

The Price of Pink: What's the Real Cost of Being a Woman?

In 2012, stationery brand BIC launched a product called *BIC For Her* – a line of pink and purple pens "designed to fit comfortably in a woman's hand." It sparked [widespread outrage and mockery](#), dominating media coverage and attracting a flood of sarcastic reviews on Amazon.

The *BIC For Her* pens weren't just notable for their colour scheme; they also came at a higher price - [double](#) that of an equivalent, gender-neutral pack. While BIC eventually discontinued the product, it raises a lingering question: *What underlying beliefs made such a misguided campaign seem like a good idea?*

Pink Tax - the price we didn't ask for

The term "Pink Tax" refers to the phenomenon in which products marketed to women are priced higher than similar products marketed to men. This practice goes beyond mere pricing discrepancies; it exposes a broader, systemic bias that assigns gendered value to everyday items.

A [study of gender pricing](#) in New York City revealed that, on average, women's products cost 7 percent more than similar products marketed to men across five industries, including Children's and Adult Clothing, Personal Care Products, and Senior/Home Health Care Products. [In Australia](#), the disparity is even more pronounced: women pay an average of 29 percent more for razors, 16 percent more for body wash, and 12 percent more for underwear compared to similar products aimed at men. Furthermore, the [Workplace Gender Equality Agency](#) (WGEA) reports that the gender pay gap currently stands at 21.8%, meaning women face a significant disadvantage when it comes to purchasing power.

[Research](#) has explored the forces behind this phenomenon, pointing to factors such as demand elasticity - how sensitive customers are to price changes; competitive structures - the level of competition among businesses; and self-sorting behaviours, which describe how consumers tend to choose products that match their personal identity. While women may indeed pay more for products, this is often because the items they purchase have higher marginal costs - meaning each additional unit costs more to produce, which ultimately leads to higher prices. This complicates the effectiveness of proposed legislation aimed at eliminating gender-based pricing differences, as such laws may have little to no impact on the overall pink tax paid by women.

Is Pink Tax merely an inconvenience, after all?

Wait, is life taxed too?

The price disparity between genders extends beyond consumer goods to a critical area: healthcare. Women often face unique costs that men do not. For instance, the average menstruating person spends

around [\\$10,000 on period products](#) over their lifetime - excluding pain management. Although the 10% tax on tampons and pads was removed in 2018 after an [18-year campaign](#), many women still struggle to afford these essential items.

Beyond costs, gender bias in healthcare remains a significant challenge. At the [2024 National Women's Health Summit](#), two out of three women reported experiencing bias or discrimination related to diagnosis and treatment. Common complaints included having symptoms dismissed, being labelled "hysterical" or "dramatic," and receiving inadequate treatment like being told to use paracetamol and a hot water bottle.

While women tend to live longer than men, they experience higher rates of chronic illness, mental health issues, and delayed diagnoses. [Dr. Nisha Khot](#), board chair of Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH), points out that Medicare's inadequate coverage forces women to spend more out of pocket on healthcare than men. With the rising cost of living, women often have to prioritise essentials like food and rent over their health. Ignoring early symptoms can worsen conditions and lead to higher future costs, and women in disadvantaged or marginalised groups face even worse health outcomes.

Time to close the gap.

The pink tax continues to impact Australian women due to the [absence of federal and state regulations](#) that protect consumers from gender-based pricing discrimination. Addressing this issue doesn't mean enforcing identical prices - it means ensuring greater transparency in how products and services are priced. However, the real challenge lies in the lack of Australian-specific research. Most studies on the Pink Tax come from the US, leaving significant gaps in our understanding of how this issue plays out locally. Without solid data on the underlying causes, we can't create meaningful solutions.

Gender bias in [medical research](#) has further contributed to health disparities. Historically, studies have predominantly focused on male subjects, with findings generalised to women, despite significant biological differences in hormones, organs, and genetics. To bridge this gap, there is an urgent need for greater representation of women in research and dedicated funding for conditions that disproportionately affect them, such as endometriosis, menopause, and cardiovascular diseases.

Australia has begun addressing these challenges through initiatives like the National Women's Health Strategy 2020–2030 and gender budgeting through the Women's Budget Statement. These efforts aim to create a future where women's health isn't sold at a premium - where *'For Her'* is no longer a marketing gimmick, but a true reflection of equality.