

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION

INFORMATION NOTE

DATE: November 10, 2020

PREPARED FOR: David Galbraith, Deputy Minister, Research, Innovation and Policy Division

ISSUE: Platform Commitments - Deliver a comprehensive approach to period poverty

BACKGROUND:

Period poverty is the widespread lack of access to menstrual products due to financial limitations. It affects girls, women, non-binary and transgender people across British Columbia (BC) who cannot afford menstrual products.

In 2018, 12.1% of British Columbians were living in poverty. For those who require menstrual products, financial barriers are compounded by stigma and discrimination, as well as misinformation associated with menstruation. As a result, these populations are likely affected by this issue more regularly and on a wider scale.

The NDP's 2020 Election Platform made a commitment to create a multi-sectoral Period Poverty Task Force to develop a long-term response to period poverty. Addressing period poverty is aligned with the commitment to making life more affordable, increasing access to opportunity and improving social inclusion as outlined in *TogetherBC*.

Current Work

The Province and several B.C. municipalities have taken recent action on this issue:

- In April 2019, the provincial government issued a first-in-Canada ministerial order that requires all public schools to provide free menstrual products for students in school bathrooms. This order followed a similar initiative announced by New Westminster school district in February 2019, and several other municipalities have followed suit over the past year.
- In July 2019, the Province announced a \$95,000 grant to the United Way of the Lower Mainland (UWLM) to distribute menstrual products to 12 non-profit agencies that serve vulnerable populations. An additional \$12,000 was provided in March 2020. The project is collecting data on the number of people served and products used, how period poverty affects people's lives, and how addressing the issue can benefit communities. An interim report was received in April 2020 with a final report expected in December 2020.

DISCUSSION:

Jurisdictions around the world have taken different approaches to addressing period poverty, including removing sales tax on menstrual products, redistributing sales tax to create grants for organizations serving women, providing free menstrual products in public places and subsidizing reusable menstrual products.

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Since 2018, the Scottish government has made menstrual products freely available in schools, colleges and universities, public places and in sports clubs. In 2020, legislation was introduced to create a legal obligation for the Scottish government to make sure period products are available for free for “anyone who needs them.” The Scottish government estimates the cost to implement the legislation at £24M annually (\$41M). The Scottish population is about 5.45 million, comparable to BC at just over 5 million.

In Quebec, municipalities are encouraging the purchase of sustainable sanitary products through a grant program where on the presentation of a proof of purchase, people can benefit from a refund on items such as menstrual underwear and reusable menstrual cups. Furthermore, a preliminary finding in the UWLM interim report was that 60% of survey respondents approved of reusable menstrual products. Respondents cited greater security and a reduction in product spending.

CONCLUSION:

A comprehensive approach to period poverty requires addressing the cost and accessibility of menstrual products with a focus on vulnerable populations.

To develop policy options for B.C., government’s task force should be comprised of advocates, academics, and/or experts on period poverty. See Appendix A for s.12

s.12 The announcement could coincide with the release of the final Period Promise report from UWLM in early 2021.

There may also be an opportunity for early action / investments in 2021 based on the recommendations of the UWLM report.

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Appendix A –^{s.12}

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INFORMATION NOTE

DATE: November 26, 2020

PREPARED FOR: Honourable Nicholas Simons, Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

ISSUE: Mandate - Deliver a comprehensive approach to period poverty

BACKGROUND:

The mandate letter includes a requirement to, “Build on the work of so many around the province to make B.C. a global leader in the fight to end period poverty by creating a multi-sectoral Period Poverty Task Force to develop a comprehensive, long-term response to period poverty in B.C.” This commitment is aligned with B.C.’s first poverty reduction strategy, *TogetherBC*, and its focus on making life more affordable, improving supports, and increasing social inclusion.

Period poverty is the lack of access to menstrual products due to financial barriers. Access barriers can be compounded by the stigma associated with menstruation. It affects girls, women, non-binary and transgender people with populations facing multiple barriers more likely to be impacted by this issue.

