

County of Santa Clara

Office of the County Executive



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DATE: November 2, 2020

TO: Honorable Members of the Board of Supervisors
Jeffrey V. Smith, M.D., J.D., County Executive

FROM: Betty Duong, Manager, Division of Equity & Social Justice
Protima Pandey, Manager, Officer of Women’s Policy

SUBJECT: Access to Period Products for Vulnerable Populations During COVID-19

On September 22, 2020 (Item No. 21), the Board of Supervisors (BOS) approved a referral by President Chavez directing the Administration to analyze and make recommendations relating to addressing potential inequities in access to period products, including gaps in access, supply, funding and distribution of free period products to the most vulnerable populations in Santa Clara County during COVID-19 and during the recovery phases. This off-agenda report will also be attached and included in the November budget discussions.

The County’s Office of Women’s Policy (OWP) has been working with the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE), Planned Parenthood Mar Monte (PPMM), Young Women’s Freedom Center (YWFC), and FIRST 5 Santa Clara County (FIRST 5) to determine needs, barriers and potential solutions.

Current estimates and analysis indicate the annual cost of period products for **63,168 women, girls, and menstruating individuals experiencing period poverty can be \$2.2 million.**

Introduction

On average, a menstruating individual will need three to six products per day, for anywhere from two to seven days.¹ Those with a heavier flow will require additional products. Period product industry standards recommend “a *minimum* of 21 products per cycle.”² A 2019 study revealed that the average woman spends \$13.25 per month on period products.³ Across the United States, 41

¹ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/womens-health/in-depth/menstrual-cycle/art-20047186#:~:text=Menstrual%20flow%20might%20occur%20every,more%20regular%20as%20you%20age.>

² <https://www.goaunflow.com/>

³ Commissioned by INTIMINA and conducted by OnePoll, the survey examined respondents' experiences with period poverty. Results revealed the average woman surveyed spends \$13.25 a month on menstrual products – Board of Supervisors: Mike Wasserman, Cindy Chavez, Dave Cortese, Susan Ellenberg, S. Joseph Simitian
County Executive: Jeffrey V. Smith

percent of kids live in low-income families. Nearly 14 percent of girls and women live below the poverty line — compared to only 11 percent of boys and men.⁴ Although more women than men live in poverty in the United States, period products cannot currently be purchased with food stamps or Medicaid.⁵

According to the 2014 Shriver Report, there are at least 42 million impoverished women in the U.S.⁶ Many of these women experience the indignity and shame of being unable to care for themselves during their periods. A 2019 study of low-income women corroborates that account. Two-thirds of the women surveyed did not have the resources to buy menstrual hygiene products at some point during [2019] and one-fifth of respondents struggle to afford period products on a monthly basis.⁷ Without these items, women's movement and ambitions are tampered. During these times, women and girls may not be able to leave their homes, go to work, or participate in civic life. Women and girls' health are also put at risk when they are forced to turn to makeshift methods or prolonged use of limited resources to manage their periods.⁸

I. Current Access and Distribution Points of Period Products for Vulnerable Individuals

1) School-Based Access

Needs Assessment

Typically, enrolled students (grades 5 - 12) can obtain period products from their schools, offered in restrooms or through school nurses. At the time of this report, SCCOE staff had yet to determine the number of tampons and pads obtained through this distribution method because each district individually purchases, governs and tracks their own period product purchases. SCCOE staff continues to work with the Office of Women's Policy to survey and interview each district to assess product need and distribution.

Countywide, there are currently **29,809** Socially Economically Disadvantaged (SED) girls and young women in grades 5-12. SED status is determined by enrollment in reduced and lunch programs. Using the industry standard of a 21-product minimum per month, SED student need for period products can be approximated at **625,989 products per month**. If purchased at retail, this monthly need would amount to roughly **\$112,678 plus tax**.⁹

\$6,360 in an average woman's reproductive lifetime (ages 12-52). See <https://www.swnsdigital.com/2019/11/new-research-reveals-how-much-the-average-woman-spends-per-month-on-menstrual-products/#:~:text=Results%20revealed%20the%20average%20woman,the%20money%20they'd%20save%3F>

⁴ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/what-is-period-poverty/>

⁵ *Id.* Period products were recently made eligible for reimbursement through the CARES act when purchased with funds from insurance spending accounts.

⁶ <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/a10235656/menstrual-period-united-states/>

⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-menstruation-usa/even-in-the-u-s-poor-women-often-cant-afford-tampons-pads-idUSKCN1P42TX>

⁸ <https://www.papermag.com/period-poverty-tampon-tax-united-states-2631311601.html?rebellitem=1#rebellitem1>

⁹ The cost of pads and tampons vary by brand and specialty (organic, heavy flow, light flow, etc...). Industry average costs of individual pads and tampons are \$.16 and \$.20, respectively. The average of \$.18 was used in the analysis of this report.

