



9<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Sorca Clarke, TD  
Dáil Eireann  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2.

**PQ 5462/24**

**To ask the Minister for Health to provide an update on the HSE period poverty scheme.**

Dear Deputy Clarke,

The Health Service Executive have been requested to reply directly to your above Parliamentary Question which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

The HSE National Social Inclusion office (NSIO) was allocated €300K in budget 2023 for period dignity. This national project aims to reduce stigma and introduce period poverty mitigation measures for women and girls at risk of period poverty.

A steering committee was established in Jan 2022 to oversee implementation of the scheme, the committee includes representation from each HSE Community Health Organisation area and representation from the Department of Health and is chaired by the HSE NSIO.

The funding has been used to support over ninety HSE funded organisations to provide period products to vulnerable women and girls. A proportion of the funding has been used to provide education, wellness days, leaflets and promotion of the period dignity scheme. The scheme provides period products to social inclusion target groups, including Travellers, Roma, international protection applicants, refugees, those experiencing homelessness, addiction services, domestic violence refuges, LGBTI+. Products are distributed via pick up points, direct distribution through outreach workers, food banks and funded organisations.

The majority of projects have reported that sanitary towels are the most requested and distributed items. As the project progresses and serves as an educational tool, an increasing number of service users are exploring and adopting tampons. Additionally, an increasing number of projects are piloting sustainable products, although the demand for such products has been low to date.

In 2022, focus groups conducted at the South East Community Healthcare pilot site revealed substantial stigma surrounding conversations about periods. However, through the projects, it has been reported that stigma and shame have been reduced. The initiative has yielded favourable additional outcomes by fostering discussions between support workers and women on a wider range of gynaecological issues. Support workers have observed an increase in uptake of smear and breast screenings and women



seeking assistance for conditions such as Polycystic Ovary Syndrome, irregular periods and the menopause due to the project's influence.

In addition to the focus groups held in South East Community Healthcare, educational women's health days, menstrual talks, talks on the menopause, attitudes surveys have all been arranged at various locations. A leaflet on women's health is currently being drafted in Community Healthcare East and will be available in Q2 2024. An art exhibition based around periods and women's health is also planned and it is hoped the exhibition will tour nationally.

The period dignity project has ensured menstrual hygiene equity for the communities supported. The overwhelming positive reception highlights not only the economic support but also the reduction of stigma.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,



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Joseph Doyle  
National Lead, Social Inclusion