

ENSURING EQUITY AND WELL-BEING:

WHITEPAPER 2026

Libra *Period*
POSITIVITY
Program



THE CASE FOR PERIOD PRODUCTS IN WORKPLACES



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Menstrual equity is a well-being issue and business imperative.

Employee wellbeing is central to productivity, engagement, and retention. Yet, while Australian businesses lose \$14 billion annually to period-related workplace disruptions,¹ access to period products remains overlooked in most workplaces.

This leaves a critical equity gap that women often endure in silence, with many having been caught without period care at work - an experience that creates stress, embarrassment, and entirely avoidable disruption. 3 in 4 women believe period products should be readily accessible in the workplace², yet less than 1 in 6 employers currently provide them², highlighting a clear mismatch between what employees need and the support they receive.

For approximately \$20 per employee per year,³ organisations can offer a simple, effective solution that enables employees to manage their periods discreetly, safely, and with confidence. Providing period products in workplaces is a low-cost, high-impact solution that supports employees' comfort and wellbeing while strengthening organisational performance, equity, inclusion, and dignity.

Reasons to act:



REDUCE ABSENTEEISM AND IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY



ENHANCE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE AND INCLUSION



STRENGTHEN ORGANISATIONAL REPUTATION

This paper outlines why menstrual equity matters, the business case for action, and practical steps to provide period care products alongside other workplace provisions like toilet paper, soap and coffee.

Workplaces should act now to provide accessible period products.



1. O'Shea, M. et al. (2026) 'Menstrual pain and the economic purse: Calculating and understanding menstrual symptom productivity loss and the Australian economy', Australian Journal of Social Issues. doi:10.1002/ajs4.70092.

2. Libra Workplace Impact Survey 2024, N=1,011 women AU

3. Libra Period Positivity Program estimates – spend will vary depending on hours worked in the office

INTRODUCTION

Every month, millions of Australians have a period – a natural and healthy process.

Yet, many face challenges at work because they lack access to or can't afford period products. This is not just a personal challenge; it's a workplace issue that impacts productivity, equity, and employee well-being.⁴ And it's one that forward-thinking organisations can solve.

The education sector has led the way in making period care more accessible for students. In 2019, Victoria's Department of Education successfully pioneered free period products in all public schools, followed by all other Australian States and Territories.

Despite these advances, workplaces lag. Less than 1 in 6 Australian employers currently provide free period products,⁵ even though nearly 3 in 4 employees believe they should⁵. This gap represents a missed opportunity to support employees' needs

in a way that strengthens inclusion, reduces absenteeism and enhances engagement. When employees are caught without the products they need, it can lead to missed work, reduced confidence, and avoidable disruptions — all of which directly influence whether people feel included, stay present, and remain engaged at work.

This whitepaper advocates for Australian workplaces to provide free period products. It explores why access to period care matters, shares examples of successful initiatives, and outlines practical strategies for implementation. By addressing period equity, organisations can create healthier, more supportive environments where every employee can thrive.



“Period equity is fundamental to workplace dignity and genuine participation. When organisations provide essential period products as a standard, they send a powerful message that supporting employee well-being isn't optional - it's an expectation that fosters inclusion, retention and real opportunity for every staff member”

*Simone Clarke,
CEO, UN Women Australia.*

2

4. World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000–2022: special focus on gender, WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP) (2023), available at: https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/wash-documents/jmp-2023_layout_v3launch_5july_low-reswhowebsite.pdf?sfvrsn=c52136f5_3&download=true

5. Libra Workplace Impact Survey 2024, N=1,011 women AU

HOW LACK OF WORKPLACE SUPPORT FOR PERIODS IMPACTS PEOPLE AND PERFORMANCE

The impacts of periods on businesses and individuals are substantial, and largely overlooked.

Missed work due to periods costs Australian businesses an estimated \$14 billion annually.⁶ 56% of women have missed work because of their period, and 1 in 3 of these women said the reason was fear of leaking.⁷



Source: Libra Workplace Impact Survey 2024, N=1,011 women AU

At work, an unexpected period can cause instant disruption: 87% of people who get periods report it happening,⁸ and 76% report no access to products when it does.⁸ What follows is often frantic improvising, breaks in workflow, or having the entire day derailed over something entirely preventable.

The personal financial burden is also significant and often forces difficult compromises. The average Australian woman spends \$180–\$240 a year on period products, amounting to a lifetime cost of \$6,700–\$10,000.⁹ Around 64% of Australian

menstruators have struggled to afford period products, and 5% reported being unable to purchase them at all in the past year.⁷

Despite how widespread these issues are and its impact on personal productivity and well-being, menstrual health continues to receive limited organisational attention.

