023

• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 73 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

Interpretation is available. For those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I'm informing the committee that all witnesses appearing virtually have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

We are now turning to our menstrual equity in Canada study.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Thursday, April 27, 2023, the committee will resume its study on menstrual equity in Canada.

Today, I would like to welcome our panellists.

We have, from Aisle International, Suzanne Siemens, chief executive officer. From Days for Girls Canada Society, we have Jillian Johnston, advocacy coordinator. She is joining us by video conference. From the Government of British Columbia, we have the period poverty task force, we have Nicola Hill. She is the chair, and you will also find her online. From joni, we have Linda Biggs, co-chief executive officer, here in the room. From Women's Global Health Innovations, we have Leisa Hirtz, chief executive officer.

We have a larger panel today, so we are doing five for the full hour and a half. We'll be starting this panel and going until 12:30 today, so we'll just continue this. There are five panels at this time. We'll be providing five minutes to each speaker. When you see me start to flail my arms, that means your time is wrapping up. If you could wrap it up within 15 seconds, that would be fantastic.

I'm going to turn the floor over now to Suzanne Siemens.

You have your five minutes. Go ahead.

**Ms. Suzanne Siemens (Chief Executive Officer, Aisle International):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the committee for conducting this really important study on menstrual equity.

Good morning, everyone. My name is Suzanne Siemens, and I'm the co-founder and CEO of Aisle. Established in 1993, this year marks our 30-year anniversary of being a leading innovator in sustainable menstrual care. While we've seen many changes in the past three decades, we are most excited about the changes to the Canada labour code and the announcement of the menstrual equity fund. I'm here with my colleagues today to share a bold message that we are poised and ready to help make sustainable period equity a reality for millions of Canadians.

Aisle specializes in making washable pads and leak-proof period underwear. Our products are best known for their lasting performance, for their reliable record on PFAS testing and for offering inclusive styles for menstruators of all sizes and gender expressions. It is our strong belief that every menstruator deserve to feel affirmed and comfortable in their body during their period.

My colleagues from the Period Purse emphasized this to the committee last week: Providing diverse product choices and multiple ways to access period products is critical to those on low incomes, living in remote areas and living with disabilities. We understand that conventional plastic-based disposable products are a really practical solution in many cases, but we also know from our partnerships with the United Way in B.C. and the Period Purse in Ontario that reusables can be a great choice for these communities.

Here are some reasons why reusables are a product choice for many of these groups. The first is comfort and peace of mind. Because they are reusable, they're more easily accessible and they don't run out. In a follow-up study by the United Way in B.C., a common sentiment among users was that they preferred reusables, because it gave them a greater sense of control and dramatically reduced their anxiety.

The second is affordability and financial savings. In addition to our own analysis, independent studies show that reusables save up to 15 times the cost compared to single-use disposables. With inflation and the cost of living rising every year, having reusables means not having to budget for or seek out new menstrual products every month.

Third, there are waste and energy savings. We conducted a product life-cycle analysis that showed that using Aisle products reduced waste up to 99%, reduced energy consumption up to 94%, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 95%. This environmental data is tracked on our website in real time.

Aisle is one of the top ranked period care B corporations in the world. This certification means we are deeply committed to ethically making products that benefit all our stakeholders, our community, our employees and our planet. For decades, we've been advocates for policy change, raised awareness, developed educational materials and established programs with delivery partners to provide sustainable menstrual products to those in need.

With this committee's attention on menstrual equity, we feel that now is the perfect opportunity for Canada to take the global lead. Already, countries like Scotland have written into legislation the provision of free disposable, sustainable and reusable products to all of its citizens. As Madeleine Shaw, from the Sustainable Menstrual Equity Coalition of Canada, said last week, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to period poverty.

I am here to ask the committee to pass a resolution to specifically include sustainable and reusable products in the choice of product recommendations during both the program rollout for the Canada labour code changes and for the menstrual equity fund.

Without such mention, it will be all too easy to fall back to the status quo, which tends to support the procurement of low-cost plastic-based disposable products, many of which can take hundreds of years to biodegrade. Without specific mention of women-led SMEs in the procurement process, our concern is that large multinational corporations will be the de facto or easy choice, and ultimately stand to benefit from the program. This leaves out women-led companies, such as ours. Women have spent their entire careers dedicated to providing solutions that prioritize the health of Canadians and our planet.

Consider this: By leveraging the innovation of Canadian women entrepreneurs, there's an exciting opportunity to achieve a significant milestone, one that prioritizes sustainability, gender equity and the prosperity of women-led SMEs towards menstrual equity. Together, we can achieve a result that we can all be proud to say we accomplished together.

Thank you for inviting me here today, and I look forward to your questions.

• (1105)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're now going to turn online to Jillian Johnston from Days for Girls Canada Society for five minutes.

**Ms. Jillian Johnston (Advocacy Coordinator, Days for Girls Canada Society):** Thank you.

Good morning. My name is Jill Johnston, and today I'm in my home in London, Ontario, on the traditional territories of the Anishinabe, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron nations.

I'd like to begin by telling all of you that I respect the work you are doing and that I appreciate this opportunity to participate in it.

I am the advocacy coordinator for Days for Girls Canada. I am appearing today to represent Days for Girls Canada and to speak about our work with Changing the Flow in a collaborative initiative called "Share the Platform".

We all recognize that currently there are many barriers to menstrual equity in Canada. My list of barriers is in the brief I prepared, but I'd like to mention specifically the limited education available to Canadians about menstrual health.

As a retired teacher, I value education very highly, and I can attest to the importance of providing access to information that is clear, accurate and inclusive. When it comes to menstrual health education specifically, my teaching experience has taken place since my retirement. As a Days for Girls team leader, I am proud of every DfG menstrual kit my team has sewn, but I'm even more proud of the teaching I have done as a Days for Girls menstrual health ambassador in Kenya, Haiti, Guyana and here in Canada.

After every distribution, I know without a doubt that the information I have shared is life-changing for an entire community. In our Share the Platform work, Changing the Flow and Days for Girls Canada aim to share information that is life-changing for all Canadian menstruators. In our Share the Platform work, we intentionally use language that includes girls, women, trans men, trans boys, non-binary, gender-fluid and gender non-conforming individuals and all others who experience menstruation.

Our Share the Platform vision is optimal menstrual health for everyone who menstruates. Menstrual health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being throughout the lifetime of individuals who menstruate. That full definition, found in the documentation I've provided, is a comprehensive one and is the basis for all our Share the Platform work as we advance menstrual equity.

Our Share the Platform collaboration with Changing the Flow has evolved over the past two years. We began as two menstrual health organizations collaborating to present bimonthly virtual events to advance menstrual equity. Our exciting new initiative involves taking the lead on the period-positive workplace campaign for Canada. This is a global campaign designed to encourage private sector businesses to support menstrual health in their workplaces.

Share the Platform congratulates all three federal ministries that are taking positive steps towards menstrual equity in Canada. We appreciate the action taken by the indigenous affairs ministry to ensure first nations communities will receive the products they need. It has been exciting and very encouraging to be given the opportunity to participate in the consultation process with WAGE and the menstrual equity fund pilot and to realize that we are being heard.

