

FLOWING FORWARD

Best Practices for Menstrual Product Distribution

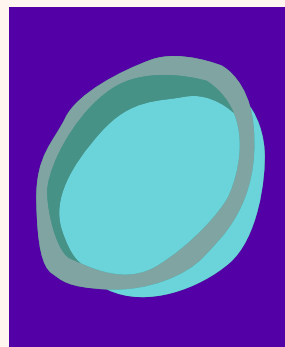
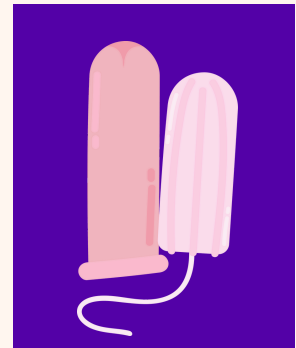
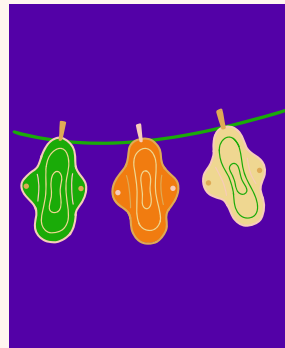
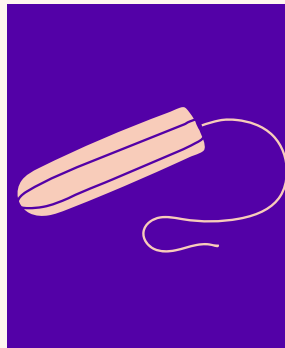
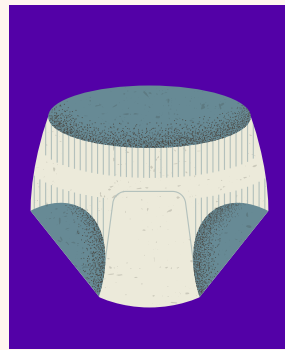
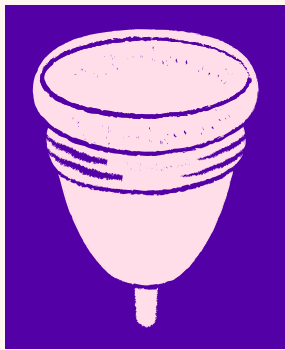


Table of Contents

Purpose

Page 3

What are menstrual
products?

Page 6

What menstrual products
should I distribute?

Page 9

How can my organization
distribute products?

Page 12

Menstrual Product Distribution
Examples

Page 18

Editable Poster Templates

Page 23

Menstrual Experience Survey

Page 24



Purpose

The purpose of this guidebook is to provide community-based organizations with a comprehensive overview of **best practices for distributing and making period products accessible** to their clients. We aim to help organizations ensure that individuals can access the period products they need to **manage their menstrual health with dignity and without barriers**.

While we wait for the *Act to Increase Access to Disposable Menstrual Products in Prisons, Homeless Shelters, and Public Schools: S.2491 and H.534 (I AM Bill)* to be passed in the MA legislature, there's no need to delay action. **We can start now by ensuring that menstruators have access to free period products!**



State of Menstrual Access in Massachusetts

In 2019, Mass NOW surveyed school nurses, homeless shelters, and county facilities who house menstruating individuals across the Commonwealth, and the results were alarming:

56%

of school nurses reported observing students missing class to obtain menstrual products

25%

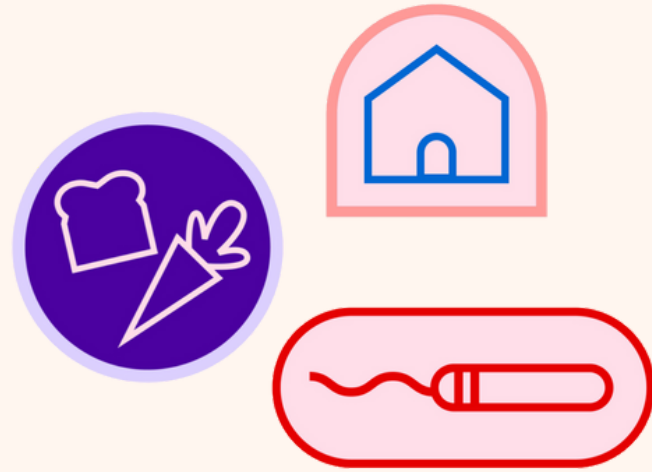
of responding shelters reported that their shelter does not provide menstrual products