This commitment arose from years of grassroots advocacy. Following a 2015 national campaign to remove GST from menstrual products, United Way led “Tampon Tuesday,” a product drive and awareness campaign across Canada. The campaign’s success in the Lower Mainland (2016-2019) contributed to growing awareness of period poverty’s impact on participation in society including education and employment.

DISCUSSION:

Actions Taken in BC

The Province and several B.C. municipalities have taken recent action on this issue. In April 2019, the Province issued a first-in-Canada ministerial order that requires all public schools to provide free menstrual products for students in school bathrooms. This order followed a similar initiative announced by New Westminster school district in February 2019, and several other municipalities have since followed suit.

In July 2019, the Province announced a \$95,000 grant to the United Way of the Lower Mainland (UWLM) to distribute menstrual products to 12 non-profit agencies that serve vulnerable populations. An additional \$12,000 was provided in March 2020. The project is collecting data on the number of people served and products used, how period poverty affects people’s lives, and how addressing the issue benefits communities. An interim report was received in April 2020 with a final report expected in December 2020.

Actions in other Jurisdictions

Several jurisdictions including Scotland, Quebec, PEI, and Nova Scotia have started to address this issue. Approaches include removing sales tax on products, redistributing

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sales tax to create grants for organizations serving women, providing free products, and subsidizing reusable menstrual products. On November 24, 2020, Scotland made history by becoming the first country to pass legislation ensuring menstrual products are freely accessible to anyone who needs them. The legislation requires menstrual products to be available in all public buildings including schools, universities, and communities centres. Products must be easily obtained and respecting of the dignity of the persons obtaining them.

Nova Scotia currently has two bills going to second reading – one to ensure menstrual products are included as part of the special needs allowance for income assistance recipients, and the second to make it mandatory for employers to make free menstrual products available to workers. Annual government investment ranges from \$1 million for subsidizing product in Quebec to an estimated \$41 million per year in Scotland to implement new legislation.

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RECOMMENDATION:

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DATE: October 20, 2020

PREPARED FOR: David Galbraith, Deputy Minister
Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

ISSUE: Municipal Enquiries regarding Treatment of Eviction Compensation

BACKGROUND:

Some municipalities have recently adopted or are currently developing new tenant assistance policies to protect tenants, by requiring landlords/developers to compensate them when they are evicted for specific reasons listed under *The Residential Tenancy Act (RTA)*.

Payments are not from the municipality; they are from landlords/developers, as required by municipal bylaws. Payment amounts vary depending on the municipality. For example, lump sum payments can range from two to 36 months of rent.

These tenant compensation payments are in addition to what is required under the *RTA*. For tenants who are evicted under Section 49 of the *RTA*, Section 51 states they are eligible to receive one month's rent worth of compensation. An additional amount equal to 12 times the monthly rent must be provided if the landlord delays conducting the activity which led to the eviction or if the landlord changes the nature of that activity. Landlords may also provide additional amounts which exceed the amount required by the *RTA*.

In Fall 2019, the ^{s.16}
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In August 2020, ministry staff completed a review of various local government "demoviction" policies. A briefing note was put forward, in which staff recommended a new regulation to fully exempt eviction compensation (lump sum or recurring) when notice is provided for reasons detailed under Section 49 of the *RTA*. This includes payments required under Section 51 of the *RTA*, payments required under municipal tenant assistance policies, and additional payments by developers/landlords. The recommendation was approved by the Deputy Minister.

When the provincial election was called on September 21, 2020, the proposed regulatory changes were put on hold (during the interregnum period). However, the ministry still needs to respond to municipal inquiries in the interim.

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DISCUSSION:

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CONCLUSION:

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Program

Basic Income Pilot

Program Description:

As part of the 2017 Confidence and Supply Agreement the government committed to test whether giving people a basic income is an effective way to reduce poverty, improve health, housing and employment. Based on discussions with experts and studies of other basic income pilots, BC determined that the most effective approach would be to first convene an independent expert committee whose mandate would be to study basic income in the BC context and apply basic income concepts to BC's current income support system.

