



Period poverty



Understanding the scope,
impact, and policy solutions

Key findings

- Period poverty refers to lack of access and affordability of menstrual products; lifetime costs in Ohio can reach between \$3,000 and \$6,000 or more for individuals.
- Limited access to menstrual products can contribute to school absenteeism, poor academic performance, and adverse health outcomes.
- Nationally, around 14.2% of college women and 24% of teenagers face period poverty.
- Black, Latino, low-income, and LGBTQIA+ individuals experience higher rates of period poverty, with disproportionate impacts on concentration and mental health.
- Medicaid and private insurance do not cover menstrual products, though some accounts like HSAs, FSAs, and HRAs can be used to pay for them; some Medicaid managed care plans offer allowances for personal care items.
- More Ohio-specific research, adopting laws similar to other states, advocating for federal legislation, and supporting local nonprofits that distribute menstrual products are key strategies to combat period poverty.

Introduction: What is period poverty?

The first health issue in the reproductive health series is period poverty. Period poverty refers to limited access to menstrual products, sanitation facilities, and education.¹ According to scholars, there are several types of period poverty. Besides access and affordability, other categories include the embarrassment/fear of embarrassment, loneliness, environmental (lack of items and sanitary facilities), and cultural alienation.² The high prices of period products limit many individuals' ability to afford them. An Ohioan can spend between \$2,882.88 to \$6,000 or more on period products throughout their lifetime.³⁻⁴ Due to the significant challenges of period poverty, there is a need to explore this public health issue in more detail.

¹ Jaafar, H., Ismail, S. Y., & Azzeri, A. (2023). Period Poverty: A Neglected Public Health Issue. *Korean Journal of Family Medicine*, 44(4), 183–188. <https://doi.org/10.4082/kjfm.22.0206>

² Michel, J., Mettler, A., Schönenberger, S., & Gunz, D. (2022). Period poverty: why it should be everybody's business. *Journal of Global Health Reports*, 6, 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.29392/001c.32436>

³ Plush Care Content Team. (2025, December 15). The cost of having your period in every country and U.S. state. *Plush Care*. <https://plushcare.com/blog/cost-of-your-period#:~:text=Based%20on%20the%20average%20number,the%20least%20on%20supplies%20overall>

⁴ Andersh, K., Francis, Z., Moran, M., & Quarato, E. (2021). Period poverty: A risk factor for people who menstruate in STEM. *Journal of Science Policy & Governance*, 18(4). https://www.sciencepolicyjournal.org/uploads/5/4/3/4/5434385/andersh_etal_jspg_18-4.pdf



How does period poverty show up across the lifespan? What do policy and legislation look like at the national, state, and local levels? How do health disparities present among racial and identity groups? Is health insurance keeping up with initiatives to cover period products? What solutions should we be ultimately advocating for?

Menstrual/feminine/period products and menstrual/feminine period items will be used interchangeably.

The impact of period poverty across the lifespan

Across the lifespan, period poverty affects both girls and women in various aspects of their lives. According to Thinx and PERIOD's report, the *State of the Period*, four in 10 teenagers thought that due to limited product accessibility, they were unable to do their best on their schoolwork.⁵ Dr. Binda Godlove explained the cycle of how period poverty affects girls as they grow.⁶ Girls of low economic status who have a lack of access to menstrual products could miss school which could lead to receiving poor grades. If this cycle continues, then girls would drop out of school, which could lead to the inability to obtain a good job. This could result in women being assigned a lower status within society. Period poverty can also have adverse effects on health. It can lead to infections, birthing complications, and mental health concerns like depression and anxiety (see footnote 6).

National, state, & local perspectives of period poverty research

How is the research on period poverty presented at the national, state, and local levels? There is a substantial amount of information about the topic at the national level. According to a study, 14.2 percent of college-attending women in the U.S. suffered with period poverty within the past year.⁷ In the *State of the Period*, almost 24 percent of teenagers in the U.S. faced difficulties buying period items in 2025 (see footnote 5). In another study, a sample of adults who experienced menstruation revealed that period poverty increased from 2018 to 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸

⁵ Thinx, Inc. & PERIOD. (2025). *State of the period 2025*. Period.org. <https://period.org/uploads/2025-State-of-the-Period-Study.pdf>

⁶ Godlove, B. (2025). Period poverty in the United States of America: a socio-economic policy analysis. *Journal of Global Health Economics and Policy*, 5, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.52872/001c.137889>

⁷ Cardoso, L.F., Scolese, A.M., Hamidaddin, A., & Gupta, J. (2021). Period poverty and mental health implications among college-aged women in the United States. *BMC Women's Health* 21(14), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-020-01149-5>

⁸ Palovick, K. A., Hunter, E., Teni, M. T., & Kuhlmann, A. S. (2024). Period product insecurity is increasing in the United States: Trends from 2018 to 2021. *Journal of Women's Health*, 33(1), 20–27. <https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2023.0367>



Although there is ample research about period poverty nationally, it is limited in Ohio. There is one study about period poverty, its pervasiveness, and viewpoints among Ohio college students.⁹ Many students (345) said they sometimes missed school or work due to menstruation and poverty. Seventy students had made a difficult decision between buying food or menstrual products, highlighting the impact of period poverty for Ohio college students. In addition, 251 students reported that they used menstrual products longer than suggested because they did not have enough items. Researchers studied the prevalence of period poverty among school-aged adolescents in Toledo, Ohio.¹⁰

After gathering results from surveys, 96.3 percent of students under 13 years old missed school due to lack of period products compared to students ages 14-15 years old.