The evidence clearly highlights the pressing need for greater awareness, support, and policy change surrounding menstrual health in the workplace and beyond.

6. O'Shea, M. et al. (2026) 'Menstrual pain and the economic purse: Calculating and understanding menstrual symptom productivity loss and the Australian economy', Australian Journal of Social Issues. doi:10.1002/ajs4.70092

7. Share the Dignity (2024) Bloody Big Survey 2024. Available at: <https://www.sharethedignity.org.au/end-period-poverty/bloody-big-survey-2024>.

8. Libra Workplace Impact Survey 2024, N=1,011 women AU

9. Cat Woods, Could Australia-wide laws eradicate period poverty?, Law Society Journal, 11 September 2024, available at: <https://lsj.com.au/articles/could-australia-wide-laws-eradicate-period-poverty/>

THE GAP BETWEEN WHAT'S PROVIDED AND WHAT EMPLOYEES TRULY VALUE

Research also uncovers a stark disparity between everyday workplace perks provided and the essential support that employees - especially those who get periods - need.

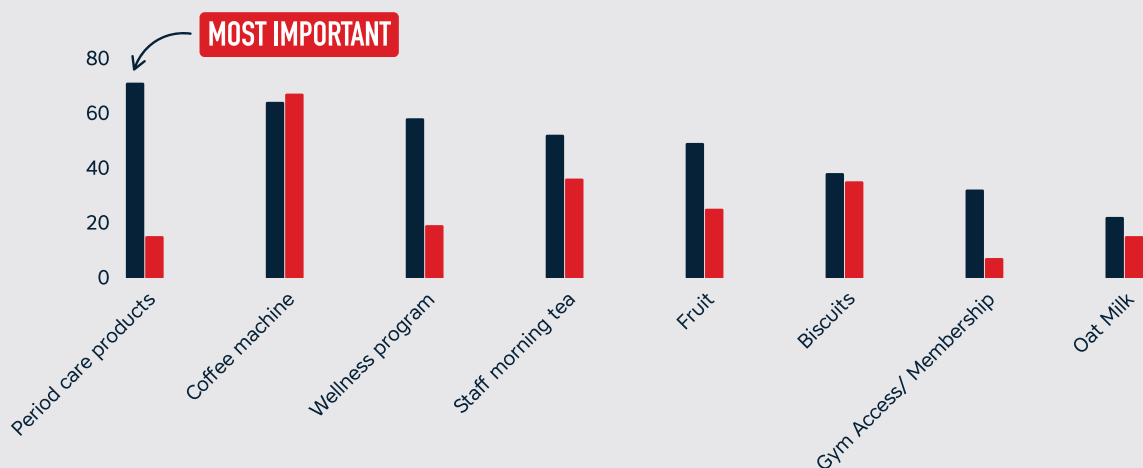
In Australia, while 71% of workers believe employers should supply free period products, just 15% of workplaces currently do - revealing a significant mismatch between expectations and reality.¹⁰

There is also a clear expectation from Australian workers, including men, that workplaces should be getting the basics right, ahead of common perks like coffee or wellness programs.¹¹

These findings highlight a pivotal question for business leaders:

ARE WE OFFERING PERKS THAT LOOK GOOD ON PAPER - LIKE FREE SNACKS AND OTHER DISCRETIONARY BENEFITS - BUT NEGLECTING FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS THAT GENUINELY SUPPORT OUR EMPLOYEES AND THEIR ABILITY TO PERFORM AT WORK?

WHAT'S PROVIDED AT WORK VS ITS IMPORTANCE



71% believe period care at work is important.

Only **15%** of workplaces provide it.

Source: Libra Workplace Impact Survey 2024, N=1,011 women AU



EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE:

Lola, Navigating Menopause:

"One afternoon, completely out of the blue, [my period] started again — heavy, fast, and at the worst possible moment: right as I was sitting in a board meeting, about to present the financials for a company I did the books for. I felt that sudden, unmistakable sensation and instantly knew I had nothing with me.

I excused myself as calmly as I could and went straight to the bathroom, trying to manage the situation with whatever I could find — mostly toilet paper, and a lot of it. I was overwhelmed,

confused, and completely unprepared. Knowing how heavy my periods had been in the past, I panicked at the thought of bleeding through my clothes while standing in front of the entire board.

It reminded me how unpredictable menopause can be, even when you think you know what to expect. And it reinforced how important it is for period products to be accessible everywhere — not just for young women, but for every woman at every stage of life."

ACCESSIBLE PERIOD CARE AT WORK – A SMALL CHANGE, *Big Results*

Just as water, soap and toilet paper are basic expectations in workplace bathrooms, period products are essential items that should be standard too.

