

Identity

Period Poverty Affects Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People, Too

On the first National Period Day, we need to think beyond the incorrect idea that periods are just for women.

BY COURTNEY ROARK

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In this op-ed, Courtney Roark, the Alabama policy and movement building director at URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity, explains why we need to drop the idea that all women — and only women — menstruate

For some people, **having a period** is completely mundane. It's just something that happens every month and, after a while, it's handled on auto-pilot. But for others, having a period presents major challenges.

In a 2017-2018 study, **64%** of women, who were recruited from community organizations that serve low-income women and participated in the study, were unable to afford menstrual hygiene supplies like tampons and pads during the previous year and 46% could not **afford** both food and menstrual hygiene products. But women aren't the only people impacted by period poverty.

On October 19, people in all 50 states will rally for the first-ever National Period Day to call for equitable access to menstrual hygiene and break down the stigma surrounding periods — including for transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming (TGNC/NB) people. By making sure clean and healthy period products

are freely accessible in schools, shelters, and prisons, and eliminating the “tampon tax,” or unfair sales tax on menstrual products, we can help ensure that menstrual hygiene is not treated like a privilege when we know it’s a right for every single person.

The way we’ve been socialized to understand reproductive health, including periods, assumes a person’s **gender** indicates their reproductive organs — which is not the case. The truth is, not all women menstruate and not all people who **menstruate are women**. We **know** that the cost of period products can be prohibitive for many, and that having a period can impede a person's ability to go to school, attend a job interview, or take advantage of another opportunity that could lead to economic advancement. So when we consider that trans folks are **more likely** to live in poverty than cisgender people, it’s easy to see how lack of access to period products falls especially hard on trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people.

But it's not just economic barriers that TGNC/NB people can face during a period. Some people also might **experience** gender dysphoria when navigating menstruation because of the way that periods have been gendered as a women’s issue, or because menstruating is incongruent with how they wish their body functioned. Some TGNC/NB people utilize **hormone replacement therapy** (HRT), and might bleed intermittently if their access to HRT is **irregular** due to cost, poverty, health insurance, or other reasons, which can also contribute to gender dysphoria.

TGNC/NB people also face safety concerns when they menstruate in gendered bathrooms. There are often no trash cans inside stalls in men’s restrooms, so there’s nowhere discreet to throw away your period products. If you “pass” for a male or appear “too masculine” in a woman’s restroom where it might be logistically easier to manage your bleeding, it might still feel just as unsafe for some people.

Transgender people face **extraordinary** levels of violence in this country so these fears are justified. (If you’re ever looking for a gender-neutral restroom, **Refuge**

Restrooms is a handy resource.)

At URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity, our dream is for every bathroom to be gender neutral and stocked with free, healthy, and clean menstruation products. In the meantime, we are advocating to provide these products and appropriate disposals in all individual bathroom stalls and common spaces, including men's restrooms. The bottom line is, every person experiences their period differently because our bodies are vast and diverse and beautiful. And as we work toward de-stigmatizing periods and improving access to safe, healthy, and affirming period products we have to account for all of these diverse experiences.

Related: [How Periods Perpetuate Homelessness](#)