The recent announcement by the labour ministry that new regulations regarding menstrual health in federally regulated workplaces will be in place by December 2023 is a huge step forward for Canada. Share the Platform sees the Canadian labour ministry initiative as a model to be followed in our own Canadian period-positive workplace campaign. We will encourage private sector businesses to supply free menstrual products in their workplaces and to become PPW-certified for doing so—that's period-positive workplace certified. We are prepared to support organizations impacted by the new regulations for federally regulated workplaces, as well as the private sector businesses that we are targeting. We will offer education, implementation assistance, access to resources for purchase and information about best practices.

I will conclude by emphasizing that, as Share the Platform, both Changing the Flow and Days for Girls Canada acknowledge that our federal government is leading by example. It is our hope that the developing plan will be designed to transition into a sustainable course of action: a plan that ensures access to free menstrual products for all Canadians in need; a plan that educates all Canadians in order to break down the barriers to menstrual equity; a plan that provides financial incentives to organizations that need to invest in education and structural improvements in order to ensure full access to free menstrual products at all times; and, most of all, a plan that supports menstrual health organizations across Canada as we work together for all who menstruate.

• (1110)

Thank you for this opportunity. I look forward to your questions.

**The Chair:** Thanks so much, Jillian. I greatly appreciate it.

We'll now move to the Government of British Columbia and Nicola Hill, from the period poverty task force.

**Ms. Nicola Hill (Chair, Government of British Columbia, Period Poverty Task Force):** Thank you, Madam Chair and esteemed

committee, for the invitation to appear before this committee on this important issue.

My name is Nikki Hill and I'm the chair of the Government of B.C.'s period poverty task force. I am here today on the traditional unceded territory of the Katzie First Nation.

The task force was established in May 2022. I'm also the former co-chair of the United Way's "Period Promise" campaign in B.C., which is an initiative that I introduced to the organization in 2016.

The Government of B.C. appointed the period poverty task force in 2022 to explore the various factors that contribute to period poverty and to find solutions. The task force is mandated to develop short-, medium- and long-term recommendations, which are due in March 2024. I am honoured to chair that body. We meet regularly and are focused on learning about the depth and breadth of this issue, which ranges from poverty and menstrual health to education and sustainability, and the issues that are impacting period poverty in our communities and across the country.

While we began our work largely to address the need to get products directly to people, we quickly evolved to a policy-based campaign as a result of the input from the public. These are stories that were unheard for too long due to the stigma surrounding menstruation—stigma that is only perpetuated when menstruation is insufficiently addressed in education, as is the current state in our school system.

It often surprises people to hear that our country has stigma around basic bodily functions, but it's a reality that stops too many people from getting their needs fulfilled in order to participate in work, school, sports and community activities. It will continue to do so if not addressed.

Whether it was a teacher who told us that they had purchased menstrual products for years from their own funds knowing kids in their class wouldn't make it to school without them, the low-wage workers who missed shifts because they couldn't cover the cost of menstrual products for the day—therefore, losing money they couldn't afford to lose—or the people living in poverty who have had to use unsafe methods to manage menstruation every month, these are the stories that shape our work. These are stories backed up by research, which you've heard from other witnesses.

It is important to remember that period poverty is a generalized symptom of poverty. As a result, those equity-seeking groups that experience poverty are most likely to have challenges accessing menstrual products when they are needed. This includes, but is certainly not limited to, indigenous people who are disproportionately impacted by period poverty, single mothers, trans folks, people of colour, immigrants and refugees, people living with disabilities and youth. As a generalized symptom of poverty, period poverty also has a close alignment with household food insecurity.

With people struggling more to afford basic needs due to the challenges of the cost of living and inflation adding to the pressure that the pandemic brought, this is more critical than ever before. We have direct input from people who have had to decide between menstrual products and buying food for their families, and of children being arrested for stealing menstrual products when their parents could not afford them.

As noted in the “Period Promise” research project report, providing menstrual products to the public through community organizations should be one nested strategy in a bundle of strategies that would dramatically increase access to free menstrual products for everybody who menstruates. The other points of access for free products that were recommended by respondents to the public survey included post-secondary institutions, workplaces, government-operated washrooms, pharmacies and other regularly accessed public spaces. This would all result in the same access that we provide for soap and toilet paper without question.

Our task force's earliest recommendations to the Government of B.C.—which leads in Canada through its implementation of menstrual products provision in the K to 12 system in 2019—include initiating the implementation of menstrual product provision in B.C. government buildings with public access, with a focus on the following locations to increase access to menstrual products for vulnerable people. We also recommend ensuring that people who are displaced by emergencies such as fires and floods have immediate access to basic necessities for menstruation.

While progress has been made across Canada, eradicating period poverty won't be accomplished with a one-size-fits-all approach, and we have much more work to do ahead. Governments must continue to make progress to ensure that the provision of menstrual products is included in the development of programs and actions. Addressing these issues is not only about menstruation. It's about equality and socio-economic advancement.

I am pleased to take any questions from the committee.

• (1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We're back into the room with Linda Biggs, the co-chief executive officer for joni.

Go ahead, Linda. You have the floor for five minutes.

**Ms. Linda Biggs ( Co-Chief Executive Officer, joni):** Good morning. Thank you to this committee for conducting this important study and for the invitation to be here today with my industry colleagues.

My name is Linda Biggs, and I'm the co-founder and co-CEO of joni, a 21st-century period care brand. We're making sustainable period care accessible to everyone who needs it.

When we first launched joni in 2020, we read a statistic by Plan International Canada that one in three women under the age of 25 is unable to afford period care in Canada. It was because of this statistic that we built a 5% giveback model, working with dozens of Canadian non-profits, like United Way, Moon Time Sisters and the Period Purse, over the last three years to distribute over 110,000 donated products across the country, including to remote areas and indigenous communities.

It was also because of this statistic and the distribution issues we saw that we created our innovative, direct-to-consumer packaging that allows us to ship for free anywhere in Canada. This means that someone living in a remote community who might otherwise pay \$30 or more for a box of pads—if they can find one—now has access to organic and plastic-free products delivered to their home for the same price that someone living in an urban area has access to.

It is these types of innovative solutions that are needed as part of a team Canada approach to make menstrual equity possible in Canada.

According to freethetampons.org, 87% of people who menstruate have been caught off guard, and 34% of them will leave school, work or sports to find a solution. When over 26% of the population menstruates, having period care accessible, just like toilet paper, can impact over nine million people in Canada. Menstrual equity means accessible period care for everyone who needs it.

When I was growing up, I remember waiting in food bank lines with my mother. As a new immigrant from Mexico, she worked several jobs trying to make ends meet. As a competitive swimmer, I often got tampons from friends and wore them longer than recommended because we just didn't have enough. While I didn't have the terminology of “period poverty”, I knew that our funds didn't cover basic household needs. Oftentimes, donated period care products are bottom-of-the-barrel, plastic-based options, and the expectation is that you should just be happy with what you get.

There is a level of dignity that comes from being able to choose what works best for your body on your menstrual cycle. Sustainable period care should not be a luxury.

