

Introduction:

Thirteen out of every 10,000 women are homeless, accounting for 223,578 women experiencing homelessness.¹ While men are more likely to experience homelessness, women face unique health challenges of unsheltered living. Menstrual pads and tampons are expensive and are some of the least donated items for women experiencing homelessness in the United States despite them being some of the most highly requested items².

Activities:

Street Medicine Phoenix (SMP) with support from Women4Women Tempe developed a menstrual health team to distribute menstrual health supplies in Phoenix's largest homeless encampment. The menstrual health team walked around Phoenix's largest homeless encampment with a wagon distributing supplies and asking about greatest needs of patients encountered.

Supplies distributed:

- Tampons and pads
- Wound care kits
- Pregnancy tests
- Socks
- Condoms
- Underwear
- Hand sanitizer
- Monistat
- Aleve
- Protein powder, food items and water
- Cleanser and lotion
- Probiotics and Vitamin D



Outcomes:

Following the implementation of the menstrual health team, SMP has increased the distribution of pads and tampons by a factor of 8 since October 2022. This rate is somewhat skewed due to a less active street team during COVID. Patients were also asked about what their greatest needs were, and supplies were adjusted accordingly. For example, we identified that one of the most requested items was underwear. This information was forwarded to our community partners and now underwear is an important component of our menstrual health supplies.



Discussion:

Menstrual health supplies are often an unmet need for women experiencing homelessness across the United States. Street Medicine teams are one avenue of ensuring that menstruating people receive supplies at large. With providing a menstrual-health specific team, not only do women experiencing homelessness have an avenue to receive menstrual health specific supplies, but rapport is built, and female-specific needs can be addressed. In this case, the menstrual health team identified a strong need for underwear.

8x

More menstrual health supplies distributed after implementing a menstrual health team

2,023

Number of menstrual health supplies distributed since October 2022

Conclusion:

The development of SMP's menstrual health team has allowed SMP to better distribute donated supplies. Furthermore, by surveying women experiencing homelessness, SMP identified the items most needed by this population.

Recommendations:

Menstrual health supplies and underwear were identified as a high-need item for women experiencing homelessness in downtown Phoenix. Street teams worldwide can meet this need by working with community partners to provide these supplies to people experiencing homelessness.

References:

1. *State of Homelessness: 2021 Edition*. (2021, August 16). National Alliance to End Homelessness. Retrieved July 19, 2022, from <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-2021/>
2. I Support the Girls. I Support the Girls 2018 Impact Report. I Support the Girls; 2018. Available from: <https://isupportthegirls.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ISupportTheGirls-2018-Impact-Report.pdf>.
3. Gruer C, Hopper K, Smith RC, Kelly E, Maroko A, Sommer M. Seeking menstrual products: a qualitative exploration of the unmet menstrual needs of individuals experiencing homelessness in New York City. *Reprod Health*. 2021;18(1):77. Published 2021 Apr 13. doi:10.1186/s12978-021-01133-8