In evaluating school-based access, SCCOE staff conducted an informal survey of districts in the county jurisdiction and found that approximately 80% of school districts had provided free period products to students prior to March 17, 2020, date of the Santa Clara County Health Officer's Shelter in Place Order. Following the suspension of in class learning due to COVID-19, the survey found that only 25% of school districts continue to provide free period products to students. Assuming that all school districts were equal in size and SED rate (which they are not), we can roughly approximate that at least **22,000 students are experiencing period poverty with limited or no access to period products.**

Access and Distribution

In October 2020, SCCOE received a donation of 25 pallets of period products from the national organization Girls Helping Girls Period. The donation amounted to more than **590,000 period products with a retail value of \$160,000.** On October 23, 2020, SCCOE began distribution of all donated period products to county school districts and FIRST 5. (See Table 1) Each school district received a baseline allocation of five cases plus additional cases as determined by their SED criteria. Additional allocations ranged from zero to 345 cases. With the exception of three school districts, every school district received additional allocations. School districts are making period products available to students through their existing meal distribution service.

Under the best of circumstances, this donation from Girls Helping Girls Period will provide one month's worth of menstruation products for enrolled SED girls and women. This approximation does not take into account transgender, gender non-conforming individuals, youth not currently school engaged, and student families who have recently become unemployed, underemployed, or rendered unable to work due to COVID-19. Additional supplies will be needed by November 23, 2020.

Current and Future Sources of State and Federal Funding

In accordance with the mandates of AB10, qualifying school districts use their base funding to purchase period products. There is currently a case before the Commission on State Mandates that would either provide specific funding for the mandate to provide period products in schools or add to the Mandate Block Grant to meet the increased need among students for period products. The Administration will communicate its support of the need to approve this cost as a mandate through its legislative affairs and mandated cost consultants.

SCCOE is unaware of any additional state and federal funding designated that can be used for the provision of period products in schools.

2) FIRST 5 Santa Clara County

Needs Assessment

In accessing client need, FIRST 5 determined that approximately **7,000 period products are needed each month** to adequately address period poverty. FIRST 5 currently relies on donations made by the public and by non-profit organizations, and on foundation grants to provide this resource. FIRST 5 recently allocated \$210,000 in foundation grant funding to procure period products and diaper kits for client families.

FIRST 5 staff are currently evaluating what the resource gap will be after all existing available resources have been accounted for. OWP staff will be meeting with FIRST 5 and community partners on November 2, 2020 to continue these discussions. For the month of November, FIRST 5 received 2,160 tampons from SCCOE and secured 6,960 pads through donations and grant funding meeting this month's need for period products. Period products will be distributed through the existing Family Resource Center (FRC) network used for diaper distribution.

Access and Distribution

FIRST 5 currently distributes diaper kits through its FRC network. There are 25 FRC sites throughout the County with at least five additional sites opening in 2021. Although not all FRC sites are currently distribution sites, FIRST 5 is able to activate additional distribution sites as needed.

Current and Future Sources of State and Federal Funding

FIRST 5 is not aware of current or future sustainable sources of state and federal funding that can be used for the provision of period products.

3) Community Health Clinics

Needs Assessment

The Community Health Partnership Consortium is comprised of nine agency partners, including Planned Parenthood Mar Monte, operating over 30 community health clinic sites providing primary care to low income and vulnerable populations. The clinic sites adopt a community centered approach that prioritizes cultural competency and language accessibility in service delivery. All sites have remained mostly open during the pandemic. There had been a handful of brief closures in March and April of this year during the initial months of the pandemic. Patients and clients are currently being served either in office or virtually through the TeleHealth system. Community health clinics have had to reduce the availability of appointments to maximize social distancing. Clinic staff has also found that that patients are opting for TeleHealth appointments over in-office visits citing fears of COVID-19.

Community Health Partnership estimates that 58.7% of the patients served by these clinics are either Medi-Cal beneficiaries or enrolled in Covered California. 31.5% of patients have no insurance.

In 2019, CHP served 166,801 unique patients via 490,351 encounters. At least 106,752 CHP patients had income levels that were 100% or more below the Federal Poverty Level. 58% of patient income levels that were 100% - 200% below the Federal Poverty Level. 6% of patient income levels were more than 200% below the Federal Poverty Level. And 36% of patient income levels were unknown. According to staff, patient income levels are usually left unknown when clients do not qualify for any health insurance program due to immigration status.

