



# The Cost of Being a Woman

The Pink Tax Phenomenon

2023





The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 13 Component unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 425,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

The office of the National Union of Public and General Employees is on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

We recognize the crimes that have been committed and the harm that has been done and dedicate ourselves as a union to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous communities in a spirit of reconciliation and striving for justice.

Bert Blundon, President

Jason MacLean, Secretary-Treasurer



## Definition

Many goods and services marketed specifically to women are priced higher than similar goods and services marketed to men. The Pink Tax is a term used to describe this phenomenon of gender-based pricing that discriminates against women. These gender targeted price discrepancies have been in existence since the 1990s. This disparity is found across a wide range of products, including hygiene products, clothing, school supplies, health care products, children's toys, health care products for seniors, services such as dry cleaning or haircuts, and financial products.

The term *pink tax* stems from the fact that gender-based items are often packaged in pink or lavender and have feminine designs. Although there is no definite tax on these products, many consider the price discrepancy a form of tax.

The reasons for this gender-targeted pricing discrepancy are believed to be import tariffs (Canadian companies pay 0.7% more on women's items), price discrimination (many companies believe that women are less price-sensitive and are willing to pay more for health and beauty products), blatant sexism, and gender stereotyping.

The pink tax issue is not exclusive to Canada and the US; it is a global issue. The 2017 [United Nations Commission on the Status of Women](#) (UNCSW) called for an end to the practice of gender-based price differentiation on all goods and services intended for, or marketed to, women and girls that cost more than similar items marketed to men and boys. This was to ensure women have full and equal access to economic participation.

## The Cost of the Pink Tax

In 2016, Parsehub conducted a [study](#) on the pink tax in Canada and found that women were paying 43% more on hygiene products compared to men. In 2021, Parsehub repeated the [research](#) and found that women are now paying 50% more for unisex products and in some categories 60% more per 100g of product. Both studies reviewed data on thousands of products from Shoppers Drug Mart and Walmart Canada. However, there are numerous other companies in Canada and globally that follow the same gender-based pricing practices.

The Parsehub research found that women pay \$9.75 per 100 g of deodorant compared to \$6.46 that men pay for deodorant containing the same ingredients. A women's razor costs on average \$2.49 compared to a men's razor at \$1.69.

Another example of this price gouging is the Life Brand ankle support wraps for which both the men's and women's products state that they help provide support for mild sprains or strains, but the "slim fit" women's version is an astonishing \$9 more for the same ankle support.

A 2016 [US study](#) done by the US Joint Economic Committee found that dry cleaning prices for women's dress shirts were upwards of 90% more expensive than for men's shirts. Senior care products such as urinals, supports, braces, health supplements and incontinence products are an average of 8% higher for women in [New York](#). Even pet

products are subjected to this price discrepancy, as products labeled for female pets are often more expensive than those for male pets.

A 2023 episode of [CBC's Marketplace](#) found multiple examples of pink tax in numerous retail stores in Canada. They found gender-based pricing discrepancies on razors, deodorant, children's bikes, and even painkillers.

In total, it is estimated that women in Canada pay an extra \$1,300 per year for products relatively similar to men's. Research done by the California Status of Women and Girls estimated that the cost to women in California has been \$46 billion since the start of the practice.

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## Actions

To overcome the financial impact of the pink tax, women to be aware it exists, and all Canadians need to take steps to end the practice.

1. We need to lobby Canadian governments to enact legislation that ends the practice of gender-based pricing. Legislation exists in New York City and in the state of California (enacted January 1, 2023) that prohibits gender-based pricing in services. The US federal legislation called the [Pink Tax Repeal Act](#) remains pending in the Congress. The Ontario government introduced a bill in 2005 to prohibit gender-based pricing and proved such pricing worked against the Ontario Human Rights Code. Unfortunately, the standing committee took no further action.
2. Applying pressure to governments on gender-based issues has resulted in some positive changes, A prime example is the Canadian government ending the GST on menstrual products in [2015](#) after receiving thousands of signatures on a petition to end the tax.
3. Challenge businesses that are using gender-based pricing. A recent [CBC Marketplace episode](#) found a glaring example of pink tax after comparing painkiller products. They compared Maxidol (marketed for menstrual pain relief) and Aleve which are both produced by Bayer and contain the same active ingredients and number of capsules. Aleve was priced at \$13.00 however Maxidol (with the same ingredients) was priced at \$16.00. After the investigation by Marketplace, Shoppers Drug Mart [eliminated the pink tax on menstrual medication](#).

[Mountain Equipment Company \(MEC\)](#) received an extensive amount of online criticism after shoppers realized that an item called the "head thingy" was \$5.00 more expensive for women than for men, even though it was the identical item except for the colour. As a result, MEC now charges the same price for both the male and female versions of the product, citing that they have to comply with [Minimum Advertised Price \(MAP\) policy](#).

4. Raise awareness about the pink tax by speaking out through avenues such as social media.
5. Support companies that use gender-neutral pricing. There are businesses that are addressing the issue of gender-based pricing, such as hair salons that are moving to charging for the length of hair not for a female haircut versus male haircut. The price difference between a female haircut and male haircut for the same length of hair can be over \$20 per haircut. These salons also ensure that transgender individuals have a safe and inclusive space to receive a haircut.
6. Purchase gender-neutral products, as many products marketed to women are the same as those marketed to men but are significantly more expensive.

## Conclusion

It is abhorrent that women are subjected to gender-based pricing discrepancies. Women in Canada already face a pay-equity issue wherein Statistics Canada notes that women still only make between 75 and 85 cents for every dollar made by men. This wage gap is even higher for Indigenous women, women of colour, and women with disabilities.

The alarming rate of inflation recently has left many Canadians struggling to meet basic needs such as food, accommodations, and basic services. Adding a gender-based price discrepancy results in women facing an even bigger struggle to meet their basic needs and those of their families. For women who are Black, Indigenous, persons of colour, persons living with disabilities, immigrants or refugees, precariously employed, and 2SLGBTQIA+—people who already experience higher economic insecurity—these pricing discrepancies cut even deeper into their already limited budgets to meet their very basic needs such as food and shelter.

Not only does this affect women's income in the present but it also has a harmful impact on their retirement if they are taking time off for caregiving responsibilities. And if women have a longer life expectancy, those additional expenses during a woman's wage-earning years directly affect the money they can save for retirement.

It is time for yet another discriminatory action against women to end!

# nupge

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