

British Columbia News

Government supports access to free menstrual products for students, people in need

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/19362>

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Burnaby - Under a ministerial order that was issued Friday, April 5, 2019, all B.C. public schools will be required to provide free menstrual products for students in school washrooms by the end of 2019.

In issuing the order, Education Minister Rob Fleming said it's time to normalize and equalize access to menstrual products in schools, helping to create a better learning environment for students.

"Students should never have to miss school, extracurricular, sports or social activities because they can't afford or don't have access to menstrual products," said Fleming, adding that current research indicates that one in seven students has missed school due to their periods because they cannot afford products.

"This is a common-sense step forward that is, frankly, long overdue. We look forward to working with school districts and communities to make sure students get the access they need with no stigma and no barriers."

The ministerial order – which takes effect immediately but allows districts until the end of 2019 to comply – comes with \$300,000 in provincial startup funding. Over the coming months, the ministry will continue to work with school districts, community and education partners to look at the needs of each district, identify gaps and ensure they have the funding needed to meet this new requirement.

In addition, government is also providing a one-time grant of \$95,000 to support the United Way Period Promise Research Project, to fund menstrual products for up to 10 non-profit agencies and research into how best to provide services and products for people who menstruate.

"The cost and availability of menstrual products is a real concern for those who are poor and often face the choice of purchasing those products or buying other essentials, like food," said Shane Simpson, Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. "I encourage other organizations to join our government in supporting the Period Promise campaign, to help end the stigma that causes social isolation, and begin to address that larger issue around affordability."

"Having your period is a part of life, and easy and affordable access to menstrual products should be simple," said Mitzi Dean, Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity. "Menstrual products should be available to people when and where they need them, which is why we're improving access in schools and in communities. These actions are going to make a big difference in the lives of people who menstruate, and I'm proud that our government is taking leadership on this issue."

The United Way funding builds on the work government is doing to reduce poverty in British Columbia. In March 2019, the B.C. government released TogetherBC, the Province's first Poverty Reduction Strategy. TogetherBC brings together investments from across government that will help reduce overall poverty in the province by 25%, and cut child poverty in half, over the next five years.

Quotes:

Glen Hansman, president, B.C. Teachers' Federation –

"By ensuring school districts make menstrual products free and accessible to all students who need them, the government is taking an important action towards improving equity in our schools. There are many reasons why students need access to menstrual products at school. Many of our members can share stories of students who have felt shame or embarrassment, or have even gone home, because they did not have access to a

tampon or pad or could not afford one. Today's announcement will also help deal with what the United Way's Period Promise campaign calls 'period poverty.' I want to thank the Minister of Education and this government, as well as those working on the United Way campaign, for making this announcement today."

Mark Gifford, chair, New Westminster Schools Board of Education –

"Our board is proud to have led the way in breaking down barriers and ensuring access to free menstrual products in all of our schools. It's a basic gender-equity issue and our work helps ensure female and transgender students can manage normal bodily functions without stigma, cost, or disruptions to their learning. We are thrilled with the minister's announcement today and applaud such swift action in support of advancing a fundamental right of access across the province."

Andrea Sinclair, president, B.C. Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils –

"This is a long-standing 'hidden and unspoken' problem for students who need menstrual products. There continues to be stigma surrounding this, which causes unnecessary anxiety and reduced confidence for students, including reduced attendance. We need to remove the barriers to access, eliminate the stigma and normalize the conversation for student well-being. We are encouraged by this action and fully support it. Today's announcement is another example of the ministry listening and acting for the best interest of students."

Michael McKnight, president and CEO, United Way of the Lower Mainland –

"The inspiring support United Way's Period Promise campaign has received demonstrates the impact we create when we mobilize to address issues in our own neighbourhoods. I want to thank the Government of B.C. for its commitment to tackling period poverty, and thank the passionate individuals tackling vulnerability and isolation in all its forms, in our local communities."

Susanne Skidmore, secretary-treasurer, BC Federation of Labour, volunteer co-chair of United Way's Period Promise campaign –

"The community and government response to the issue of period poverty has been incredible. The hundreds of thousands of donated menstrual products we've received will make a concrete difference in people's lives, and with support from the Government of B.C., we can also create change on a wider scale, long-term."

Learn More:

Participate in the United Way Period Promise campaign: <https://www.uwlm.ca/>

Read TogetherBC: B.C.'s Poverty Reduction Strategy: <https://www.gov.bc.ca/TogetherBC>

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