Today, I'm in a much more privileged position, yet even as the founder of a period care brand, I'm still caught off guard. Just last year, my daughter started her first period on our way back from Nova Scotia. On our last leg, I went from bathroom to bathroom at night in the airport, trying to find an option since I had packed all of my products in my checked luggage. The dispensers I found were broken or empty, or I didn't have the right change, and no stores were open. It was in about the fifth bathroom that I found a pad on the counter that, thankfully, someone had left behind, so I could take it back to my daughter.

Even with all my privilege, I am also caught off guard. Conventional distribution methods like paid dispensers don't necessarily mean accessible period care. This is why we have recently designed, in partnership with two Canadian universities, an award-winning smart "freevend" commercial dispenser that dispenses bamboo, biodegradable and plastic-free pads and 100% organic cotton tampons with compostable wrappers. Compared to a conventional plastic-based pad that takes over 300 years to break down, plastic-free pads break down, on average, in 12 months, in the right conditions.

This model works to make sustainable pads and tampons accessible in public places, just like toilet paper.

As a company, we're committed to driving innovation forward in this industry with our non-profit partners and industry colleagues who are here today. Our innovations support new labour code changes and go further to support any private organization choosing to make its workplace more equitable by providing free products to its workers, all contributing to what we call an ecosystem of accessibility.

Just like we wouldn't question having toilet paper in places of work, regardless of whether they are in-office or hybrid, the same consideration is needed for 26% of the population when it comes to menstrual products. joni is part of the Sustainable Menstrual Equity Coalition—SMEC—which is a coalition of Canadian women-led SMEs addressing period poverty, which is already providing innovative, sustainable solutions to Canadians, as well as internationally.

We believe it's important to make reusable and sustainable plastic-free disposable options accessible, and we ask each of you to call for a resolution to include sustainable options from women-led Canadian SMEs as part of the procurement process for the government menstrual equity program.

Thank you.

• (1120)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Finally, for our last speaker, from the Women's Global Health Innovations, we have Leisa Hirtz, chief executive officer.

Leisa, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Ms. Leisa Hirtz (Chief Executive Officer, Women's Global Health Innovations):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Hello. I'm Leisa Hirtz, founder and CEO of Women's Global Health Innovations, a Canadian social enterprise researching, de-

veloping, manufacturing and currently distributing our innovative Bfree Cup globally.

As a Canadian social entrepreneur and innovator, I am developing disruptive period products intended to address the complex challenges menstruators face in managing their periods, while taking into consideration social, environmental and economic sustainability. Our mission at Women's Global Health Innovations is to improve the menstrual health outcomes—and thus lives—of the world's most marginalized adolescent girls and young women.

As a member of the UN Global Compact, we play a vital role as one of the many private sector participants actively working towards the achievement of the sustainable development goals. According to UNICEF, 1.8 billion people across the world menstruate monthly, and according to the World Bank, 500 million lack access to menstrual products and adequate sanitation facilities to manage their periods safely and with dignity.

The idea of the Bfree Cup was born after I learned first-hand how adolescent girls and young women living in Kenya's and Uganda's urban slums and refugee settlements faced some of the harshest conditions and challenges to managing their periods.

Lack of access to clean water, affordable menstrual products and private female-friendly sanitation facilities led to high-risk behaviours including transactional sex to buy pads or the unhealthy reliance on makeshift products like old socks, mattress stuffing, goat skin, dried cow dung and reportedly the washing and reusing of products intended for single use. Additionally, girls reported rolling up pads and inserting them vaginally as many do not have underwear to hold their menstrual pads in place.

Conversely, the reusability—thus improved accessibility—of menstrual cups promised a healthier solution, but unfortunately the need for them to be boiled was seen as a deterrent to adoption.

I soon learned that this was a reality not only in Kenya and Uganda. Similar stories exist right here in Canada.

The Bfree Cup is proudly a Canadian innovation developed in partnership with researchers at the faculty of engineering at the University of Toronto. The Bfree Cup is the first and only physically antibacterial menstrual cup available on the market today. Its surface prevents a biofilm—thus bacteria—from forming, meaning that unlike all other menstrual cups, the Bfree Cup does not need boiling after each menstrual period.

Cleaning the Bfree Cup is easy. It can be lightly rinsed or simply wiped clean. The Bfree cup was described by a senior menstrual product developer with Johnson & Johnson as the first real innovation in menstrual products since Kotex put adhesive on the back of a menstrual pad.

With respect to environmental sustainability, one Bfree Cup can be used for upwards of 10 years, replacing 3,000 to 5,000 plastic-based disposable products, many of which take upwards of 500 to 800 years to decompose in a landfill. To date, the Bfree Cup has diverted 1.2 million disposable products from landfill, saved over 185,000 litres of water and reached over 18,000 marginalized adolescent girls and young women in Africa and South America, as well as indigenous women in the United States.

We have implemented projects in Kenya and Uganda and supported many other projects and programs in sub-Saharan Africa and South America, relying on a user-centred design approach.

A pilot project implemented in two secondary schools in northern Uganda, supported by a grant from the United Nations Population Fund, helped us reach 350 schoolgirls with education and the Bfree Cup. At end line, a 91% successful product uptake amongst the participants was documented. We remain committed to continuing research and development while expanding our manufacturing capacity here in Canada. Currently, research is under way in partnership with McMaster University for the development of two novel menstrual products that will broaden user choice of environmentally sustainable products.

I would also like to add that Bfree is a proud member of the Sustainable Menstrual Equity Coalition of Canada, from whom this committee has already heard.

We are collectively and collaboratively combining our decades of Canadian and international experience to address period poverty and to advocate for policy changes in Canada to raise awareness of the challenges that so many Canadians face managing their periods with dignity, and to establish initiatives to provide high-quality, safe, dioxin-free, sustainable choice in menstrual products for those in need, domestically and internationally.

Let us work together to deploy a team Canada approach to ensure that menstrual equity is achieved here in Canada and on a global level, through leveraging the knowledge and experience of our Canadian women entrepreneurs and innovators to establish a comprehensive social, environmental and economically sustainable national standard.

• (1125)

Thank you for the invitation and opportunity to speak with you today.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Thanks to all of you. Everybody stayed within that five minutes. You guys are awesome.

I'm going to start our first rounds of six minutes each.

We'll start off with Dominique Vien from the CPC.

Dominique, you have the floor for six minutes.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good morning everyone. I wish you a good start to the week.

To the witnesses, thank you for making yourselves available to be with us today.

Ms. Hill, I'm going to address you in particular, because you're currently conducting a study on behalf of the government of British Columbia. It's very interesting. First of all, I'd like to hear your views on this Menstrual Equity Fund set up by the Government of Canada. How do you think this pilot project will shed light on the issue of menstrual equity?

[*English*]

**Ms. Nicola Hill:** Thank you for the question.

To preface, I'm not directly involved with the menstrual equity fund in my work in the province of B.C. I can speak to the importance of the type of work such a fund and such grassroots activities do in informing our work.

One of the important things about the way the Government of B.C. structured our period poverty task force work is that it also accompanies a series of grants for grassroots organizations. We're taking a look at how we can solve the problem within communities. As I said in my statement, that's very important. The reason there's a task force in B.C. is that it's a systemic issue, and there's no one approach that's going to work for everybody.