Many school nurses and shelter workers reported they do not have a sufficient supply of products to meet the needs of menstruators they serve

I AM Bill

**No one should have to choose
between food, housing, or
menstrual products**

An Act to Increase Access to Disposable Menstrual Products in Prisons, Homeless Shelters, and Public Schools: S.1381 and H.534 (I AM bill).



This bill, championed by lead sponsors Senator Jehlen, Representative Livingstone, and Representative Barber, would ensure access to free menstrual products to all menstruating individuals in incarcerated facilities, homeless shelters, and public schools. The bill also contains language to ensure the products are truly accessible without stigmatizing the individual seeking them.

As of October 2023, the I AM Bill was passed out of the Senate Ways and Means Committee and has now been sent to the Senate! We need your help to bring it to a vote this calendar year! Call your legislators to encourage them to become active champions for the I AM Bill.

Don't know who your legislators are? [Click here to find your legislators!](#)



What are menstrual products?

A menstrual product (also known as period product) is an item that is used by people who menstruate to manage their periods. These products are designed to absorb or collect menstrual blood and other vaginal fluids.

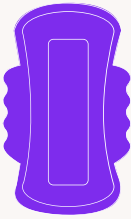



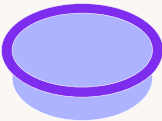

There are two main types of menstrual products: inserts and non-inserts.

Inserts are products that are inserted into the vagina. Examples of inserts include tampons, menstrual cups, and menstrual discs.

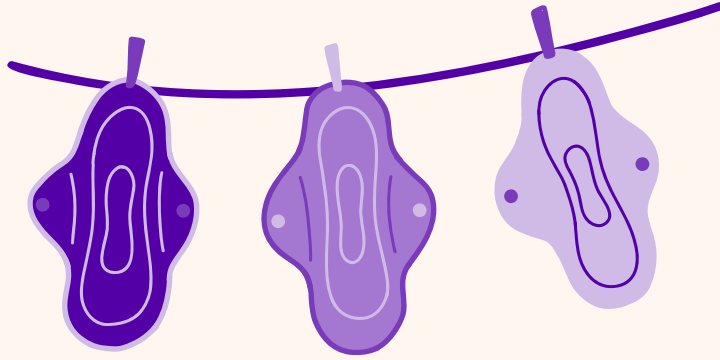
Non-inserts, on the other hand, are products that are worn outside the body. Examples of non-inserts include pads and period underwear.

Period Product Guide

Thanks to the latest advancements in technology and innovation, we now have a wider range of period product options than ever before! To make things easier, we've put together a handy guide that will help menstruators understand the different choices available so you can choose what works best for them. [Click here](#) to access the PDF version which you can print and give out as a resource.

