

# Recommendations for the delivery of free menstrual products to the public: a qualitative exploration among marginalised groups in Victoria, Australia

**‘Menstrual product insecurity’** is the inability to access or afford sufficient menstrual products to last the duration of the menstrual cycle.



Governments in Australia are trying to address this issue, yet finding a solution is complex. Free-product provision services in Victoria will soon expand from schools to public spaces.

In 2023 we conducted 35 interviews (30 with marginalised groups aged 18-45 and 5 Key Informants) to find out:

**“How would those experiencing the most menstrual product insecurity, best benefit from a free product provision service?”**

- Participants described varied levels of insecurity, which we developed into three categories.
- These matched to three different service delivery recommendations.
- Multiple approaches may be necessary depending on the level of insecurity people experience.



## Severe

Can't afford or access menstrual products



## High

Can't afford or access *enough* menstrual products



## Low

May be unable to afford or access *preferred* products

### Existing social services

Integrate with services already accessed by severe insecurity populations (Foodbanks, community centres).

- Larger quantities feasible
- Existing relationships and trust

### Direct provision

Postal delivery, cash-back, subsidies or targeted payments through financial support services (Centrelink, PBS).

- Level of need inbuilt through existing eligibility
- Supports product choice & agency
- Supportive for those with accessibility issues (location, disability, age)

### Vending machines

Product dispensing machines in public female and unisex bathrooms

- Smaller quantities feasible
- Potential accessibility/entry restrictions on severe needs groups

## What did participants suggest?

Participants reflected that there was no “one-size-fit-all” solution that works for everyone given the variation of menstrual experience.

*“You could put five girls in a line and each one of them could use something different.”*

*“It’s basically my answer... there needs to be options.”*



### Convenience

- Any service must fit easily into daily life with minimal time-burden.
- Different insecurity groups preferred mechanisms convenient to them.

### Choice

- Choice of product and quantity
- Anatomy, ability, gender-identity, cultural norms impacts product
- Level of product insecurity impacts quantity

### Privacy and visibility

- Balancing privacy and visibility
- To ensure take-up, people are aware of the service and comfortable to use it

### Fair distribution

- Consistent access for those in greater need
- Mitigate potential service abuse ie: QR codes or delay timers.

*“I don’t want people knowing that I am on my period... However, I still think good visibility to create awareness.”*

*“If there was no timer or any restrictions, I feel like people would just like empty it out straight away and be greedy.”*

### Leverage

- Utilize product provision to support other menstrual health needs
- improved menstrual health education
- Normalize menstruation as a healthy bodily function, not something shameful.

### Citation:

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