The granting system we've set up in B.C., in which we will have full research and report, is the second. The first system informed the United Way B.C.'s Period Promise research project, which a number of witnesses have referred to in their testimony over the past week. That study gave us the direct knowledge from people with lived experience, which is critical. In terms of looking at the menstrual equity fund and the potential to frame that, it does look a lot like the way we did the work in B.C., where we talked to people in communities who have the needs and are able to tell us what works, what doesn't and where we need to be expanding. I think that's critical.

I sit here as somebody who has not personally experienced period poverty, though I have been an activist on this issue for many years. Those voices from community are very important. They will be important in the menstrual equity fund as well.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Ms. Hill, I understand that you're conducting the study for the government of British Columbia and that it's not pan-Canadian in scope. However, what you are studying should give us an indication of what we might see across Canada.

Are you moving towards universal accessibility of menstrual products for women in your province? I understand the report isn't finished, but do you think you're moving towards that? Is that possibly one of the recommendations you're going to make?

[*English*]

**Ms. Nicola Hill:** Thank you for the question.

I think it is very important that we are not only working towards what will most benefit British Columbians. We are also very hopeful that our report will be of benefit to Canadians as a whole. We are currently the only remaining period poverty task force globally, so we are also working with global partners. We are hopeful that our recommendations help inform some of this group, which is very present and active across the world because of our status in that role. We are looking very carefully at each recommendation.

We believe we are looking to start with the initial problem, but it is very important to look at this through different layers. When we look at period poverty, we are looking at addressing recommendations that impact people who are vulnerable in our communities, particularly indigenous people. When we look at menstrual equity, yes, we would be looking towards recommendations that, in the long term, would benefit all people.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** In an ideal world, all women would have free access to menstrual products, but that would cost a lot of money. So if we had to give priority to certain people, it would have to be the poorest or people living in remote areas, for example. Is that what you're saying? Who should be given priority?

• (1135)

[*English*]

**Ms. Nicola Hill:** With period poverty, we should be prioritizing some of the people that I noted in my statement. We're talking about people who are vulnerable. We have noted a disproportionate impact on indigenous people, for example, as well as people with disabilities and young people in post-secondary.

However, I do think it's important to note that another aspect of this work—and I think we've heard it from witnesses—is ensuring that menstrual products are available similarly to toilet paper and soap in washrooms. I think that is where progress is being made to normalize the provision of menstrual products within public spaces and physical spaces.

What's important to our work is noting that public and physical spaces do not always ensure that menstrual products are available to people who are vulnerable because they may not be accessing a workplace or a school. We have seen through the pandemic where those buildings were shut down, even if they had menstrual products.

Then, as I noted, we're also looking at how we address urgent needs such as floods and fires, where people may be evacuated and need to immediately have access to such a basic product.

**The Chair:** Thanks so much, Nikki. I was going to cut you off, but you have so much important information to give, especially at this difficult time.

I'm now going to pass it over to Jenna Sudds.

Jenna, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Jenna Sudds (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses in the room and online for sharing your expertise and for the work that you're doing in this space.

I have so many questions. I'm going to start online with Ms. Johnston.

You had shared a little bit about the period-positive workplace campaign and the PPW-certified part of it that's upcoming. You also put into context that, through Minister O'Regan and the changes to the labour code effective in December of this year, menstrual products will be available within federally regulated workplaces.

I'm curious about your thoughts around synergies there and whether there's an opportunity to collaborate or to leverage the PPW certification to expand this in a bigger way.

**Ms. Jillian Johnston:** Thank you.

I think that's a wonderful question. I, of course, think it would be wonderful to link the two things. The steps taken with federally regulated workplaces are very similar, if not identical, to the ones we would like to take with our private sector businesses. I think that the leadership shown by our government is something that we would love to build on. We would love their support.

I think that collaboration is the key. I think that with collaboration within the government, collaboration between all of the menstrual health organizations across Canada that are working together and then collaboration between the government and those organizations, we can accomplish this by working together.

I think collaboration is one of the founding principles for Share the Platform, the organization that we have formed with Changing the Flow. With the plans that we've been given from the period-positive workplace coalition, which is an international coalition.... By the way, Days for Girls International is one of the five founding organizations of this coalition, so we have direct access to all of the information that they are using. Our job is to Canadianize it.

One thing, for instance, is that we would really like to specify that the products need to be free in the workplaces. We just feel that there are so many link-ups with getting information to the business owners, for instance, about all of the products that you've heard mentioned today, like the products that are sustainable, biodegradable, long-lasting, safe and made locally by businesses run by women in Canada. I think it's a wonderful opportunity to share all of that information with the businesses to let them know what is available for them to purchase, so that they can offer a full selection of products to their workers.

• (1140)

**Ms. Jenna Sudds:** Amazing. I hate to cut you short, but I have so many questions. Thank you for that.

I'm now going to move in the room to Ms. Biggs.

Your example of your situation with your daughter and being in an airport brings to mind to me, obviously, the importance of the access points as we move forward with the menstrual equity fund.

Also, I would love for you to share your experience and your expertise around the importance of choice for those who are seeking out products when they are in need.

**Ms. Linda Biggs:** It's absolutely a great question. It's something that my industry colleagues here next to me can also attest to. We hear so many stories, especially when it comes to donated products, of communities having to use whatever is given. If there were pads one time, they will have to use pads. If it's tampons, they will have to use tampons. As we know, our bodies are unique. We have individual situations that will determine what we can use for our bodies. This idea of reasonable choice is what other period equity programs internationally have used as well. That language is important, so that someone who menstruates can choose what works best for their body. There's a level of dignity in that. That's a really important piece when it comes to period equity.

While donated products are great, I think there has to be an emphasis on how we empower people who menstruate to be able to choose what works best for them.

**Ms. Jenna Sudds:** Incredible. Thank you for that. I think it's an important point.

Maybe I'll open the floor on the earlier comment I made around the access points. As we're moving forward with the menstrual equity fund, and obviously we've done a ton of consultation over the last year, I would love your insights or your thoughts around where people are reaching the products. Where should those products be accessible?

I'm thinking more around the harder-to-reach people, if I may.

Who would like to take that?

Go ahead, Suzanne.

**Ms. Suzanne Siemens:** Thank you for the question.

We have worked with United Way in B.C. as well as the folks in Ontario, with the Period Purse as well. They are going to the communities that need them the most. They are diverse in their access points, including food banks and community centres. They receive the need. They are addressing what products they are needing to ac-

cess. There are many different ways in which they want them—some want reusables; some want disposables. Listening to the community, which is what Nikki Hill suggested, is really how best to address it.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We're now going to pass it over to Andréanne Larouche.

Andréanne, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

To the witnesses, I'd like to thank you for coming today to address this issue, which is still very taboo and which we're trying to "untaboo", if I may use that term. Before talking about solutions, I'd like to come back to some of the observations you've made.

Ms. Hill, like Ms. Hirtz who said she had seen girls abroad using rather risky or somewhat less safe means, you spoke in your opening remarks of unsafe methods of managing menstruation. Could you tell us a little more about what exactly were these unsafe methods?

[*English*]

**Ms. Nicola Hill:** Thank you for the question.

Through our surveys and our data, because we want to rely on people's experiences, we have been told that many issues face people who don't have the access and ability to change their products regularly. Their leaving products in too long is one problem. We know there are guidelines in terms of how long you use a tampon or a pad or another product. If you don't have access to many, you will just use the one that you have longer, which is a health concern. In addition we hear quite a bit that people just don't use what we would consider regular menstrual products. They're using rags or paper towels that they've taken—things that don't actually allow for what we would all assess as basic hygiene needs for people.

