

P-05-863 Provide free sanitary products to all women in low income households

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Research Briefing:

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Malpas WI demands free sanitary products to all women in low income households.

The Women's Institute was set up in 1915 and campaigns on issues which matter to women and their communities.

Our aim is to empower and inspire women of all ages. We believe that no-one should be forced to go without sanitary products because of cost.

With ever more women needing foodbanks to keep themselves alive, it has become clear that sanitary products are a luxury women on low incomes cannot afford.

Across the UK there are girls too poor to buy sanitary protection. They are having to miss school. Their dignity is being undermined.

For too long women's needs have been neglected. Unlike property transactions, sanitary products are still not exempt from VAT. Periods are not a luxury, they are a necessity. Women do not choose to menstruate.

We call on the Welsh Government to follow Scotland's lead and provide free sanitary products to all women in low income households.

Background

Period poverty is when women and girls struggle to pay for essential sanitary products on a monthly basis with significant impacts on their hygiene, health and well-being.

According to the girls' rights charity [Plan International UK](#), one in 10 girls are unable to afford sanitary items in the UK. Findings from their research show that one in seven girls has had to

ask to borrow sanitary wear from a friend due to affordability issues, and more than one in 10 girls has had to improvise sanitary wear due to affordability issues. The Charity has called on the UK Government to end period poverty by providing free sanitary products in schools, foodbanks and homeless shelters.

Welsh Government Action

The former First Minister, Carwyn Jones AM [committed](#) the Welsh Government to working with local government in Wales to create a national, sustainable response to period poverty.

The Welsh Government [announced](#) on 23 March 2018 that it had allocated £1 million to tackle period poverty in Wales. The Welsh Government's statement explains that 'local authorities will receive £440,000 over the next two years to tackle period poverty in their communities where levels of deprivation are highest, and £700,000 of capital funding to improve facilities and equipment in schools – ensuring that all girls and young women can access good sanitary facilities when they need them'.

Assembly debate

On 2 May 2018, Assembly Members passed a motion, put forward by Jane Hutt AM and Jenny Rathbone AM calling on the Welsh Government to consider the impact of period poverty and stigma on women and girls in Wales during a [debate](#) in plenary.

The issue had been raised previously in the Senedd. In October 2017, Huw Irranca-Davies AM [tabled a question](#) calling for a statement on how the Welsh Government is supporting and encouraging both grass-roots volunteer and local authority efforts to tackle period poverty.

Further Information

On 2 February 2019, BBC Wales published an article [Patients 'denied free sanitary products' in some Welsh hospitals'](#), which reported that some Health Boards do not PROVIDE sanitary products to patients.

The Welsh Government's Social Research department has published a report '[Exploring Welsh food bank responses to period poverty](#)'.

The Scottish Government are tackling the issue of period poverty by offering sanitary pads and tampons for free to women and girls from low income households. Free sanitary products have been provided in many schools, colleges and universities since August 2018. The Scottish Government [announced](#) in January 2019 its intention to widen the distribution of these products further, making £4 million available towards providing free sanitary products in more public places, such as leisure centres and libraries. It will be up to local authorities to decide on specific locations for distribution in order to best meet local demand.