They also answered the question, “Why don’t you have pads or tampons?” Out of the various responses, 36.2 percent stated financial concerns. Unfortunately, there was no research about period poverty across northeast Ohio.

The connection between period poverty and health disparities

Health disparities persist for specific groups of people who struggle to afford period products. Black and brown households are disproportionately affected by period poverty and menstrual hygiene challenges, regardless of location. Eight percent of white respondents, 24 percent of Latino participants, and 23 percent of Black individuals said they were struggling to afford period products in 2021.¹¹ Compared to 28 percent of white students, almost half of Black and Latino students reported difficulty concentrating in school due to a lack of period items.

On income, some individuals expressed challenges to afford menstrual items. In the Toledo study, students in low-income schools showed higher rates of period poverty than students attending high-income schools (see footnote 10). In the study about period poverty across colleges and universities in Ohio, students who belonged to the LGBTQIA+ community had the

⁹ Handle, M. L. (2024). *Menstrual equity in the United States: Implications for Ohio college students in regard to mental health and academic achievement* [Thesis, Ohio University]. OhioLINK. https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=ouhonors1714166731754832&disposition=inline

¹⁰ Feeley, M., Afon, O., Gonzalez, T., Gorrell, C., Warner, E., & Matus, C. (2024). Period poverty: Surveying the prevalence in Toledo-area schools. *Journal of Women’s Health, 33*(5), 671-677. <https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2023.0569>

¹¹ Obionu, I., & Kuhlmann, A. S. (2024, November 27). *Period poverty and its reach across the US*. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/period-poverty-and-its-reach-across-the-us>



highest response rate of identifying period poverty. Out of the 261 students from this community, 101 struggled to buy period products, 33 students could not afford period products each month, and half of transgender and nonbinary students could not buy these items (see footnote 9). Hence, period poverty negatively affects people of color, sexual orientation, and income.

Policy related to period poverty

Period poverty has inspired some effort to try to address it with policy. At the federal level, U.S. Representative Grace Meng (D-NY) introduced the **Menstrual Equity for All Act** as an approach to end period poverty and enhancing access to feminine products.¹² Some might include:

- Allow states the option to use **federal grant funds to offer free menstrual products** to students in elementary and secondary schools.
- Incentivize students to form **higher education pilot programs** that offer free menstrual products to students.
- Call for **Medicaid to cover the cost** of period products.
- **Enable homeless assistance providers** to use grant funds that cover shelter necessities (e.g., toothbrushes and blankets) to also buy menstrual products.
- Ensure large **employers with 100 or more employees to offer free menstrual products** for their employees in the workplace.

The Menstrual Equity for All Act was introduced in 2025 and referred to many committees. The Speaker must decide which provisions of the act should be allocated to the Committees on Education and Workforce, Judiciary, Financial Services, Energy and Commerce, Transportation and Infrastructure, Ways and Means, and the Budget.¹³

The state of Ohio passed some legislation about resolving period poverty across the state. House Bill 29 (HB 29) was recently signed into law, which enables all county, municipal, and state correctional facilities to provide free feminine hygiene products.¹⁴ The legislative language also requires correctional facilities to implement a written policy about protecting inmates from the denial of period products, how to store and dispose of the products, and sanitation

¹² Congresswoman Grace Meng. (2025, June 2). *Meng introduces comprehensive legislation to end period poverty and improve access to menstrual products* [Press release]. <https://meng.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/meng-introduces-comprehensive-legislation-end-period-poverty-and>

¹³ Menstrual Equity for All Act of 2025, H.R. 3644, 119th Cong. (2025). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/3644/text>

¹⁴ *House Bill 29: Regards inmates' access to feminine hygiene products and showers*. (n.d.). The Ohio Legislature 136th General Assembly. <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb29>



procedures. In addition, correctional facilities must allow female inmates who are menstruating to shower at least once a day.

An earlier state operating budget helped educational institutions reduce the burden of period poverty for students from grades 6-12.¹⁵ For FY 2024, \$3 million in total was allocated for all Ohio school districts, public/non-public, and charter schools to buy period products, and \$2 million was allocated to install dispensers in the education institutions.¹⁶ However, schools must create and implement a sustainability plan to continue to provide access to period products.¹⁷

The state of Ohio made feminine products tax-free beginning April 1, 2020.¹⁸ Products include pads, tampons, menstrual cups, and period underwear.