Image of Product	Type of Product	Sizes	Description / How To Use	Average Cost
	Single-Use Pad	Size chart will depend on the brand and material type; there are options that can accommodate light, medium, and heavy blood flows.	To use a pad, remove the paper strip to reveal the adhesive and stick it in your underwear. For pads with wings, wrap them around the bottom. To dispose of a used pad, unstick it from your underwear, wrap it in toilet paper, and dispose of it in the trash can or special disposal box. Do not flush pad down the toilet. Change every 3-4 hours or sooner if bleeding is heavy	\$6-\$10 It depends on the number of pads in each box
	Reusable Pad	Size chart will depend on the brand and material type; there are options that can accommodate light, medium, and heavy blood flows.	Place the pad onto your underwear in the same way you would place a disposable pad. However, instead of adhesive to attach to the underwear, these pads have clip-on buttons that fasten around the bottom, ensuring that the pad stays in place. Do not flush reusable pad down the toilet. Change every 3-4 hours, or sooner if bleeding is heavy.	\$20-\$30 for a box of 5 pads Can be washed and reused for up to 2 years, depends on the brand and material used
	Tampon (single-use only)	There are options that can accommodate light, medium, and heavy blood flows.	Insert the tampon into your vagina using an applicator or your finger. To remove the tampon, pull gently on the string until the tampon comes out. You can find the string by reaching inside with your fingers if needed. Do not flush tampon down the toilet. Change every 4-6 hours or sooner if bleeding is heavy	\$7-\$10 It depends on the number of tampons in each box
	Menstrual Cup	Small and large are the two most common sizes. But you may see small referred to as 1 or A and large called 2 or B.	Menstrual cups are inserted into the vagina to collect blood before it flows out. Menstrual cups are made of flexible materials such as rubber or silicone and are reusable, unlike tampons. It's important to empty the cup several times a day to avoid overflow , as you can't see when it's full. Refer to the instructions on the box. It's best practice to boil before the first use between cycles.	\$25-\$35 Can be washed and reused for up to 10 years; check with the brand
	Menstrual Disc	Choosing the right size will depend on the height of your cervix. When in doubt, you can try different options to see what fits best or ask your OB/GYN	To fold a menstrual disc, squeeze the sides together lengthwise to form a figure-8 shape. Insert it with the open bowl portion facing up towards you while directing it towards your tailbone to secure it underneath the cervix. After insertion, tuck the front rim of the disc up as high as you can. Although there is a risk of blood contact while removing the disc, with practice and using brands with removal aids, you can eliminate messy removals. Change every 12 hours, or sooner if necessary.	\$15-\$30 It depends on whether you're purchasing reusable or single-use discs Can be used for several years; check with the brand
	Period Underwear	Comes in many different sizes starting from extra small; check the sizing chart for each brand	Period underwear are worn like regular underwear and come with a moisture barrier and an extra layer to prevent leaks. Choose a comfortable fit, not too tight or loose. Some types have a space to hold a pad for overnight protection. Change and clean every 12 hours or more often if bleeding is heavy, and follow the washing instructions provided by the brand you use.	\$10-\$16 Can be used for several years; check with the brand

Period Product Educational Resources



Want to learn more about period products?
Here's a list of educational videos.

How To Use a Single-Use (Disposable) Pad - [Link](#)

How To Use a Reusable Pad - [Link](#)

How to Put in a Tampon (Step-by-Step) - [Link](#)

Menstrual Cups: What You Need To Know - [Link](#)

How to Insert a Menstrual Disc - [Link](#)

How to Use Period Underwear - [Link](#)

A woman with red hair and sunglasses is holding a brown shopping bag. She is standing in an outdoor market or festival area with other people and stalls in the background. The image is overlaid with a purple tint.

What menstrual products should I distribute?

When distributing menstrual products, it's important to consider the needs of the people using them. Menstrual products are not one-size-fits-all, so it's important to **offer various options** to accommodate different preferences and needs. Some people may prefer tampons, while others may prefer pads.

While you may want to offer a range of products, such as period underwear and menstrual discs, it's important to consider the cost and feasibility of doing so. These products may be more expensive and less widely available for bulk purchase, which could limit your options.

However, if your budget allows for it, offering a variety of menstrual products can help ensure that people have access to the products that work best for them.

Ingredients in Period Products Matter

The ingredients in menstrual products matter because they come into contact with sensitive and absorbent areas of the body. **Until recently, information about ingredients, components, or additives used in period products was largely unavailable from manufacturers. Just as consumers expect food packaging to include a list of ingredients, the same transparency should apply to period products.**

In 2019 the New York State legislature passed the first law in the country requiring disclosure of all intentionally added ingredients in period products on the label – a law which went into effect in October 2021. This law specifically includes disclosure of ingredients in any products used to collect or absorb menstrual discharge including (but not limited to) tampons, pads, menstrual underwear, menstrual cups, and discs.

Women's Voices for Earth, a national non-profit organization, conducted a field study examining ingredient disclosures on period product labels both in New York and across the United States. **To access the report, *What's in Your Period Product? An investigation of ingredients disclosed on product labels*, [click here](#).**

A Helpful Tip:

As a service provider, consider purchasing and distributing period products from companies that disclose ingredients on their period product label.