Period care in the workplace empowers employees to manage their period discreetly, safely and with confidence. Beyond convenience, it's a high impact, low cost investment that communicates respect and positions an organisation as one that genuinely supports its people.

For approximately \$20 per menstruating employee annually¹¹ – roughly the cost of 45 minutes of work – organisations can remove barriers that directly impact performance and well-being.

Nearly half of menstruators arrive late or leave early due to period-related challenges, and 58% have missed important meetings¹² - regaining that lost productivity far outweighs the minimal cost of providing products.

INVESTMENT

up to **\$20** per menstruator per year

45 minutes work on Australian minimum wage

RETURN



Increased attendance

62% have been more present at work i.e. less time off

+



Increased motivation

78% have improved work satisfaction and motivation

+



Increased loyalty

90% feel valued, supported and cared for

Source: Libra workplace impact survey 2024, N=190 women AU with access to free period care at work

THE EVIDENCE SETS A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR ORGANISATIONS TO ELEVATE MENSTRUAL HEALTH AS A STANDARD ELEMENT OF WORKPLACE SUPPORT.

Creating a Workplace that Supports Menstrual Equity.

Menstrual inequity and period poverty affect millions globally - and it's closer to home than you think. Sadly, many employees cannot reliably access the products they need - whether due to affordability, availability, or stigma - affecting their confidence and participation at work.

Menstrual equity means ensuring access to products, education, and appropriate facilities so periods never limit opportunity. While providing accessible period products in workplaces is the most impactful first step, a comprehensive program also includes:

1. Education and open dialogue to reduce stigma
2. Policies that promote inclusion and dignity
3. Policies that minimise health risks from menstrual discomfort and disorders

Genuine and visible support helps to prevent missed work, health risks, and shame - issues that no modern workplace should ignore.

“Normalising conversations about menstruation at work is just as critical as providing products. When we break the silence and encourage open discussion, we reduce stigma, support mental wellbeing, and build truly respectful workplaces where everyone can belong.”

*Simone Clarke,
CEO, UN Women Australia.*



WORKPLACE CASE STUDIES: PUTTING MENSTRUAL EQUITY INTO PRACTICE

Lifeblood – Supporting Employees through accessible period care

Lifeblood is a national health organisation responsible for delivering Australia’s blood, plasma and biological products. With a diverse, medically-focused workforce operating across office-based, clinical, and donor-centre environments, employee wellbeing and operational reliability are essential to their purpose.

Lifeblood proactively introduced free period care products to improve employee comfort and productivity. The initiative aligned with their broader wellbeing strategy and reinforced their commitment to dignity, inclusivity, and psychological safety. With leadership support, their Diversity & Inclusion team partnered with Facilities to deliver a national rollout across more than 100 sites. Employee feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, prompting expansion of the program to include liners and additional hygiene options.

Employee Reflections:

“Every time I go to the bathroom, I’m thankful for the availability of the [period care] products, the assurance/comfort it provides is well beyond the actual usage. I no longer need to worry if an unexpected period arrives!”

“As a woman experiencing perimenopause, with the often-unexpected arrival of my period, the provision of sanitary products has been extremely welcome and I thank those involved in the initiative.”



Energy Queensland – Meeting the Needs of a Dispersed, Diverse Workforce

Energy Queensland is Australia’s largest wholly government-owned electricity company, with more than 9,000 employees working in 117 depots and offices across metropolitan, regional, and remote locations. Operating in a traditionally male-dominated industry, their workforce includes field technicians, apprentices, engineers, and corporate teams - many of whom can find themselves working in environments where access to essential products can be limited.

Energy Queensland made period products available in their staffed locations to ensure employees, particularly those working in remote areas, had access to essential support. The initiative was driven by incidents that highlighted the impact a lack of access could have on wellbeing and retention. A business case was developed using research on breakthrough bleeding, productivity impacts and promotion of gender equality and inclusion. This positioned the initiative around dignity, respect and clear operational benefit. The program has since been embedded into routine restroom servicing to ensure long-term sustainability.



Insights from leadership:

"We heard directly from our people the impact of breakthrough bleeding*, especially when working in the field in remote locations. The importance of dignity and support at work should not be underestimated as a key retention issue."

"We drew on existing research about the likelihood of women experiencing a breakthrough bleed during their working lives, along with data on how many people would leave work if that happened. Once we calculated what that meant in hours against an average salary, the productivity benefit of providing period products was clear. We are a cost-conscious organisation, and the data spoke for itself."

"For women working in male-dominated industries in particular, there have historically been many signs and symbols that they don't belong, and that work hasn't been designed for them. Putting period products in our bathrooms is a clear indicator that we understand the experiences our people are having. It's an important symbol of inclusion in addition to its practicality."