The committee was formed in June 2018 and is looking at BC's existing income support system and how the ideals of a basic income could be used to transform and enhance it. The project is being led by academics from UBC, SFU and the University of Calgary, and is being supported by some of the best academics from universities across Canada. The expert committee is comprised of the following:

- David Green (chair) Department of Economics – UBC
- Lindsay Tedds School of Public Policy – Univ. of Calgary
- Jonathan Rhys Kesselman School of Public Policy – SFU

Mandate

The committee is conducting research on the various basic income models and will assess their implications for BC. To support this, they will simulate the basic income models on BC's population to identify impacts, winners and losers, and financial implications.

The committee is also looking at BC's existing income support system and how the ideals of a basic income could be used to transform and enhance it. The project is incorporating the impact that advances in technology and automation are predicted to have on the labour market over the next several decades. The work of the committee is also considering additional social, economic, and health-related trends and drivers that are anticipated to impact BC's low-income population and income support system in the coming years including changes in disability prevalence and conditions, advancements in medical treatment and assistive technology, demographic shifts including changing family composition, and shifting citizen expectations. The project will put special focus on BC's more disadvantaged populations, including persons with disabilities, Indigenous people, and gender-diverse people.

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The committee will make recommendations on how to modify BC's income support system to apply a basic income lens, while applying the core basic income principles of equity, efficiency, accessibility, and avoiding disincentives to work. The following principles will be considered when evaluating changes to BC's income support system:

- improves accessibility to supports for people in need of assistance
- reduces the unnecessary complexity associated with income support programs
- reduces poverty
- promotes social inclusion
- increases program administration efficiency
- promotes labour market attachment
- eases transitions between different income support programs and between income support and employment as applicable
- promotes early intervention to mitigate the impact of life events on long-term economic security
- considers impact on government's fiscal plan

Funding

The pilot was funded in the first provincial budget, \$2 million for 2018/2019 and \$2 million for 2019/2020. As a result of delays in accessing data the contracts were extended to April 2021, although no additional funding was provided. The ministry has contracts with both UBC and the University of Calgary. The UBC contract is for \$1.93 million while the University of Calgary contract is for \$1.11 million.

In 2018/19, \$1.65 million was spent on the Basic Income project while in 2019/20 \$1.78 million was spent.

Deliverables and Timelines

An interim report on the findings of the project was delivered in early August 2020. The final report is due December 31, 2020. The related research projects will start to be completed and made available in early 2021.

Interim Report

The interim report contains their findings on the feasibility of a basic income for British Columbia which is a more thorough analysis of what the panel members have stated publicly. The panel states that a basic income is much more complex than people recognize, with so many different elements that need to be considered that the

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combinations are considerable. The costs to implement a decent basic income would be very high, and it would require a significant overhaul of the tax system. They estimate that the annual cost of a basic income that guarantees all British Columbians are at least at the MBM poverty line would cost \$51 billion, approximately the entire BC budget. Less expensive models are possible, but they are also less effective at reducing poverty. The analysis shows that to have a major impact on reducing poverty the basic income model selected will have to be expensive. The tax increases necessary to implement a basic income would have significant economic impacts in terms of work and other disincentives and business competitiveness.

They also disagree with the many claims that a basic income will have significant positive impacts on other social outcomes including health, education and justice. While they believe that reducing poverty will have a positive impact, they feel that more than alleviating poverty is required to fully address these issues. They also take exception to the recent claims that if Canada had a basic income we would have been in a better situation during the COVID-19 pandemic. They argue that if we had a basic income Canadians would have built that into their spending patterns, and the income shock caused by the pandemic would still have required a new program response.

The interim report also includes their preliminary list of 54 recommendations to reform BC's income support program, 28 which are directly related to SDPR. SDPR is currently working with the different ministries to determine the implications of the recommendations in terms of feasibility, cost, and implementation issues.