There was one law about addressing period products throughout northeast Ohio. In Cleveland, the city council passed an emergency ordinance in 2021 to make period products free and accessible in public buildings.¹⁹ Specifically, the menstrual products are free in all restrooms in City Hall and Neighborhood Youth and Adult Education Resource and Recreation Centers.

Do health insurers cover period products?

Health insurance—both Medicaid and private insurance—does not cover menstrual products. However, some health insurance offers benefits for members to pay for the items. Due to the passage of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act in 2020, Health Savings Accounts (HSA), Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA), and Health Reimbursement Arrangements (HRAs) can be used to pay for period items.²⁰ Some Medicaid managed care

¹⁵ 33 Ohio Rev. Code. § 3313.6413 (2023), available at <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3313.6413>

¹⁶ Henry, M. (2023, July 27). *Period products will be available for free in Ohio schools*. Ohio Capital Journal. <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2023/07/27/period-products-will-be-available-for-free-in-ohio-schools/>

¹⁷ Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. (2025, March 17). *Menstrual products in schools*. <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Student-Supports/School-Wellness/Student-Health-and-Medication-Supports/Promoting-Student-Health/Menstrual-Products>

¹⁸ Ohio Department of Taxation. (2024, February 26). *Sales and use tax information release: ST 2024-01- Feminine hygiene products*.

https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/tax.ohio.gov/sales_and_use/information_releases/ST2024-01_Feminine_Hygiene_Products.pdf

¹⁹ *Emergency Ordinance 925-2021*. (2021). Cleveland City Council. <https://cityofcleveland.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5185968&GUID=B3727D53-44BA-4EB8-B8D1-DE2B9494E452&Options=ID%7cText%7c&Search=>

²⁰ Sharfin, S. (2023, December 13). *Here's how to use your HSA and FSA dollars on period products*. Aunt Flow. <https://goauntflow.com/blog/hsa-and-fsa/>



organizations in Ohio provide a \$100 allowance for eligible members to pay for over the counter or personal care products.²¹

Health insurance—both Medicaid and private insurance—does not cover menstrual products.

Suggested solutions

Even though some policies grant access to menstrual products to reduce period poverty, more solutions should be considered to address this problem. The following list presents some recommendations in detail.

- From a public health standpoint, **more research** about the issue of period poverty throughout Ohio is needed, especially in northeast Ohio. There is a lack of scholarly research about period poverty in the area. Examining how period poverty affects citizens from state to local levels could lead to the creation of interventions to decrease period poverty, especially for vulnerable groups of people.
- Ohio could **implement state laws similar to other states**. For instance, Ann Arbor, Michigan passed legislation to have all public restrooms (except for places of worship) to offer period products.²² Businesses who do not follow the policy will be fined. The state of Ohio could require colleges and universities to offer free period products, such as California and Illinois.²³
- Individuals can **advocate for the Menstrual Equity for All Act**. The act has been introduced many times, only for it to not pass out of Congress. Advocating for the act requires interacting with legislatures and collaborating/joining coalitions to support it.
- For a more immediate solution, people can **donate menstrual products locally**. I Support the Girl, Cleveland chapter, is a local nonprofit that collects feminine products to give to homeless shelters for teenage girls and women.²⁴ Pride Among Daughters and Sisters (PADS) is another nonprofit organization which delivers period products throughout Greater Cleveland.²⁵

²¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2024, September 30). *Medicaid: Menstrual product coverage*. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-24-106960.pdf>

²² Ordinance 21-32. (2021). City of Ann Arbor Michigan.

<https://a2gov.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5180458&GUID=17A55D6C-964C-420A-973C-28A485A38E00&Options=ID%7cText%7c&Search=>

²³ Berl, C. (2025, June 9). What states require free period products in schools? *Berl's Commercial Supply*. <https://www.berls.com/blog/what-states-require-free-period-products-in-schools>

²⁴ I Support the Girls. (n.d.). *Cleveland*. <https://isupportthegirls.org/affiliates/cleveland/>

²⁵ Pride Among Daughters and Sisters. (n.d.). *Join the movement for period equity*. <https://www.prideamongdaughters.org/getinvolved>



Recommendations to deal with period poverty can be addressed from community to policy levels.

Conclusion

Period poverty is a symptom of a system that does not understand the continuing needs of women's health.

The lack of period products affects the lifespan of women and girls from school, work, and health. Statistics about this health issue are more prevalent at the national level than state and local levels. Period poverty is magnified in health disparities and health insurance does not cover menstrual items.

Solutions to address period poverty in Ohio include conducting more research, replicating laws from other locations, advocacy surrounding the Menstrual Equity for All Act, and supporting local nonprofit organizations. Addressing period poverty is challenging, but implementing solutions has the potential to end this problem nationwide and within local communities.



REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ISSUE BRIEF 1

Period poverty

Understanding the scope, impact,
and policy solutions