Period Product Companies Mass NOW Has Worked With

If your organization has the budget to purchase menstrual products, there are several companies based in the U.S. that offer a variety of menstrual products, including pads, tampons, menstrual cups, and period underwear. It's best practice to look for brands that prioritize *sustainability, accessibility, and equity* in their products and practices.

Click on the links below to learn more about each company.

[Aunt Flow](#)

[Egal](#)

[Femly](#)

[Fihri](#)

[The Period Company](#)

[Unicorn](#)

[Viv for Your V](#)



How can my organization distribute products?

When it comes to distributing menstrual products, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. The ultimate goal is to ensure that those in need have **access to the products** they need in addition to **menstrual education** to manage their menstrual health.

The strategies for distribution **should be targeted** to the specific needs and preferences of the community.

Schools

Students spend about 6-8 hours of their day at school. **Menstruators may need to change their period product 2-3 times throughout the school day** (or even more depending on their menstrual flow). According to the 2019 State of Menstrual Access Survey, **56% of school nurses reported observing students missing class to obtain menstrual products**. As a school, there are best practices you can implement to ensure menstruating students have the resources they need.

Below are examples of good practices (pink box) and even better practices (purple box) for menstrual product distribution in school-based settings. Please note that these are meant to be suggestions and strategies that schools can implement as more resources become available.

Good Practices:

Placing a basket on the bathroom sink counter or mounting a dispenser on the wall stocked with pads only.

Making pads and tampons available in the nurse's office.

Announcing to the student body via email that menstrual products will be made available in student restrooms.

Even Better Practices:

Placing a basket on the bathroom sink counter or mounting a dispenser on the wall stocked with pads **and tampons**. This provides another option for menstruators besides pads.

Making pads, tampons, **underwear, and pants** available in the nurse's office. Some students may bleed through their clothes. Providing students with a new pair of underwear and pants can help them continue with their day without any interruptions.

Announcing to the student body, **parents/caregivers, and teachers** via email, **in-person, and through flyers** that menstrual products will be made available in student restrooms.

Shelters

Shelters are safe havens for people experiencing homelessness or escaping abusive situations. In some cases, people may not have the financial means to purchase menstrual products. This can result in them using makeshift products such as toilet paper or wearing a menstrual product longer than the recommended use, which may potentially lead to infections and other health complications.

Below are examples of good practices (pink box) and even better practices (purple box) for menstrual product distribution in shelters. Please note that these are meant to be suggestions and strategies that shelters can implement as more resources become available.

Good Practices:

Placing menstrual product dispensers in all restrooms and common areas within the shelter.

Providing menstruators with 10 pads or tampons in their period kits, and reassuring them that they can contact a staff member for more if needed.

Even Better Practices:

Offering period kits that include a variety of personal care products, such as pads, wipes, soap, underwear, and pants to everyone who visits the shelter.

Providing menstruators with at least 35 pads or tampons in their period kits. On average, someone will go through 4-5 pads or tampons a day, with an average menstrual period of 5-7 days.

Correctional Facilities

Access to menstrual products is a basic human right, and it is essential that correctional facilities provide them to incarcerated menstruators. Using menstrual products as a bargaining chip is a cruel practice that should never be tolerated. **In correctional facilities, where individuals often have limited access to basic necessities, withholding access to pads can be used as a form of punishment or control.** This can lead to individuals feeling powerless, humiliated, and ashamed. Menstrual products are not a luxury item.

Below are examples of good practices (pink box) and even better practices (purple box) for menstrual product distribution in carceral settings. Please note that these are meant to be suggestions and strategies that correctional facilities can implement as more resources become available.

Good Practices:

Placing menstrual products in a designated and secure location that is easily accessible to individuals, such as in bathrooms or common areas.

Providing only regular or ultra-thin sized pads and tampons for free and charging menstruators for super and overnight pads and tampons.

Even Better Practices:

Providing menstruators with period care kit with products upon arrival and on a monthly basis, if needed.

Providing a variety of size options at no cost to menstruators. Not everyone has the same menstrual flow, some are heavy bleeders and must change their menstrual product often and use products that have a higher absorbency level.