*Breakthrough bleeding refers to unexpected menstrual bleeding that occurs outside a person's regular cycle

GLOBAL ADVANCEMENTS IN MENSTRUAL EQUITY

Scotland: Leadership in Menstrual Equity

In November 2020, Scotland became the first country globally to legislate free access to period products through the Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill. This landmark policy ensures that menstrual products are available at no cost across a wide range of public and community settings, including workplaces, community centres, youth clubs, and pharmacies.¹³ The initiative has been widely recognised for its comprehensive approach to addressing menstrual equity and has established a benchmark for other nations seeking to implement similar measures.

Why This Matters - Scotland's leadership further reinforces that menstrual equity is not a fringe issue, but a matter of public health, dignity, and social inclusion. By embedding free access to period products into law and making them widely available across everyday public spaces, Scotland has demonstrated that large-scale, government-led action is both achievable and effective.

Canada: Progress in Federal Workplaces

In 2023, Canada introduced federal legislation requiring all federally regulated employers to provide free menstrual products in the workplace.¹⁴ This was a significant step toward workplace equity, ensuring employees in sectors like banking, telecommunications, airlines, media, and public service (about 910,000 private-sector employees) have access to essential hygiene products.

Why This Matters - Canada's legislation recognises that menstrual equity is fundamental to workplace health, participation, and inclusion. By mandating free products across federally regulated sectors, the policy reduces infection risks, prevents absenteeism, and addresses the financial burden faced by 1 in 5 Canadians who struggle to afford period products.¹⁵

13. Rodriguez, L. (2021) 20 Places Around the World Where Governments Provide Free Period Products, Global Citizen. Available at: <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/free-period-products-countries-cities-worldwide/>

14. Employment and Social Development Canada (2023) Menstrual products now available at no cost to employees in federally regulated workplaces, Government of Canada, 15 December. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2023/12/menstrual-products-now-available-at-no-cost-to-employees-in-federally-regulated-workplaces.html>

15. Government of Canada – Women and Gender Equality Canada (2025) Beyond the pad: The real price of period poverty in Canada, Canada.ca. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/funding/equality-action/menstrual-equity.html>

CONCLUSION

Menstrual equity is not just a social imperative - it is a smart, strategic business decision. Providing free period products in the workplace delivers measurable benefits: improved productivity and reduced absenteeism, enhanced employee satisfaction, and a stronger organisational reputation. The cost is minimal compared to the return on investment.

Recommended Actions for Workplaces:

1. ASSESS YOUR NEEDS

Review current facilities to see where period product access is missing.

2. DECIDE WHERE TO IMPLEMENT

Start with women's bathrooms, and consider unisex, visitor, and men's bathrooms for broader access.

3. STOCK AND REPLENISH

Most office and workplace suppliers offer cost-effective solutions for as little as \$20 per menstruating employees. Choose dispensers for high use areas or smaller Period Care Boxes for smaller spaces or in cubicles.

4. COMMUNICATE

Communicate the policy clearly to employees to help to break down taboos and stigmas about periods at work.

5. TIME YOUR RELEASE

Align with DE&I and wellbeing programs. Consider launching around International Women's Day (March 8, 2026) or Menstrual Hygiene Day (May 28, 2026) for maximum visibility.

BY ACTING NOW, ORGANISATIONS CAN FOSTER INCLUSION, SUPPORT WELL-BEING, AND POSITION THEMSELVES AS LEADERS IN PROGRESSIVE WORKPLACE PRACTICES. THE TIME TO CLOSE THE GAP IS TODAY - START BY MAKING PERIOD PRODUCTS AS STANDARD AS SOAP AND TOILET PAPER.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Libra Period Positivity Program

The Libra Period Positivity Program is on a mission to make access to period care a standard in workplaces, schools and public environments. We partner with organisations, governments and educational institutions to integrate period care into their existing washroom services. With a range of dispensing solutions and bulk Libra refills designed for easy servicing, the program helps ensure products are available when they're needed - reducing stigma, removing barriers and supporting the wellbeing of employees, students and communities.

Libra is Australia's #1 period care brand, made in Melbourne since 1978. Libra is a company of Essity - a global, leading hygiene and health company and Australia's only local manufacturer of period care products. This foundation of reliability, quality and long-standing commitment to health and hygiene underpins the Libra Period Positivity Program.

UN Women Australia

UN Women is the lead UN entity on gender equality and women's empowerment. UN Women Australia raises funds for and awareness of UN Women's work to drive change for women and girls. We partner with governments, the private sector, academic and for-purpose organisations to shift the systems that shape lives - from policy and legislation to workplace culture and community safety - in four critical areas: leadership; economic empowerment; freedom from violence; and peace and security. From advocacy to action, UN Women keeps the rights of women and girls at the heart of global progress — always, everywhere.