

September 2026

Written Submission for the 2026 Pre-budget Consultations

On behalf of the organizations working
toward menstrual equity in Canada



**FREE PERIODS
CANADA**

hago
help a girl out



**Dignité mensuelle
Monthly Dignity**



**Project
AIM**
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Recommendations

1. Establish a permanent, federally funded Menstrual Education and Awareness Program
2. Create a permanent national menstrual product distribution program
3. Establish a dedicated research stream for Menstrual Equity

SUMMARY

Menstrual equity means having equal, comprehensive access to menstrual products, along with education about sexual and reproductive health and rights (WAGE). When people lack access to menstrual products, education, or facilities, the consequences extend beyond the individual; It affects school, work, community life, household finances, and long-term economic security for both individuals and the Canadian economy.

In 2023, the government launched the Menstrual Equity Fund (MEF) pilot to address a crucial need for accessible menstrual products and menstrual education in Canada. The pilot has laid a strong foundation for a permanent national program; however, the MEF pilot is set to end in March 2027.

We recommend that the federal government establish a permanent Menstrual Equity Program.

Without a permanent program and sustainable funding, Communities that received menstrual products risk losing access, and menstrual education will not reach future generations of youth entering adolescence.

A permanent Menstrual Equity program is crucial because:

- The pilot built capacity and partnerships across Community organizations; many organizations will cease to exist without sustained funding.
- Repeat requests for menstrual education workshops show the ongoing need to reach new generations of youth as they enter adolescence.
- The six education delivery partners in the MEF pilot collaborated effectively to use resources efficiently. Partnerships with community-specific organizations, such as Moon Time Connections, demonstrate how hard-to-reach northern and remote communities can be engaged.
- The pilot opened opportunities for Canadian small businesses developing menstrual products; permanent funding would encourage small businesses to make long-term investments and drive innovation in the Canadian business sector.
- No other funding program directly fits the Menstrual Equity program's unique approach, which makes it difficult for organizations in the space to secure funding.

This pre-budget submission was developed collectively with the six education partners of the MEF pilot.

Submitted on behalf of the following organizations:



Background

Why do we need a Menstrual Equity Program?

1 in 6 Canadians experience period poverty, and 3 in 4 northern Indigenous kin face barriers accessing menstrual products in their communities. Meanwhile, 65% of Canadian menstruators received little or no adequate menstrual-health education. This also has an economic impact, seen in **lost wages, missed school, and reduced productivity** in comparable countries.

While comprehensive data is not available in Canada, evidence from comparable developed countries shows:

- Netherlands: 13.8% reported missing work or school because of their periods, while 80.7% reported reduced productivity, with an average of **8.9 days of lost productivity** per year. ([Netherlands](#))
- UK and Ireland: Students who menstruate miss an average of **10 study days per year**, increasing to **19 days for those with menstrual health conditions**. This equals **11 weeks of lost study over a three-year degree**. ([UK and Ireland](#))
- Australia: **77% of women reported bothersome menstrual symptoms**, 44% missed work or study because of them, and the estimated **economic impact was AUD \$14.2 billion per year**. ([Australia](#))

A permanent menstrual equity program will ensure lasting access to menstrual products, close gaps in menstrual-health education, and reach communities, like northern Indigenous communities, that continue to face the greatest barriers. The 2023 Menstrual Equity Fund pilot program has already shown the meaningful impact this work can have.

What the Federal Menstrual Equity Fund Pilot Has Demonstrated

In 2023, Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) launched the Menstrual Equity Fund (MEF) pilot program to address a crucial need for accessible menstrual products and menstrual education in Canada. Food Banks Canada was selected to deliver a national pilot and received federal funding to procure and distribute menstrual products, as well as support education and awareness activities. The pilot was designed to test a national approach to providing free menstrual products to diverse low-income populations, increase awareness of menstrual health, and reduce stigma (WAGE, 2023). ([Canada](#))