66% of all patients (110,088) identified as female. 30% of patients (50,040) were between the ages of 20-34. And 30% (50,040) of patients were between the ages of 35-64. The Center for Disease Control defines childbearing age as a range from ages 15 to 49, with the average first menstruation occurring at age 12.5. CHP staff is still distilling data to determine how many of their patients are women and menstruating individuals between the ages of 18 and 49 to define the universe of patients in need of access to period products. By the most conservative estimate, there are at the very least **33,026 patients in need of access to period products** (66% of patients age 20-34 being female).

Access and Distribution

There is currently no integrated program within CHP for the provision of period products. If there were such resources, distribution of period products would naturally fit into the Consortium's existing women's health services conducted in clinics and in community using mobile health vans. Because of the health setting and proactive approach to women's health, clinic staff are often asked for period products. Clinics may have donated period products on hand to distribute but supplies are not guaranteed. In some cases, clinic staff have used personal funds to purchase period products for clients.

Typically, patients request and receive period products during clinic appointments. Due to the pandemic, physical attendance is lower than average. However, CHP has created an engagement framework as part of the County's COVID-19 response to facilitate face to face interactions outside of the clinic.

CHP currently partners with the County on the Community Health and Business Engagement Team Initiative. The CHP network of Community Health Workers engage patients in waiting rooms, canvass high need zip codes and homeless encampments to provide COVID-19 information, resources, and COVID-19 preparedness kits. Community Health Workers also conduct patient wellness calls daily to provide COVID-19 resources, health education, and ensure continued access to primary care. This existing framework of engagement can be leveraged to distribute period products to menstruating individuals in need and promote the availability of such products as part of their women's health offerings. Moreover, clinic staff believe that this additional support will help facilitate conversations about HPV vaccines and reproductive health with girls and their families.

Current and Future Sources of State and Federal Funding

CHP community health clinics are not aware of any current or future sources of state and federal funding that can be used for the provision of period products.

Planned Parenthood Mar Monte receives no federal funding and no dedicated funding source for the provision of period products. Period products are purchased as supplies and provided to patients after a procedure or if a patient menstruates during an exam.

4) Custody Settings

Women, girls, and menstruating individuals in County custody are provided with period products as needed. Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall and the Elmwood Women's

Correctional complex had no change in supplies during the pandemic. Period products are also available at no cost in visitor restrooms at County custody facilities.

5) Homeless Shelters and DV Shelters

Period products are provided as needed to all clients at homeless shelters and domestic violence shelters. Period products are provided using existing funding from the County, local government agencies, individual donors, and other private funders.

OWP staff will continue conversations with County staff and service providers to determine the level of need in shelters and whether existing supplies leave any gaps in access.

6) Unsheltered Homeless Persons

Outreach workers from the Valley Homeless Healthcare Program, the Office of Supportive Housing, and its network of community-based partners regular canvass homeless encampments to provide resources and hygiene kits. Hygiene kits for homeless women include period products such as pads, tampons, wipes, and underwear.

OWP staff will continue conversations with County and community partners to determine the current level of period product distribution and assess what gaps in need may still exist.

7) Young Women Freedom Center (YWFC)

YWFC reported that their clients were able to access period products at their offices. This access point for period products has been limited by office closures due to COVID-19.

OWP staff will continue conversations the Young Women Freedom Center to determine the current level of period product distribution and assess what gaps in need may still exist.

II. Potential Actions to Address Period Poverty in the Long Term and Ensure Access to Free Period Products for Vulnerable Individuals During the Pandemic and Recovery

1) Partner with a regional or national organization dedicated to addressing period poverty.

A handful of national organizations collect and distribute period products at no costs to nonprofit entities, community-based organizations, and individuals in need. These organizations are often sponsored by or in partnership with a period product manufacturer with the ability to purchase in bulk at discounted rates and have direct access to supply chains. Girls Helping Girls Period is one such organization and is responsible for the donation of more than 190,000 period products to SCCOE.

While the County and its partners continue to seek donation support from such organizations, a partnership should also be considered to enhance buying power and ensure access to supplies should dedicated funding become available. For example, Women Helping Women Period, a national period poverty advocate and supply source, can

purchase a year's worth of menstrual products for one woman at a total cost of \$35 (a retail value of \$162).

Other national organizations of note include Alliance for Period Supplies and #HappyPeriod. Such national organizations rely on a network of chapters to support the national mission by facilitating local distribution. The County and its partners can consider the possible designation of a Santa Clara County chapter.

2) Leverage the existing COVID-19 resource network to expand distribution of period products.

The County's COVID-19 response created a framework of direct access and engagement points for vulnerable communities and individuals. The existing framework can be used to support distribution of period products to vulnerable persons and help ensure accessibility when used in conjunction with other access points identified in this report (e.g. meal service distribution, Family Resource Centers, and community health clinics).