I think, in many cases, we see that people lack the ability to access things where they have a choice, so it does mean that we've heard stories of people just going to work and bleeding through their pants, for example. We've heard those stories particularly from people who work in places that are heavily dominated by male workers. They might be one of the only women workers. We are continuing to see where there's a lack of access to both products and wash facilities for people to be able to be clean. That puts them in unsafe health situations.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you very much for your answer.

Ms. Siemens, in your opening remarks, you mentioned Scotland and the legislation it has passed. Are there any other countries in the world that the committee could learn from?

[English]

**Ms. Suzanne Siemens:** I'm not operating at the international level to the extent that my colleague Leisa Hirtz is, so I might defer to her to respond to that one.

**Ms. Leisa Hirtz:** Thank you.

That's a wonderful question. I do a fair bit of work in Kenya with partners—the Kenya Girl Guides Association—as well as some policy-makers. Kenya is the first country to have a stand-alone menstrual health management policy. With that, the intention was to provide menstrual products to all schoolgirls in the country.

The policy is in place. It's a complex issue, and this is where sustainable products come in, because the challenges they're having with single-use products are distribution and stock out challenges, as well as female-friendly sanitation facilities.

Kenya is advanced. It was the first country to eliminate single-use plastics.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** All right.

Now I'd like to talk about solutions with all the witnesses. I'd like to hear your views on the pink tax, the tax on menstrual products. I'd already tried to get the committee to study the fact that a pink-coloured product or one specifically designed for women costs more, a cost that is added to that of additional daily hygiene products which women, who for many reasons are already financially disadvantaged, also have to buy. I wish the committee had done that study. Would it be important to broaden the current discussion to include the infamous pink tax, which really means that the cost of a product varies depending on its colour?

[English]

**Ms. Suzanne Siemens:** Thank you.

I would say that women and non-gendered and non-conforming folks are always exposed to increased prices, just because the marketplace is going to attempt to increase those prices. However, we're speaking specifically as experts around menstrual products. We know that at least the GST was removed in 2016 from menstrual products, so that certainly helps a lot.

However, inflation overall, costs and taxes are always going to increase the cost of having a period. That's why this program of providing a menstrual equity fund is really amazing, and having employers provide products for their staff, as well, is always going to improve the process.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** All right.

Would anyone else like to add something about the pink tax in the 30 seconds I have left? I'll save my other question for later.

[English]

**Ms. Leisa Hirtz:** It is, definitely. Getting a haircut as a woman is more expensive than for a man. That is something that I think is

broader than this issue and that we definitely have to be working on, just like communicating on menstrual equity, talking about it more and really bringing it to the floor.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We're now going to move online. Bonita is online.

Bonita, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses who have come out today to talk about this important product and to raise the visibility of this issue across Canada.

My first question is going to be for Ms. Siemens. You spoke a lot about sustainability and diverse product choices. I'm wondering about education on diverse products and choices. How can the government assist in that, not only for adults but for children?

• (1150)

**Ms. Suzanne Siemens:** There are lots of organizations that have produced amazing educational materials, and there are people in the educational system who provide them. Ensuring that those individuals are well supported and well funded so that they can continue to convey that message and supporting the organizations that are developing those materials....

We work with a lot of those organizations and collaborate with them to produce those educational materials, which ultimately helps reduce that stigma the individuals are facing around their period. It's about more support and funding to these groups that are developing the materials and ensuring that they get distributed in the school systems and in the education system.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Great. Thank you.

I'm going to go to Ms. Hill, also on education.

I want to thank you for all of your work. I remember back in 2016 and 2017, when local city halls were doing tampon Tuesdays. That was just an amazing eye-opening opportunity for women and transgender folks at work to be able to talk to their colleagues about the lack of access.

Would you mind sharing your experience of how education has grown? Do you have any thoughts on how we could do better on education for children? I'm specifically thinking about children in schools. How can we raise the education there?

**Ms. Nicola Hill:** Through our period poverty task force work, we have engaged a number of educators in our hearings in the past few months. One of the things we have been very surprised to find is how much the level of education on menstrual health has decreased. This was particularly over the pandemic period, when schools were making decisions about what they were teaching to children online or within the class system. I think that's very important. Even if we think there is a base level of menstrual health education in schools, we understand very clearly that it has gone down.

For example, we have many jurisdictions now that are providing menstrual products in schools to kids. B.C. was the first to do that back in 2019, and others have followed. There isn't a pathway there to help children through that process as their bodies change, and they start to deal with their own menstruation. It also increases the stigma. I think that a lot of the work that advocates do normalizes the conversation.

Thank you for the shout-out to our previous work with tampon Tuesdays, before it evolved to United Way Period Promise. A lot of that is about educating the community and people that we should talk about these issues. When we are not talking about them, people are suffering in silence, because there's so much stigma surrounding them.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Absolutely. Thank you for that.

I think about kids at home who don't have access and don't have money to buy their own, and their parents can't.

I'm going to go to Ms. Hirtz.

I want to speak a bit about the lack of access to water, and the need for sanitary services outside of the home in Canada. I've spoken to many school-aged people who menstruate. They said that having no access to bathrooms, when they're using transit, is a barrier for them to actually use transit. It makes me think about the fact that we need to have access to running water.

Ms. Hirtz, would you mind sharing how the lack of access to sanitary services is difficult? You did make some comments about Bfree Cups not necessarily needing that access, but I think privacy is still something that's needed. Could you also speak to that a bit?

**Ms. Leisa Hirtz:** Yes. The development of the Bfree Cup was very specific to the lack of clean water in slums and refugee settlements.

It's easy for us to turn on our tap, have a pot and whatnot. We don't know the situations that Canadian women and girls have at home. It is assumed, because the issue of water comes up quite frequently with regard to the dignity of being able to have female-friendly washrooms. It's definitely an important issue. It is fundamentally something that women and girls face much more than men.

I hope that answers your question adequately.

• (1155)

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you.

I'm going to go to Ms. Biggs.

Madam Chair, how much time do I have?

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds. You have a very short question and answer.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Very quickly, I'm talking about sustainable innovation. You talked about a resolution.

What would that resolution look like, Ms. Biggs, from this committee, or going forward?

**Ms. Linda Biggs:** An important ask for us today is to really include sustainability when it comes to the procurement process for this fund. Oftentimes, that's overlooked, but we can clearly see the impact that menstrual products have across Canada. We would like to add that to the guidelines.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We're now going to go to our five-minute rounds.

I'm going to Anna Roberts, for five minutes.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here.

My first question is for Ms. Johnston.

How many companies have signed on to the program?

**Ms. Jillian Johnston:** That's a good question. Thank you very much.

We launched the period-positive workplace campaign on the menstrual health day, which was May 28, so there hasn't been a lot of time. To my knowledge, so far we have five or possibly six. There are companies we are approaching. We have hired, through Canada summer jobs, two students so far, who are helping us with the campaign. We are starting to offer our virtual sessions of "How to become a" sessions. The word is spreading. We have 15 people signed up for our first session, which is tomorrow. Hopefully, by tomorrow, there will be another 15 companies signed up.

