

## Action on menstruation matters much more than we think says Commissioner

South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly, has today released her latest report **Menstruation Matters** – an in-depth exploration of the impact menstruation has on South Australian school aged children and young people who have periods.

Commissioner Connolly is calling on the state government to acknowledge that menstruation goes well beyond period poverty and product supply to encompass issues of stigma and taboo that perpetuate young people being taught 'how to hide' instead of 'how to manage' their periods.

As one of the first reports to explore the issue in depth it makes the argument that because of the wide-ranging impact menstruation has on children and young people, the onus is on all sectors of society - government, education, business, health, and community - to recognise menstrual wellbeing and dignity as a systemic issue that is fundamental to children's rights, central to economic productivity, and crucial to achieving gender equity across the State.

Children and young people have told the Commissioner they want the social, economic, cultural and environmental barriers relating to menstruation to stop impacting negatively on their lives while in school and across society more broadly. They have made it clear that improved health outcomes require better menstruation education, universal access to period products and adequate provision of facilities that enable them to manage their periods more easily. By addressing these needs the stigma and taboo that surrounds menstruation will decline.

Recommendations made after an analysis of more than 3,267 responses from 2,985 children and young people between the ages of 7 and 22, include the need to develop a Menstrual Wellbeing Policy as a core pillar of the State's Health in All Policy (HiAP) framework; ensure all children across primary and high school, receive menstruation education that extends beyond the biological cycle; formally recognise the barriers menstruation has on school attendance; and develop best practice resources to support schools to use 'review and change where required procedures' in relation to bathroom access, sanitary bin supply and uniform policy.

Research suggests that whilst product supply and infrastructure responses are part of the solution, the complex socio-economic nature of managing menstruation across an individual's life course requires a suite of reinforcing policies, particularly in relation to social stigma and taboos surrounding menstruation. These must include challenging the expectation that those who menstruate 'know what to do' and must simply 'get over it' and 'soldier on'.

Lack of comprehensive menstrual education means significant numbers of children and young people are not equipped to manage their period in a way that enables their full participation in sport, work, school and life. Neither does it help those who don't menstruate understand the complexity of the issues raised and validate the need for them to be addressed.

Evidence suggests that positive experiences of menstruation come from having access to high quality information, appropriate infrastructure and resources to support menstrual hygiene. These actions can also reduce menstrual taboos and stigma with the long-reaching benefits of good menstrual management including 'increased confidence, higher educational attainment, and ultimately, improved quality of life over the life course'.

**Quotes attributable to Commissioner Helen Connolly:**

It's time to address menstrual wellbeing and the current failings in our responses to menstrual awareness, menstrual education and menstrual management for all South Australian children and young people. We can no longer shrug off the impact of menstruation as an individual challenge or something to be dealt with within the family. It is patently clear that to improve menstrual wellbeing across our community we must acknowledge menstruation as a systemic gender equity and equal opportunity issue, which needs a comprehensive systemic policy response.

To download the "Menstruation Matters" report go to: <https://www.ccyp.com.au/ccyp-reports/>

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

For more information about the work of SA Commissioner for Children and Young People go to:

[www.ccyp.com.au](http://www.ccyp.com.au)

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