- The COVID-19 Support Team

This resource provides resources to COVID-19 positive individuals and their household to support successful isolation and quarantine. The COVID-19 Support Team has provided cleaning supplies, food assistance, and other necessities to positive cases and their households. The provision of period products, should a supply become available, can be included in their resource offerings.

- The Public Health Call Center

Members of the public can access the Public Health Center by first calling 2-1-1 with a COVID-19 related question and are then transferred to the Public Health Call Center. The Call Center is staffed five days a week to answer live calls and return voicemail messages within 48 hours. Should there be a supply of free period products made available in the future, the Call Center staff can help facilitate this need. This is a natural fit because 2-1-1 resources elsewhere across the country are already serving as an access point for free period products. So much so that the Alliance for Period Supplies advises individuals in need of free period products to call their local 2-1-1 for assistance.

- The Community Health and Business Engagement Team

Community Health Workers canvassing neighborhoods and communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. During engagement, Community Health Workers are handing out COVID-19 hygiene kits that include face coverings, hand sanitizers, and sanitizing wipes. Period products can be added to COVID-19 hygiene kits.

3) Support legislative efforts at the State and Federal level to eliminate taxes on feminine hygiene products also known as the “pink tax” to alleviate some of the costs of such vital supplies.

4) Identify funding sources to support the purchase of period products that will be made available to vulnerable individuals at no cost.

Staff continues to gather information to inform and define countywide need for period products among vulnerable populations. Currently, staff can approximate the following:

- School Based Need: **625,989 period products needed monthly** to ensure access for **29,809** Socially Economically Disadvantaged (SED) girls and young women in grades 5-12.
- FIRST 5 Client Need: **7,000 period products needed monthly** to serve approximately **333 clients** based on the recommended minimum supply of 21 products per menstruation cycle.
- Community Clinic Need: **693,554 period** products needed per month to ensure access for **33,026 patients**.

If the County is able to engage a national organization with bulk buying arrangements such as that of Women Helping Women Period, the annual cost of period products for **63,168 women, girls, and menstruating individuals experiencing period poverty can be \$2.2 million.**

Such direction by the Board of Supervisors would require the use of discretionary resources and necessitate a transfer from the General Fund Contingency Reserve if other funding sources are not identified.

cc: Miguel Marquez, Chief Operating Officer
James R. Williams, County Counsel
Megan Doyle, Clerk of the Board
Chief Board Aides
Erica Kelly, OBA Analyst
Agenda Review Coordinators

Table 1. Distribution of Donated Period Products to School Districts During Week of October 23, 2020

	Baseline Allocation of Period Products (# of Cases)	Additional Allocation Based on District's SED Criteria (# of cases)	Total Allocation (# of Cases)	Total Number of Period Products	School District
1	5	104	109	47088	Alum Rock Union Elementary
2	5	345	350	151200	East Side Union High
3	5	79	84	36288	Franklin-McKinley Elementary
4	5	102	107	46224	Gilroy Unified
5	5	5	10	4320	Luther Burbank
6	5	18	23	9936	Mount Pleasant Elementary
7	0	0	0	0	Santa Clara County Office of Education
8	5	15	20	8640	Berrysessa Union Elementary
9	5	19	24	10368	Campbell Union
10	5	30	35	15120	Milpitas Unified
11	5	10	15	6480	Moreland
12	5	32	37	15984	Morgan Hill Unified
13	5	11	16	6912	Mountain View Whisman
14	5	25	30	12960	Oak Grove Elementary
15	5	3	8	3456	Orchard Elementary
16	5	129	134	57888	San Jose Unified
17	5	52	57	24624	Santa Clara Unified
18	5	15	20	8640	Sunnyvale
19	5	6	11	4752	Cambrian
20	5	65	70	30240	Campbell Union High
21	5	9	14	6048	Cupertino Union
22	5	41	46	19872	Evergreen Elementary
23	5	43	48	20736	Fremont Union High
24	5	0	5	2160	Lakeside Joint
25	5	0	5	2160	Loma Prieta Joint Union Elementary
26	5	3	8	3456	Los Altos Elementary
27	5	1	6	2592	Los Gatos Union Elementary
28	5	4	9	3888	Los Gatos-Saratoga Union High
29	5	21	26	11232	Mountain View-Los Altos Union High
30	5	19	24	10368	Palo Alto Unified
31	5	1	6	2592	Saratoga Union Elementary
32	5	7	12	5184	Union Elementary
33	5	0	5	2160	FIRST 5 Santa Clara County
TOTAL	160	1214	1374	593568	