

LEGISLATURE IN FOCUS!



HER HEALTH, HER RIGHT:

ENDING PERIOD
POVERTY
TOGETHER



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Period Poverty is a harsh reality for many women and girls in Tobago, forcing them to struggle to afford basic menstrual products. While sexual health resources like condoms are free, menstruation is involuntary and costly—a burden no one should bear alone. Recently, 22 courageous women and girls, ages 15 and up, spoke out in the Assembly Chamber, sharing their struggles and demanding action. Should menstrual products be accessible to all—because dignity is not a luxury?! Is it time to break the silence, advocate for change and ensure that no woman has to choose between food and a pad?

A KEY PERIOD IN TIME...

On International Women's Day 2025 (March 8th), the world rallied behind the theme **"For ALL women and girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment."** In Tobago, this vision was personalised with the theme **"Her Health, Her Right: Closing the Gaps in Healthcare for Women and Girls."** A key focus of the debate was **Period Poverty**, highlighting the struggles women and girls face in accessing menstrual products, sanitation and education. The discussion extended to postpartum care, mental health and other healthcare disparities affecting women and girls in Tobago.

On March 13, 2025, the International Women's Day Debate in the Assembly Chamber became a powerful call for action. Joshel Dann, Leader of Assembly Business and Member for Bethesda/Les Coteaux, introduced a motion for a **Comprehensive Women's Health Action Plan in Tobago**.

The plan aims to:

- Provide free or subsidized menstrual products
- Strengthen menstrual health education
- Expand postpartum and maternal healthcare
- Improve access to contraception and sexual health services.
- Increase mental health resources for women and girls.
- Strengthen rural healthcare
- Reaffirm the Assembly's commitment to making women's healthcare a priority.

Dann emphasised the need for early education on menstruation, stating it would break the generational curse of misinformation.

HMMM... POLICY VS. PRACTICALITY?

The debate revealed two distinct perspectives on tackling women's healthcare challenges. The majority view asserted that government intervention is essential. Majority Councillor Jaelle Charles stated, **"This motion is not just about giving out pads—it's about dignity, equality, and opportunity. It's about ensuring that no girl misses school because of something beyond her control."** The majority emphasised systemic change and government-backed policies as the key to real progress.

In contrast, the minority view, one of which came from Tiannah Winchester, Member for Roxborough/Argyle, questioned reliance on government action alone: **"Must we rely solely on sweeping policies and increased government expenditure? Or can we instead explore more sustainable, community-driven, and economically viable approaches?"** Similarly, Bree Powder, Member for Signal Hill/Patience Hill, cautioned against prioritising one issue over others, noting that women's struggles are multifaceted and require a broader approach.

A NOTEWORTHY PARTNERSHIP!

For the International Women's Day Debate, the Assembly Legislature, Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection (DHWSP) and the Tobago Regional Health Authority (TRHA) collaborated to ensure its success. Secretary of the DHWSP, Dr. Faith Brebnor, expressed enthusiasm as the debate topic aligned directly with her Division, providing an opportunity to hear the concerns of women and girls and consider practical solutions for the DHWSP.

MEET OUR ESTEEMED FACILITATORS!

Dr. Faith Brebnor, Sexual and Reproductive Health Facilitator- "Here in Tobago, period poverty is real—some girls miss school because they cannot afford menstrual products. Our girls may be silently struggling too. Globally, over 500 million women and girls face this issue. It is more than just access to pads—it affects health and dignity, as some use unsafe alternatives like tissue or cloth, risking infection. Menstruation remains a taboo topic, yet silence only deepens the problem. We must break the stigma and ensure menstrual health is treated as a right, not a privilege."

Based on the debate, what are some priority areas that the DHWSP and the TRHA might action?

"We're actively addressing period poverty by partnering to provide free or affordable menstrual products in schools and health centres, especially in underserved areas. We are strengthening sexual and reproductive health education across schools and communities, expanding mobile clinic outreach for women's health services, and investing in culturally sensitive mental health care for women, from postpartum support to menopause management."

Korice Nancis- Founder of Fibroid Awareness TT and IWD 2025 Debater:

"I'd like women and girls to note that fibroids are usually non-cancerous growths in or on the uterus, varying in size and number. They can cause severe symptoms like pain, heavy bleeding, anaemia, and fertility issues, though some women experience no symptoms. Anyone concerned should see a doctor."

Why was participating in this debate so emotional for you?

Having personally experienced the effects of misinformation about period poverty as a teenager, I understand the importance of initiatives that promote public education and awareness.

SMALL TOOL, BIG IMPACT!

Dr. Shauntelle Winchester-Sampson, a surgeon and gynaecologist, provided girls with a **My Period Tracker Diary** to address a critical gap in menstrual health awareness. She was inspired by frequent cases in her clinic where young girls lacked records of their cycles, making it harder to assess concerns. By encouraging early tracking habits, she aims to empower girls to understand their bodies, recognise irregularities and confidently communicate with healthcare providers. Dr. Sampson emphasised that this simple tool can have a significant impact, as knowledge is key to taking control of one's gynaecological health.

NO MORE EXCUSES...PERIOD.

"Ignoring period poverty means ignoring the struggles of countless women and girls in Tobago. This experience has reinforced my belief that advocacy matters. We are not just debating—we are fighting for progress, and we refuse to let excuses stand in the way of change." -Jaelle Charles