It's growing. We're hoping it will grow very quickly as we get rolling.

Thank you for the question.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** No problem.

Maybe you can elaborate on it.

What are these companies supplying? Are they supplying to the schools? How does that work in conjunction with the funding from the government? I don't understand how the program works. Could you explain that to me?

**Ms. Jillian Johnston:** The funding from the government that we have right now is for the students who are from the Canada summer jobs program. Other than that, we are not working with funding from the government at this point.

What we are doing is offering an opportunity for companies, big and small. It might be your doctor's office or the kitchen shop downtown—any place people go where they might start their period and need to have a product, but particularly organizations where employers can offer free products for their employees in the workplace. It's a program that will gain momentum. It will also gain identity, because we're developing it as a Canadian campaign.

There will be differences from the main campaign. The main campaign link is available in my notes. It is [periodpositiveworkplace.org](http://periodpositiveworkplace.org). You'll find more answers there, I hope.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** One of our local MPPs started a campaign a few years ago called the shoebox campaign. Everybody—mainly women, but anyone—could contribute through a Shoppers Drug Mart, where there were selected items to be placed in a shoebox, bag or whatever you choose and provided to women's shelters. They found they lacked a lot of those essential items that women need.

Has anything like that...? Has Shoppers approached you on any of those types of ideas—that it could provide or donate?

**Ms. Jillian Johnston:** We haven't been approached by any companies for donating.

The concept we're working on right now is that employers would take on the responsibility of purchasing the products for their employees and anyone else who is a client or visiting their place of business.

If companies want to get on board, that would be wonderful. At this point in time, we feel that, in order for menstrual equity to really happen, public sector participation is vital. There's money in the public sector that can be spent fairly and justly for the people employers employ.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Thank you very much for the answer.

My next question will go to Ms. Hirtz.

You spoke about the Bfree Cup. What is it made of, exactly?

**Ms. Leisa Hirtz:** The Bfree Cup is made from 100% medical-grade silicone.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Is that something that would be cleaned regularly throughout the day, or is it once a day? I'm not aware of that. I'm sorry if I—

• (1200)

**Ms. Leisa Hirtz:** No, that's okay.

The menstrual cup is a kind of bell-shaped product worn internally. It collects as opposed to absorbing. When it's removed, you can empty it out. You can just wipe it with tissue or rinse it with water, and then reinsert it. It can be left in place for upwards of 12 hours, so it's very convenient for workers or students.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** I have 15 seconds. Oh, my goodness.

I'm thinking about young girls using that in school. Say they have to clean it while they're in school. With the new gender bathrooms, it would be very uncomfortable for them to do that.

Has anybody given any thought about whether we should continue to have separate washrooms for females? I'm thinking of a

young girl going in, and then a male comes in. It would be very uncomfortable for them.

Do you agree with that?

**Ms. Leisa Hirtz:** In regard to menstrual health and normalizing the discussion around menstruation, it's time. The stigmas and taboos.... Yes, I understand the discomfort, but it's—

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** You know how young boys are.

**Ms. Leisa Hirtz:** We educate them as well.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Good. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Anita, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.):** Thank you.

I do want to thank all the witnesses. Not only are you educating us, but also, for the public watching, you are dealing with the taboos and the stigma. I think just having you here as witnesses is doing a tremendous amount for that.

I would say, as a committee full of feminists, and many of us are or have been menstruators, there's a lot of information here that I think many of us didn't even know. That tells us something, so thank you very much.

The question I wanted to ask you is specifically around this: A couple of you talked about how your engagement on this started through international development work. I'm the parliamentary secretary for international development as well. I find it interesting because I've always seen development as a two-way conversation. It's not just people going and trying to somehow impart knowledge to other countries, but the amount we learn back in terms of sharing all the different practices.

Ms. Siemens, you mentioned Scotland as a country that does very well. Earlier, one of you mentioned Kenya and the policies there. I wonder if you could talk about countries or jurisdictions that have very good policies that Canada and our committee may want to look into further and maybe get some ideas from.

Go ahead.

**Ms. Suzanne Siemens:** I can speak briefly.

The Scotland policy is incredibly comprehensive. I'm even learning myself, having been in this for decades. They have done an extensive amount of research and listening. It's probably the best policy I've seen written to date. I would encourage everyone in this room to read the Scotland policy, if they haven't already.

I'll pass it over to Leisa to talk about other countries.

**Ms. Leisa Hirtz:** I can speak about the work on the ground in schools in Uganda, for example, and how welcoming the schools and the schoolmasters are.

We train the boys on puberty and menstrual health, as well as the girls, using an entertainment type of delivery. It has been very effective. We're making it fun, but also addressing the taboos through education and through the knowledge that's transferred. We're always working in user-centred design and working in a very community-led approach wherever we're doing the work.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** Are there any others?

**Ms. Linda Biggs:** We don't work internationally, but kudos to Nikki and the work that she and the team are doing in B.C. There's a lot of leadership being shown there.

I think we could look at the level of collaboration with industry partners and stakeholders like ourselves and other non-profits, especially as we look at what we can do better. There's a complex solution, but for what we can do better, we can definitely look at B.C.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** Those online, did you want to add anything?

Do I have time for another question, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** You bet.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** One thing that all of you have mentioned is sustainable, reusable menstrual products. I can say we're looking at this right now in the context of those who might not be able to afford menstrual products and who want to reuse. I'm imagine there is a huge market out there of people who want to be environmentally sustainable, who maybe are privileged and can afford to buy the plastic products, but would rather do something that is going to be better for the environment and for our future.

You talked about procurement. I'm wondering if there are ways to make sure those kinds of products are not seen and then become stigmatized as being for the more vulnerable and marginalized communities, as opposed to something that should be probably marketed to everyone.

I'm opening it to all of you. Whoever wants to answer first, go ahead.

• (1205)

**Ms. Suzanne Siemens:** Most of our customers are privileged and are folks who can afford them. We rely on their testimonials and their advocacy for how reusable products have changed their lives.

A lot of them are doing it for sustainability reasons, but they find a new sense of comfort, agency and ability to manage their period the way they want to. They feel comfortable and don't feel they are creating waste or using products where maybe they're questioning what's in them.

As a collective, we are very transparent about how our products are made, what's included in them and what's not included in them. That makes everyone feel safe from a health perspective and it satisfies their environmental objectives.

**Ms. Leisa Hirtz:** I can speak to a recent project in Malawi, actually, that was conducted by the Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief. There were adolescent girls, but then it was their mothers who wanted access to the cups. It was wonderful to hear the feedback from them, asking, "Where was this 20 years ago?", because of the level of comfort and the ease. They say this was life-changing.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** That's awesome. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We're now going to move to two and a minutes for Andr anne Larouche.

Andr anne, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ladies, thank you for being here.

We're talking about initiatives we've seen elsewhere, but I have the impression that we're also talking about research and innovation in menstrual products to provide more variety. I'd like to hear your views on this, as it might be an issue that falls under federal jurisdiction. How do you think we can encourage research and innovation in sustainable and affordable menstrual products?

