



# Creating menstrual equity in the workplace

Encouraging productivity, promoting menstrual equity and making a positive impact on the environment



## Executive Summary

Period products are an essential for 50% of the population, for an average of 3,500 days of their lives. Historically, workplace and public toilets have not regularly provided these essentials, and when they have more recently, the quality of the product is poor, creating a negative impact on the environment, discomfort for women and even physical irritation and allergic reaction.

Over the past five years, there have been developments in the provision of period products in workplace toilets. Companies worldwide have recognised the importance of supporting menstrual health and fostering gender inclusivity. Many organisations have taken proactive steps to install free and easily accessible period product dispensers in their facilities.

While there has been a growing trend towards offering a diverse range of products, including organic and sustainable options, there is still a long way to go. Such initiatives reflect a more empathetic and progressive approach towards menstrual hygiene, promoting employee well-being and productivity. The tides are changing, working towards a transformative shift that will not only destigmatise periods in the workplace but has also set a precedent for other essential facilities.

ABM, a leading provider of integrated facility services, has created a solution which not only positively affects the customer's bottom line, but gives them the opportunity to encourage better productivity, demonstrate understanding of the unique needs of menstruating individuals, promote greater menstrual equity and make a positive impact on the environment.





## The Period Landscape

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Menstruation, a natural biological process experienced by approximately half of the global population, has been historically shrouded in stigma and silence. However, recent studies have shed light on the multifaceted impact of menstruation, covering issues related to the environment, workplace productivity, gender bias, and economics.

One striking statistic that underscores the scale of the issue is that, on average, every woman uses 11,000 period products in her lifetime. Unfortunately, many of these products are packaged and made with plastic, contributing to a mounting environmental crisis. Plastic-based period products take an astonishing average of 400 years to biodegrade, exacerbating the already massive problem of plastic pollution. Tampon applicators, plastic-backed pads, and individually wrapped items end up in landfills or oceans, posing a severe threat to wildlife and ecosystems.

Beyond the environmental implications, there are significant health and comfort concerns associated with using plastic-based period products. Women spend the equivalent of ten years on their period, with period products in close proximity to or inside of their bodies. The non-breathable nature of plastic materials can lead to irritation, allergic reactions, and discomfort. Moreover, the warm and moist environment created by these products can foster bacterial growth, potentially increasing the risk of infections. There is also a concern about exposure to harmful chemicals found in some plastics, such as phthalates and dioxins, which can be absorbed through the skin and impact health negatively.

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The impact of menstruation extends to the workplace, where gender bias and inequality often come to the fore. In almost all work environments, men are not denied access to toilet paper, while provision for women is often overlooked. A shocking 79% of women are left to improvise with toilet paper, leading to feelings of shame, discomfort, and distraction while trying to cope with their menstrual needs: a need that is as natural as going to the toilet. This disparity not only affects workplace productivity but also perpetuates the stigma surrounding menstruation and creates an unwelcoming work environment for women.

Three prominent topics that have gained momentum in recent years are menstrual leave, period poverty, and the tampon tax. Menstrual leave refers to providing women with additional paid or unpaid leave days during their menstrual cycles to acknowledge and accommodate the physical and emotional challenges they may face. While this idea is met with both support and scepticism, its recognition indicates a shift towards recognising the unique needs of women in the workplace.

