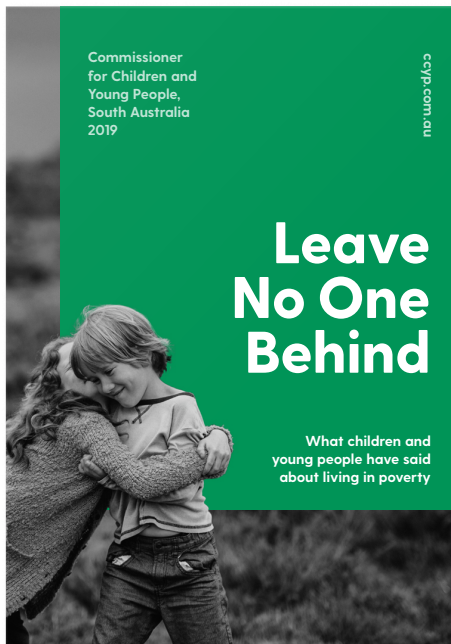


# Sanitary Product Supply to School Students in South Australia

Commissioner for  
Children & Young People

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An issue highlighted in the Commissioner for Children and Young People's recent report **Leave No One Behind**, was 'period poverty'. The report on young people's perceptions and experiences of poverty in South Australia identified that some girls are missing school because the household can't afford sanitary products.

To follow up on this CCYP contacted 48 public high schools in metro and regional areas to ask teachers and administrators about the availability of sanitary products for students. These schools represent a broad cross section of metropolitan and rural locations.

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## The scope of the problem

**100%** of schools contacted have some sort of informal or semiformal response to address this issue. However, the vast majority of these were 'emergency measures' often championed by individual teachers who are not always available or on campus.

Word of mouth is the only way students can know about getting access in **55%** of the schools. With a number of schools 'unsure of exactly how students know'. Typically, the staff report things like 'the girls just know where to go'.

**74%** of schools believe that access to sanitary products is an issue for their students.

**11%** of schools discussed access to sanitary products on campus and this typically takes place in year 8 in health and wellbeing units. However, this did not appear to lead to a coordinated or consistent approach to access on campus.

**11%** of schools reported that this is having an impact on student attendance. The schools where this happens are more likely to be rural and/or be in an area of concentrated disadvantage.

## Access pathways

The majority of students were required to ask a staff member for assistance and may have to utilise one or several of the options below.

- Students can go to student services, which may mean tracking down an individual teacher, who may be away from their desk and working elsewhere on a large campus. **(18%)**
- Students need to find and/or book in with the school councillor. **(22%)**
- Students need to ask for key to get to a specific room or seek products via school reception. Some products are kept or 'hidden' in supply rooms. Students need to return key on completion. **(33%)**
- Students need to go to first aid room and/or find a first aid officer (which may be a male staff member). **(25%)**
- Students need to ask the wellbeing officer. **(22%)**
- Over and above these numbers **18%** of students need to ask teacher first and may end up having to deal with multiple staff members.
- Less than **10%** of the schools have vending machine in student bathrooms. The vending machine items typically cost the student to use (approximately \$1). If students were unable to pay the cost, the school generally had emergency stock available through a staff member.

## Conclusion

Currently across South Australia access to sanitary products is a major issue affecting schools, students and teachers. Many campuses are having to rely on assistance from manufacturers, charities and community groups and these partnerships are not reliable and getting harder to maintain.

Students may be embarrassed or shamed by the often convoluted and informal processes that they need to follow. Often the school assumes that students will hear about how

## Burden on schools

**37%** of schools engaged a manufacturer, charity or community group to fill the gap in supply. However, these partnerships are getting harder to secure, are inconsistent and on the decline. Many schools have told us that manufactures are now reporting that they are overwhelmed with requests for products and have stopped or are reducing the starter packs and 'freebies' given to schools. In other cases, schools relying on community groups and charities did not know if the partnership would continue at the end of the year. This led to schools missing out or having to share what supplies they get amongst multiple schools.

## Burden on teachers

Almost **20%** of schools report that teachers (all female) are purchasing for students with their own money. This includes going to the chemist or supermarket in their staff lunch breaks. One teacher CCYP spoke to had recently purchased for three students in one week, these costs are significant, and teachers feel responsible saying things like *'I'm a woman so I get it'*. Another teacher reported frequently calling parents to bring in clean underwear from home or when this was not possible had to purchase it for students.

## Resourcing

**88%** of schools want the department to resource sanitary products. They are typically saying things like *'this should just be paid in the budget like electricity, water and toilet paper'*

to access the products "through the grape vine". Individual champion teachers are bearing the financial burden of supporting female students and often having to leave campus and sacrifice their breaks. Councillors, wellbeing and first aid staff are also having their time diverted from other critical tasks to address this basic hygiene issues.