[*English*]

**Ms. Linda Biggs:** I can start.

I know that for us, when we launched in 2020, we were gathering data on what menstrual equity looked like in Canada. There is limited data from a federal perspective. There are a lot of individual studies in each region, but it would really be great to have a very team Canada approach to what it looks like holistically as a country.

When it comes to funding, a lot more research in this space would be very beneficial to be able to better understand some of the challenges that communities and individuals are facing in this area.

**Ms. Leisa Hirtz:** I can speak to product innovation and the support that we have received through NSERC alliance grants. Historically, we've received a number of grants, and they have helped to develop the product and the continuation of new product developments.

Again, speaking to the team Canada approach to keep building on this, there's so much that Canada can be doing to advance and be the leader in period poverty and menstrual product development around the world.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Ms. Hill, did you address the issue of research and innovation in British Columbia in your study?

If any other witness would like to add anything, I would invite them to do so. Otherwise, I'll ask another question.

[*English*]

**Ms. Nicola Hill:** In B.C., part of our task force work has been to bring together businesses—you've mentioned a few of them, and some of them are in the room—that we've worked with for a long time as a reference group so we can have these conversations about what policy change they need from government.

We're very lucky to have these incredible business leaders, and, again, many of them are appearing before you and can speak to the research and innovation. I also think the partnership piece is very important when it comes to reusable and sustainable products.

In B.C., we've had what we call the Period Promise policy agreement, which is for workplaces, civic municipalities and post-secondary campuses. They can sign and commit to providing menstrual products in washrooms. A number of those have committed to a system of vouchers or grants with sustainable products, which provides that research.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Nicola.

I'm now going to pass it online for two and a half minutes with Bonita.

Bonita, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to ask my question of Ms. Biggs, and then, if I have time, Ms. Hill could also follow up with some comments.

Ms. Biggs, you mentioned your participation in sports when you were younger. When I go to visit high school students, I often hear from girls and diverse genders that they didn't take part in sport and certainly didn't go to out-of-town competitions or take part in competitive sports because of the lack of access to menstrual products.

I wonder if you could share what you think the government could do to assist in that? The federal government does fund sports organizations in this country. How could we use those avenues and those tools to ensure that everyone gets to take part equitably in sport?

• (1210)

**Ms. Linda Biggs:** It's definitely a great first step, that funding. Education is very important in this space. Anecdotally, concerning my own story as a swimmer, it was the use of tampons, because sometimes there's a lot of stigma around the use of an insertable product. When you build that education piece in, you could bring some awareness around that, and then it provides people with more potential options. I think it's very important to educate those young children, people in sports, to be able to understand what their options are.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you.

Ms. Hill, do you have any comments about that? Is there anything you've heard in your work around the limitations of sports and participation?

**Ms. Nicola Hill:** Absolutely, we've seen that in all the data. One thing that shows leadership is when sports teams and community centres stand together.

Recently in Victoria, the Q Centre and, I think, four of the sports teams decided to endorse menstrual products in their washrooms with Period Promise so that kids going into those facilities will always have the access they need and won't have to avoid....

That's a great model for other sports teams in the country.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you so much.

I'd like to ask one more question of Ms. Hirtz around the cost differential. I am interested in understanding, on a monthly cycle, how much more economical and sustainable a reusable product could be.

**Ms. Leisa Hirtz:** I can speak about the example of a menstrual cup, in particular the Bfree Cup, which can be used for upwards of, and sometimes over, 10 years. Compare that to the purchase of traditional products—let's say tampons or pads—that are available from multinationals. At about five or six months or even less—three to four months—you've already paid the price of a Bfree Cup.

**The Chair:** That's fantastic.

We're now going to move on and finish this round. We'll have Dominique for five minutes and Marc Serré for five minutes.

I will then look at how much time we have left, because I believe it will probably be about two minutes per group before we go and finish the meeting.

Dominique, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Dominique Vien:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Hirtz, on TV and in magazines, we see ads for tampons and sanitary pads. Maybe I'm looking at the wrong magazines and TV channels, but you don't see ads for reusable menstrual products. I see my colleagues nodding their heads in agreement. Are these products not there?

Also, what reaction do you anticipate from the business community if they are asked to pay for their employees' menstrual products?

[*English*]

**Ms. Leisa Hirtz:** Yes, it's a great question, and it's a great point that you see a lot of ads for Poise for incontinence, as well as ads for pads and tampons, those particular ads on TV. It's very expensive. We're small and medium-sized enterprises, and we're looking at ways that we can properly market and get the knowledge out there. I think most of us are doing it through social media.

I take your point, but it's very costly.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Maybe it's a generational thing. Women of my generation didn't have access to reusable products.

[English]

**Ms. Leisa Hirtz:** Right.

**Ms. Suzanne Siemens:** Yes.

If I may respond to that... We are reaching our customers the way they want to be reached. They are using social media. They are using tools that are accessible to them in what they enjoy accessing.

In response to employers' providing the cost for this product, as was addressed earlier, reusables save, in our particular case, 15 to 20 times the cost of disposables because you're not constantly replenishing them in the washrooms and dealing with facilities and storage. We can provide good data to employers on how much money they will actually save by providing reusables to their staff. The staff have that convenience, too, if they're particularly working from home, which is quite a significant number of folks, as well. There's a very strong economic argument, as well as an environmental argument.

• (1215)

**Ms. Leisa Hirtz:** If I could just add one point there in terms of the cost of disposal and the disposable with regard to the bathroom, the facilities.... These are not flushable. I'm talking about the non-reusables, the single-use products. The cost of waste management really doesn't come into account when most people are talking about this issue. However, it's quite costly because they're meant to go to incineration.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** There's so much of everything now.

With the witnesses in the room having responded, do the witnesses who are online have a response?

What reaction from the business world should we expect? Some will say that these are additional costs, so they'll pass the bill on to customers. Others will say they could include this in working conditions, which could be attractive to women. What reaction do you anticipate?

[English]

**Ms. Nicola Hill:** Thank you.

We have partners here in B.C. that are large companies—Pacific Blue Cross and Vancity—in addition to a number of unions, organizations, government crowns and municipalities. I think that, initially, people look at the cost and think it's prohibitive. When they understand that it should be as basic as what they're doing in terms of their other washroom provisions, they can see where it's actually very cost-efficient, particularly if you talk about things like people coming to work and being able to be productive and be in their workplaces. We have not had a significant push-back, and we do have agreements with some pretty large employers.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We're now going to go online to Marc Serré.

Marc, you have five minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses who have presented good recommendations today, which will benefit our study on menstrual equity for women, girls, trans and non-binary people. Menstrual equity and poverty in Canada are very important topics.

Before I ask my first question, I'd like to mention that private sector employers have a responsibility, period. They already provide soap and toilet paper, but they don't ask employees to pay for them. So, since half of the employees in the private sector are women, businesses should also cover the cost of menstrual products.

You all talked a bit about the philanthropic role you play and the importance of accessibility, that is, reaching young girls and women in rural areas and in schools. You also talked about home delivery of products.

Ms. Biggs, what could the federal government do to help the private and philanthropic sectors encourage reach out into rural areas, homes and schools?