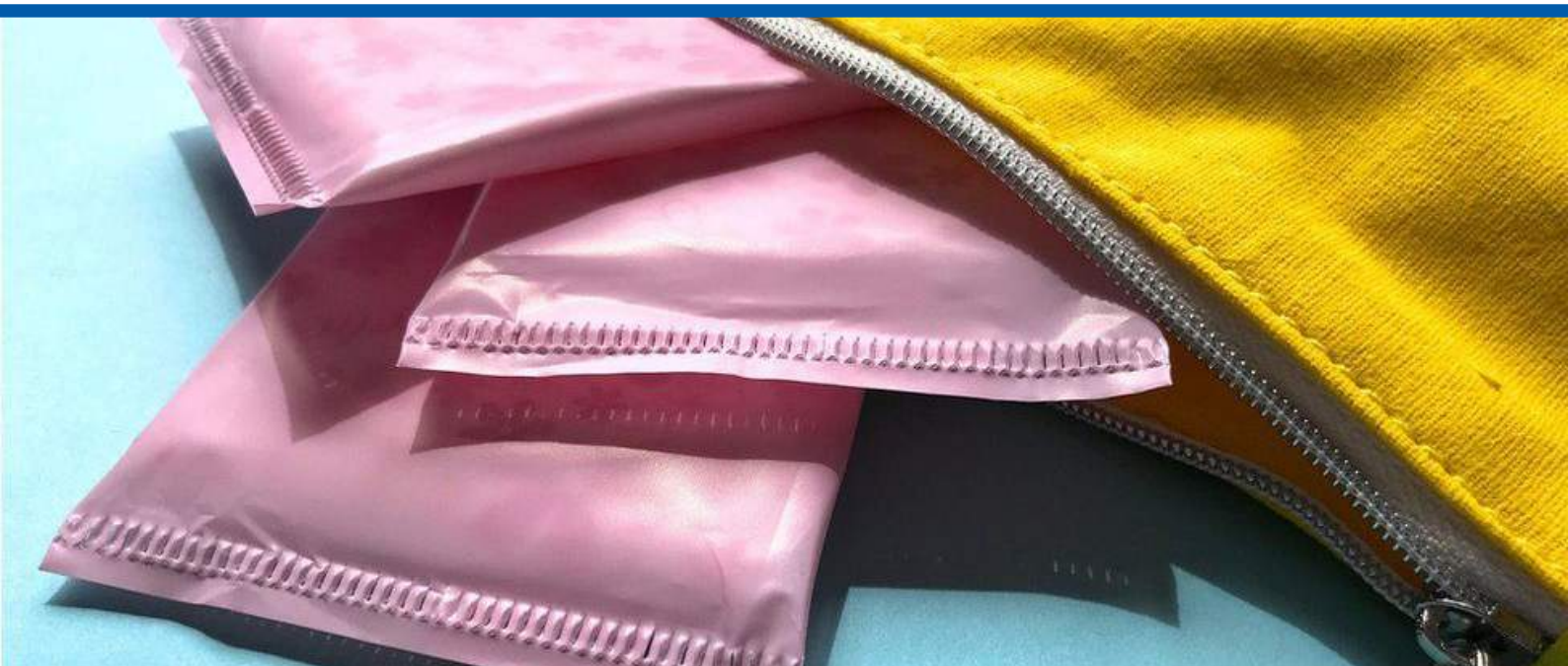
Period poverty is a critical issue that highlights the economic challenges faced by many women in accessing affordable menstrual products. Lack of access to these products can lead to unhygienic practices, health issues, and educational and economic setbacks, particularly in disadvantaged communities.

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The tampon tax, or the imposition of sales tax on menstrual products, has been a subject of ongoing debate. Advocates argue that these products are necessities and should not be taxed as luxury items. This tax disproportionately affects women and perpetuates gender-based economic discrimination.

In conclusion, the conversation around menstruation has increased in volume in recent years. As the dialogue continues to evolve, businesses willing to provide a simple solution in the workplace will not only encourage better productivity but demonstrate understanding of the unique needs of menstruating individuals, promote greater menstrual equity and make a positive impact on the environment.



## The Solution

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ABM recognises that facilities service providers play a crucial role in helping customers to address menstruation inequality in the workplace by ensuring accessible, sustainable solutions which remain well-stocked and with proper disposal facilities for period products.

ABM has successfully created and implemented a pilot programme for a key client to address all the issues outlined in this paper. The programme introduced free tampons and pads, along with dispensers, at one of the client's fulfilment centres. The impact has been astounding, with women providing glowing feedback and actively choosing the new product over the previous offering due to its unique benefits, including the presence of an applicator and superior quality and comfort.