Libraries

Access to menstrual products in public libraries is crucial for ensuring the dignity and well-being of menstruating individuals. Libraries are important communal spaces that serve a variety of needs for people from all different backgrounds. Access to menstrual products in libraries can help to remove the stigma and ensure that menstruators have the necessary resources to manage their periods with ease and comfort.

Below are examples of good practices (pink box) and even better practices (purple box) for menstrual product distribution in libraries. Please note that these are meant to be suggestions and strategies that libraries can implement as more resources become available.

Good Practices:

Mounting a wall dispenser in each bathroom and keeping it stocked with pads

Sending out a monthly email newsletter with community resources and mentioning that free menstrual products are available at your branch library

Even Better Practices:

Mounting a wall dispenser in each bathroom and keeping it stocked with pads **and tampons**

Sending out a monthly email newsletter with community resources and mentioning that free menstrual products are available at your branch library **and posting signage about free menstrual products around the library translated into different languages.**

Workplaces

An employee spends on average 7-8 hours in the office. Menstruators may need to change their period product every 2-3 times throughout the work day (or even more depending on their menstrual flow). As an employer, making menstrual products available in the workplace is an important step towards creating an inclusive and supportive environment for your staff. Not only is it a basic requirement for women who experience menstruation, but it can also help promote gender equality and show that your workplace is committed to the well-being of all employees.

Below are examples of good practice (pink box) and even better practice (purple box) for menstrual product distribution in workplaces. Please note that these are meant to be suggestions and strategies that workplaces can implement as more resources become available.

Good Practice:

Keeping a basket on the bathroom counter with pads and tampons, and stocked depending on if someone remembers to refill it.

Even Better Practice:

Keeping a basket on the bathroom counter with pads and tampons, **and stocked daily when the bathroom is cleaned by maintenance so restocking the basket remains a priority just like toilet paper and soap.**



Menstrual Product Distribution Examples

Improving access to menstrual products is an ongoing effort and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. However, as a community, we can work together and utilize the resources available to us to make menstrual products easily accessible to all those who need them.

The following pages showcase various examples of menstrual product distribution, which we hope will inspire your organization.



Image Description:

A period product display is mounted on a wall in the bathroom. Inside a wooden box, it is stocked with tampons and pads that people can take at no cost. It also includes a colorful one-pager explaining the purpose of the product display and some basic menstrual education.



Image Description:

A white period product box placed on the bathroom sink counter. Inside the box are individually packaged pads and tampons. The packaging is cardboard. On the front-facing side of the box is a sticker with the words, “UCLA Facilities Management.”

IMAGE CREDIT: (CHRISTINE KAO/DAILY BRUIN STAFF)



Image Description:

A white box with the the titled text “Period care is important” bolded in large black letters and a subtitle in smaller text “please take what you need,” is mounted on the wall in the men’s bathroom. The box has two slots, one for tampons and one for pads.

IMAGE CREDIT: FREE MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS IN A MEN'S BATHROOM IN SAANICH MUNICIPAL HALL. TIMES COLONIST



Image Description:

An extra large biodegradable plastic ziplock bag filled with regular and heavy flow pads and tampons, a menstrual education booklet, pamprin (for cramps), a hot pad, hand sanitizer, and disposable wipes.

IMAGE CREDIT: THE HEALING HANDS PROJECT



Editable Poster Templates

Are you hosting a period talk or making products available in bathrooms and in need of a flyer to catch people's attention?

The link below has a compilation of poster templates your organization can edit via Canva, download, print, and display.

<https://www.canva.com/posters/templates/period-education/>

Menstrual Experience Survey

As we continue collecting data on menstruators' experiences, we could use your help! Please consider displaying this poster wherever you provide free menstrual products to community members.

The QR code on the flyer links to the menstrual experience survey. We use this data to inform our menstrual equity work which includes advocacy, health education, and other community programming.

Directions:

1. [Click this link](#) to view the template
2. Make a copy of the template
3. Edit the template to include your organization's logo
4. Print and display the poster



Need More Resources? Contact Us!



Website

www.mmecoalition.com

Email :

mmecoalition@gmail.com

Follow Us On Social Media:

[@mme.coalition](https://www.instagram.com/mme.coalition)