

# CALIFORNIA MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS PILOT

*Addressing Period Poverty in Los Angeles & San Diego*



***Half of Californians menstruate, yet access to affordable menstrual products is a basic need many cannot afford***

Lack of access to menstrual products, in addition to being a dehumanizing experience is especially problematic because it has negative impacts on people's physical and mental health. We are grateful for California's bold leadership in addressing menstrual equity, but there is still work that needs to be done to make menstrual products accessible to all, including expanding and making permanent the state's highly successful Menstrual Product Pilot (MPP).

# CALIFORNIA'S LEADERSHIP ON ENSURING ACCESS TO MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS

Period Poverty, the inability to afford or access menstrual supplies, impacts people at an alarming rate. In recent years, California has implemented policies and invested state funding to lessen this barrier, thanks to tremendous leadership from Assemblymember Cristina Garcia, the legislature, and Governor Newsom:

- » In 2017, [AB 10 \(Garcia\)](#) was successfully passed, ensuring low-income schools in disadvantaged communities provide students with free menstrual products.
- » In 2019, [SB 92](#) eliminated taxes on menstrual products for two years. And in 2021, [AB 150 \(Chapter 82\) of the 2021–22 State Budget Act](#) was passed eliminating the tax permanently. It is important to note that twenty-six other states still tax menstrual products.
- » In 2021, [AB 367 \(Garcia\)](#) — The Menstrual Equity for All Act of 2021 — was passed which requires “all schools maintaining grades 6–12, community colleges, college campuses (CSU/UC), and state/local municipal buildings to stock its public restrooms with free menstrual products.”
- » Most recently, the [Budget Act of 2021](#) (Provision 35 of Item 5180-151-0001 of AB 128) provided \$2 million one-time for a menstrual product pilot project to the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank and Jacobs and Cushman San Diego Food Bank.

## PERIOD POVERTY IN CALIFORNIA

Period poverty is an issue that impacts many Americans. [Two in five people with a uterus struggle to purchase period products](#) and Black and Hispanic people who menstruate are [more likely to agree](#) they've struggled to afford period products. Although California eliminated the tax on menstrual products, inflation still makes these products expensive, which is not surprising given almost [60% of families live paycheck to paycheck or struggle to make ends meet](#). By May of 2022, the average price of tampons had [risen 9.8%](#).

[Lack of access to menstrual products negatively impacts a person's health](#): without access to pads or tampons, girls may resort to using dirty rags or leaves during their periods. This can cause infections and other medical problems. If someone wears a product for too long, they may be more likely to experience toxic shock syndrome. In addition, without access to menstrual products, menstruating people are less likely to participate in physical activities, and not being physically active can have negative long-term health outcomes.

Not only does period poverty lead to missing out on physical activity, but it also leads people to miss educational and employment opportunities. [One third of low-income people](#) with a uterus report missing work, school, or similar commitments due to lack of access to period supplies. Lowered attendance at work and school can lead to lower performance and fewer opportunities, reinforcing the cycle of poverty. College students who experience period poverty are more likely to [experience moderate or severe depression](#).



# MENSTRUAL PRODUCT PILOT IN LOS ANGELES AND SAN DIEGO

We are thankful for policies to lessen the barrier in accessing menstrual products, yet more needs to be done to eliminate period poverty for all in California. The [Budget Act of 2021](#) provided \$2 million one-time for a 3-year menstrual product pilot project to the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank and Jacobs and Cushman San Diego Food Bank. Through their robust networks of partners and food pantries, these food banks are distributing menstrual products to a large demographic that is underserved and is already accessing free groceries and food resources. Period products are distributed even in times of emergency, which is why it is crucial that this pilot becomes permanent.

“We know that if you are having a hard time getting food, you’re having a hard time getting diapers for your kids, you’re having a hard time getting medicine, you’re also having a hard time getting essentials when getting your monthly period,” [said Assemblymember Garcia](#).