Aside from the positive response from employees, the programme has resulted in remarkable cost savings for the client. Within a two months, the company saved over £2,978. Moreover, the initiative carries an additional social impact, as the supplier donates one product for free for every ten purchased, contributing to menstrual equity and sustainability.

Following significant research, ABM's product of choice is Aunt Flow; a revolutionary period product company and campaign dedicated to menstrual equity, sustainability, and inclusivity. Their mission is to ensure that everyone who menstruates has access to safe and comfortable period products. Unlike traditional period product companies, Aunt Flow's products are free of harmful chemicals, dyes, and fragrances, making them safe for both the user and the environment.

Aunt Flow's product line includes organic cotton tampons, pads, and liners, all packaged in plastic-free and biodegradable materials. Additionally, the company works to combat period poverty by providing period products to those in need through their Buy One, Give One programme.

ABM's pilot programme showcases the significant positive changes that can be achieved when facilities service providers proactively address the needs of their clients' employees, fostering a more inclusive and supportive workplace environment. The success of this initiative sets a positive example for other companies to follow, promoting menstrual equity and well-being for all employees.



## Pilot Case Study

- ABM installed wall mounted dispensers with capacity for 50 pads and 50 tampons
- All Aunt Flow products are made from 100% organic cotton and are packaged in bio-degradable packaging
- All Aunt Flow products are packaged individually so there is no wastage
- A smooth-tip applicator is provided with each tampon making it more hygienic and easier to use



For every 10 Aunt Flow pads and tampons purchased one is donated to a menstruator in need. Based on purchase data from 2022, ABM UK would have seen the pilot clients portfolio donate 12,852 period products, with a further 7,958 products donated so far in 2023

### Results:

In eight weeks, the pilot programme on one site achieved the following:

- £2,937 was saved for the client
- 3,543 period products were saved from being wasted
- 814 period products were donated to a menstruator in need
- 100% of ABM operators find the new dispenser easier to use

## Operational benefits

- By switching to Aunt Flow period products, the site would see an annual cost reduction of 48.15% and if rolled out across the ABM/the clients portfolio would see an annual cost reduction of 47.56%.
- The vending machines have a 61.29%-150% higher product capacity depending on product type in comparison to the current vending machine offering.
- Due to the higher product capacity the vending machines will require fewer replenishment interventions, remain fuller for longer and product is less likely to grade out and impact associate experience.

# User Feedback

Don't take it from us. Here is just a sample of the feedback from the women in the know.

“ 10000% better than always. Always makes me ill due to the fragrance and chemicals. Aunt Flow needs to be in all the bathrooms ASAP ”

“ Fantastic product! ”

“ Great machine ”

“ Nicer product, no waste and better with applicator ”

“ They are brilliant. So much better than the old ones - we need more ”

“ The product is pleasantly soft. No allergic reaction was observed, which was the case with Always products. I would be happy if this new product remained representative. Thank you ”

\*Feedback was gathered anonymously through a QR code on the machines.

In summary the pilot programme was a resounding success. As a result of the change, ABM forecasts an annual cost saving for the site of

**£9,046**

If the initiative is rolled out across the six pilot-client sites which ABM serves, there will be an annual cost saving of

**£58,779**



\* Supply to the European Union will require further consultation





ABM is one of the world's largest providers of integrated facility services. A driving force for a cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable world, ABM provides essential services that improve the spaces and places that matter most. From pavement to rooftop, ABM offers a comprehensive array of facility services that includes cleaning, engineering, parking, electrical & lighting, energy solutions, HVAC & mechanical, landscape & turf, and mission critical solutions. ABM delivers these custom facility solutions to properties across a wide range of industries – from commercial office buildings to schools, airports, hospitals, data centres, manufacturing plants and distribution centres, entertainment venues and more. Founded in 1909, ABM serves over 20,000 clients, with annualised revenue exceeding \$7 billion and more than 100,000 team members in 350+ offices throughout the United States, United Kingdom and other international locations.

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