[English]

**Ms. Linda Biggs:** I think the labour code changes are a great start to set the tone for what is required when we're going into our workplaces. As you mentioned, just like toilet paper is provided—we never question the cost of that; it's an essential product—so, we feel, should menstrual care products. We should also look at the opportunity costs for not having them there and the statistics around how people leave their work to find a solution.

When we're talking to the private workplaces, it's the same concept. You have a team here, and you're looking at procuring toilet paper. How do you then implement into your workplace another essential product that 26% of the population is going to use?

Really, it's the conversations around that. They're very similar.

However, the rural communities.... One of the issues that we saw was a distribution issue, as you mentioned. The collaboration piece with our non-profit partners that are in those communities has been an essential way for us to get that reach with our donated products. A lot of the non-profit partners involved in this, as witnesses here today and in prior meetings, are in those communities, having those important conversations. We work directly with them, and with dozens of them across Canada, to be able to reach those communities.

• (1220)

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you for that.

My second question is for Jillian Johnston.

We talked about the role of the private sector, and you mentioned the labour code changes that are happening. You talked with my colleague earlier about some of the recommendations for those synergies with the private sector and the federal government—and with the provinces, to a certain extent.

When we talk about menstrual products, obviously there's a physical cost to those, but you also mentioned the education. A lot of the witnesses talked about education. This morning, for example, there was an article on menopause at the workplace. Ten per cent of women are quitting their jobs because of the stigma attached to menopause. That represents about a billion dollars lost to the Canadian economy.

I want to know if there's a link to what you're doing on the employer side—education—when you talk about menstrual products. Also, how do you look at the continuum when you look at menopause, when you look at the entire lifespan at the workplace? Are there any links? Are there any recommendations you would have for us federally?

**Ms. Jillian Johnston:** Thank you. That's a great question.

In our work, we keep coming back to the definition of menstrual health, and I would encourage you to look into the notes that I provided and see what the definition is. It is incredibly thorough and comprehensive, and it covers everything including the lifespan of a person who menstruates.

We do look at not just the period as the five days when there is bleeding and there's a problem, but we look at that 28 days that happens every 28 days for a very long span, and then menstruation comes to an end with menopause, yet that's still part of the menstrual cycle, so you're right.

You have done your homework. Thank you very much for bringing that up. It's pretty important to remember that, and we hope to be able to share through our virtual sessions with the project we're doing with the period-positive workplace. That's the kind of education we want to share.

**The Chair:** Perfect. Thank you so much.

We have seven minutes remaining, so we have about a minute and a half per group.

I would like to ask one question and then we will go around to the group from there. I will be passing it over to Sonia for your minute and a half. I will start this right now. I will give myself a minute.

Thank you so much to everybody. I really do appreciate your coming.

Linda, perhaps to you, I know we have talked a lot about distribution. To me, distribution is one of the greatest challenges we have, especially when we're looking to the Far North and to some of these remote communities.

There are great options through the United Way and different things like that, but how are we getting it to those remote communities when it is already so difficult to get food and items like that?

**Ms. Linda Biggs:** As I mentioned in my testimony, from an individual perspective, we're able to ship to those communities for free.

We do that because our packaging is letter mail rate essentially. As a business, we took the look. We had the lens of accessibility and we built that into our model to ask, "How do we then provide this accessibility to everyone in Canada equally?"

All of the individual businesses here today have that lens and are taking a look at those innovative solutions, which I think is very important for this fund and this program—to really work with organizations like us because we are already taking those steps forward.

**The Chair:** Thanks so much.

I'm now going to pass it on to Sonia.

Sonia, you have the floor.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being with us and thank you for your work and advocacy.

Ms. Biggs, you mentioned that 87% of people who menstruate have been caught off guard with 34% of them having to leave school, work or sports to find a pad or tampon.

What recommendation would you have for our committee to ensure accessible and affordable menstrual products for all individuals in Canada so that no one has to miss work or school? You also mentioned the distribution. Can you give us some recommendations or advice?

• (1225)

**Ms. Linda Biggs:** Yes. Thank you for the question.

It's a very complex solution, so there's not going to be a one-size-fits-all approach to it. It's very much taking an innovative approach to how period care is dispersed and the options available.

When it comes to disposable and reusable, it's not necessarily an either-or option. You can use both. For workers, it's the same as toilet paper. You need this product when you go to work. We need to provide accessible products, and then take that sustainable lens, because when we're looking at the impact of these products and how many people use them, we can do better by providing products that are disposable, biodegradable and compostable.

I think it's very much going to take collaboration at all levels, with our non-profit partners, with organizations like joni and Aisle and Bfree Cup, who are here today, because we each come with a unique solution and a unique lens to be able to build a long-term solution in this space that really takes—again we're going to say—this team Canada approach because that's really important.

**The Chair:** Awesome. Thank you so much.

I'll go back to Andréanne Larouche for a question.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you very much.

Thank you to the witnesses, and I would like one of them to answer the following question.

In March of 2021, people living in Quebec's 92 municipalities and Montreal's eight boroughs were entitled to a subsidy program for the purchase of reusable menstrual products. We're talking about 2,042,431 people, or 24.9% of Quebec's population. In addition, the government of Quebec has already carried out studies on the issue, including one entitled "Faciliter l'accès aux produits menstruels: mesures possibles", conducted by the Conseil du statut de la femme du Québec. Many municipalities in Quebec have adopted measures to facilitate access to menstrual products.

Could the federal government offer financial resources to implement similar initiatives? I'm thinking of Quebec, but we have a witness here from British Columbia. This falls under the health system. It would follow that the Canada Health Transfer should be increased to give Quebec and the provinces the financial means to set up more initiatives like this.

[*English*]

**Ms. Suzanne Siemens:** Yes. I would agree that additional funding to the provinces would be hugely beneficial so that they can then adopt a provincial approach to ensuring their constituents get what they need. I would support that.

**The Chair:** That's fantastic.

It's down to just one question, because we're right at the end of the time.

Bonita, you can have one final question.

Thanks.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you.

My question will be for Ms. Hill around other feminist laws that may be able to address equity in addition to product. I think about what recently happened in Spain around allowable days for debilitating period pain.

I currently have a petition that I'm sponsoring in the House of Commons around this ask for the ability to have days off with this debilitating pain. I know that many young girls and diverse genders throw up and vomit during this time. I'm wondering if you have any thoughts about other feminist laws. They're often very hard to push through.

**Ms. Nicola Hill:** Thank you for that petition. I think it's really important as decision-makers, even in terms of recommendations and questions, to look at which programs and policies can be changed. Really, as you're looking at developing an assistance program, for example, does it account for needing to provide more money to people who menstruate to access menstrual products?

The labour code changes are important, and we're going to be looking at similar things in B.C. around employment standards and WorkSafe, because these are important measures. When you're looking at poverty reduction plans, are you accounting in those programs for giving people access to emergency management plans?

It is incredibly important not to look at this as isolated to one act or one fund. You need to have a holistic approach that applies this lens to ensure the issue is actually being addressed throughout education, poverty and northern services.

Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

On behalf of the committee, I would really like to thank all of the witnesses who came today to give us their professional look at this really important issue.

We are going to suspend for a moment. I'm asking any of our members online to get on the other link. We'll be going in camera for a few minutes.

We will suspend for about two to three minutes and get on the new link. Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]







Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :  
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>