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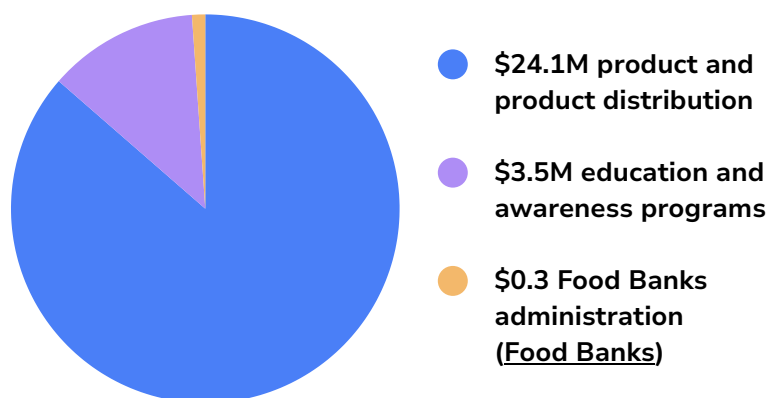


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The federal Menstrual Equity Fund (MEF) pilot is a strong example of what coordinated national investment can accomplish. According to the Government of Canada, in the program's first two years (2023–2025), nearly 400 pilot sites and more than 2,000 distribution locations participated, with representation across all provinces and territories [WAGE]. Millions of menstrual products were distributed during this period, resulting in more than four million instances of people accessing menstrual products [WAGE]. We estimate this reach **increased at least three times** in subsequent years of the pilot program.

Moon Time Connections, an **Indigenous-led menstrual equity organization** partnered with Food Banks Canada to distribute approximately \$4 million in products to northern Indigenous communities. This partnership enabled the pilot to reach remote communities, underscoring the importance of a partnered and collaborative effort between government, private, and charitable organizations. Distribution to local communities requires careful coordination of transportation, warehousing, Community relationships, and an understanding of northern logistics and cultural contexts. (Newswire)

First two years of pilot program (2023-2025) Total funding \$27.9 M



Through a competitive process, Food Banks Canada selected the following six menstrual equity organizations to deliver menstrual education and awareness programs:

- Free Periods Canada (National)
- Help A Girl Out (National)
- Moon Time Connections/True North Aid (National)
- The Period Purse (National)
- Monthly Dignity (Quebec)
- Project AIM (BC)

This collective of Menstrual Equity Fund education partners scaled the delivery of educational programs, reaching 70,000 individuals directly and 10s of millions more indirectly across all provinces and territories in Canada in the first two years of the pilot. (Canada) Demand for menstrual education renews every year as new cohorts reach the age when it is needed. The value of the MEF-funded education programs are evidenced by The Period Purse's 9.8 Net Promoter Score and strong repeat demand across education providers.

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What a Permanent Menstrual Equity Program Could Achieve

Countries, such as Scotland, show what sustained investment in menstrual equity can achieve. Free products have been available in schools, colleges and universities since 2018, and in 2022 Scotland became the first country to establish a legal right to free period products. (BBC, Scottish Government, YoungScot, Australia).

- Before widespread free provision, nearly 1 in 10 girls missed school because they lacked period products, averaging 4.56 missed days.
- After free products were introduced, more than 8 in 10 students who accessed them reported a positive impact, and 64% said they could continue daily activities more easily.
- Among adults unable to afford enough products, 11% stopped activities such as work or education.

By establishing a permanent Menstrual Equity Program, Canada can transform outcomes for menstruators nationwide, reducing missed school and work days, easing financial strain on households, and strengthening economic security by keeping people in school and in the workforce.

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Recommendation #1:

Establish a permanent, federally funded Menstrual Education and Awareness Program

Menstrual education must address needs at every stage of life. Menstrual health does not begin and end with access to pads and tampons. It includes education, understanding of menstrual cycles, access to appropriate health information and care, management of menstrual pain and heavy bleeding, perimenopause, menopause, and the ability to participate fully in education, employment, and community life. The World Health Organization has found that providing menstrual supplies and menstrual health education for girls and boys in schools improves health outcomes and reduces shame and stigma. ([WHO](#))

The Period Purse conducted a scan of Canadian public education curricula for grades 4 to 8 and found that several provinces do not include menstruation as a topic at all. Where it is mentioned, coverage is sparse, and menstruation is described only as one step in the reproductive process. The curricula largely omit the practical aspects of menstruation management, as well as the physical and emotional health issues associated with menstruation.