Providing these products at food banks bridges the gap between those who already have access to free products through schools and those who do not since food banks serve a variety of populations across communities, such as unhoused families with young children not in school yet, and people who are working. Only [4% of Americans](#) are aware of local resources where free or reduced-priced menstrual products are available, so providing this resource at food banks helps to raise awareness. In addition, providing menstrual products at food distribution sites can help eliminate the shame people may feel when on their period. Concerningly, [42% of people with a uterus have experienced period shaming](#). By food banks offering period products along with food, it provides an access point, and the box of menstrual products can fit inside a grocery bag for people to pick up. Promoting these menstrual products in the community will help to eliminate the stigma associated with menstruating.

Food banks are an essential service. [The Gender Policy Report stated](#) that during COVID-19, “Stories about consumers buying toilet paper in bulk ran on the nightly news. Similarly, many local and online retailers ran low or sold out of several major brands of tampons. With pandemic disruptions of businesses, many people lost their jobs. With closures of schools and community centers, many more lost access to their only regular source of food or menstrual products.”

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– Assemblymember Cristina Garcia

# LOS ANGELES REGIONAL FOOD BANK

Los Angeles Regional Food Bank (LARFB) distributed 2.5 million menstrual products to over 74,251 people at the mobile food pantry and through partner agencies during regularly scheduled food distributions from October 2021, when the program launched, to September 2022.

Many other partner agencies have expressed interest in the program, as over 800,000 people are served at LARFB per month, so the 74,251 who received menstrual products is not even one tenth of the people served.

***“Menstrual products are necessities and the people we serve are so appreciative of not having to sacrifice other items in order to purchase menstrual products monthly.”***

– Derek Polka, LARFB

# JACOBS & CUSHMAN SAN DIEGO FOOD BANK



Jacobs and Cushman San Diego Food Bank (SDFB) currently distributes menstrual products across eighty-five partner agencies to over 4,500 people per month. In total, they have given out 1.5 million menstrual products since the start of the pilot. They have seen that with the rising cost of inflation, households are continuing to struggle with purchasing basic needs items, including menstrual supplies.

SDFB has not only seen the positive impact the MPP program has on people, but states that it has also brought a new level of period education to their region. “This education has continued via news, radio, and print media and continues to be a highly sought out program by many families,” said Wendy Starling of SDFB.

The one-time funding for this pilot spans three state fiscal years (SFY) from SFY 2021-22 through SFY 2023-2024 for costs associated with the purchase, storage, handling, and transportation of menstrual hygiene products to individuals served by LARFB and SDFB. The pilot covers the southern portion of the state and there is a need to expand to other regions so that access is more equitable.

When the pilot sunsets at the end of 2024 it will leave a gap for these products to reach the people who are most in need. California can close this gap by making the pilot permanent and expanding access to central and northern regions of the state.

## LOOKING AHEAD: EXPAND & INVEST IN CALIFORNIA'S MENSTRUAL PRODUCT PILOT



California has made important progress to recent years to advance policies and state investments to achieve menstrual equity. The pilot is set to end in 2024, which would hurt many Californians. People cannot control the fact that they get their period, but California can decide what is done to help. We ask that the MPP pilot become a permanent program at organizations like food banks who have wide reach to communities most in need of these products, not only in Los Angeles and San Diego, but statewide.

One critical measure the state can take to expand the availability of menstrual products is to [invest \\$60M one-time](#) for the existing 8 Diaper Banks, establish three additional Diaper Banks, provide funding for wipes, and support all 11 Diaper Banks in distributing menstrual products to individuals living in the 38 counties that would be served.



Organizations like food banks have a wide reach to low-income communities in every corner of our state, and have the unique relationships, infrastructure, and trust to serve their neighbors even in times of disasters. The Menstrual Products Pilot works to provide a basic resource for menstruating people in a dignified way and will continue to help Californians when extended. No one should miss school, work, or daily life because they are unable to access this basic resource.

### Questions?

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