Recommendation: Establish a permanent, federally funded Menstrual Education and Awareness Program

The Government of Canada should establish a long-term, permanently funded Menstrual Education and Awareness Program delivered through experienced menstrual equity organizations and Community partners.

Funding should support:

- Culturally relevant menstrual health education
- Education adapted for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Communities
- Age-appropriate education for children and youth
- Education for parents, caregivers, educators, health professionals, and Community workers
- Menstrual pain and menstrual health education
- Perimenopause and menopause education
- Disability-inclusive menstrual health resources
- Two-Spirit, trans, and gender-diverse inclusive programming
- Multilingual and Indigenous-language resources

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Recommendation #2:

Create a permanent national menstrual product distribution program

Women and Gender Equality Canada's national research found that 17% of Canadians who menstruate have personally experienced period poverty, increasing to 25% among those living in households earning less than \$40,000 annually. In addition, 15% reported that an inability to afford menstrual products had prevented them from participating in daily activities such as school, work, or sports (Women and Gender Equality Canada [WAGE], 2025). ([Canada](#))

The MEF pilot program demonstrates what can be achieved by leveraging Community organizations across Canada. However, without continued investment, this progress is temporary, and the conditions will revert once the pilot ends.

Recommendation: Create a permanent national menstrual product distribution program

The federal government should establish a permanent program providing free menstrual products to the most vulnerable Canadians through trusted Community organizations, food banks, friendship centres, schools, shelters, Indigenous organizations, and other local service providers. Any menstrual product distribution or subsidy program should be flexible to Community and individual needs.

Northern and remote Communities should receive dedicated funding that recognizes the substantially higher cost of transportation and distribution.

Funding should cover:

- Procurement of menstrual products, including reusable products
- Warehouse and transportation costs
- Shipping costs to northern and remote Communities
- Logistics coordination
- Community-level administration.

Additionally, we recommend that the distribution program include both reusable products and subsidies for purchases of reusable products, which will support waste reduction and lower the overall cost of period products in the long term.

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Recommendation #3:

Establish a dedicated research stream for Menstrual Equity

Menstrual health is often used as an indicator of overall health and well-being. Yet a recent review of Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) funding shows that only 0.03% of overall CIHR funding goes toward menstrual health research ([The Lancet](#)). Anecdotal evidence and international research point to significant economic impacts of menstrual inequity, and some studies have begun to estimate its prevalence. However, Canada still lacks comprehensive, nationally representative data on the economic costs of menstrual inequity across all populations.

Stronger data on the economic impact of menstrual inequity could:

- Help build a stronger case for non-governmental institutions to provide free menstrual products
- Provide organizations with a clear cost-benefit rationale for supplying menstrual products across various industries
- Support policy development at the federal and provincial levels, such as informing the National Framework for Women's Health (Bill S-243).

Recommendation: Establish a dedicated research stream for Menstrual Equity – Funding should support:

- A separate, dedicated research program focused on the economic impact of menstrual inequity.
- Appropriate funding through coordinated efforts with SSHRC, CIHR, NSERC, and/or Health Canada
- Evaluation of the Menstrual Equity Fund (MEF) pilot program to determine the direct cost of menstrual products, transportation and shipping costs, and household financial impacts
- An economic impact assessment that examines school absenteeism and participation, employment absenteeism and presenteeism, and a cost-benefit analysis of reusable menstrual products
- A life-course approach, considering the various stages of menstrual health across the reproductive lifespan, along with environmental considerations
- Prioritization of Indigenous-led and Community-based methodologies and include northern, remote, rural, low-income, disabled, youth, and gender-diverse populations

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Conclusion

Menstrual inequity imposes costs on individuals, families, Communities, employers, health systems, educational institutions, and the environment. Canada has already taken an important first step through the federal Menstrual Equity Fund pilot and the research supported by Women and Gender Equality Canada. The evidence now supports moving from a temporary pilot model to a **permanent, adequately funded, national menstrual equity program**.

The organizations working in this field are not asking the federal government to begin from scratch. They are asking the government to build on existing infrastructure, research, partnerships, and Community knowledge.

Permanent investment would provide Canadians with greater financial security, improve access to education and employment, strengthen health and well-being, support Indigenous and northern Communities, reduce environmental waste, and allow Canada to finally develop the evidence necessary to understand the full economic cost of menstrual inequity.

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