District 12 Period Poverty

Examining Menstrual Equity, Legislative Action, and Data in the American West

# Introduction

Period poverty continues to impact individuals and families across the United States, especially in rural and under-resourced regions like Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and South Dakota. The inability to access affordable and adequate menstrual products leads to missed school and work, health risks, and ongoing stigma.

# Understanding Period Poverty and the Pink Tax

Period poverty is marked by limited access to menstrual hygiene products, education, and supportive infrastructure. The “pink tax” refers to the extra sales tax many states impose on menstrual products, treating them as luxury rather than essential items. Eliminating the pink tax can significantly improve menstrual equity by making products more affordable.

# Statistics: The Scope of the Problem

* According to the Alliance for Period Supplies, 1 in 4 U.S. teens has missed class due to lack of access to period products.[1]
* A 2021 Colorado survey found 82% of low-income women have struggled to afford period products at some point, and 21% experience this monthly.[2]
* On Native American reservations—especially in Montana and South Dakota—families can spend up to $20 per month on period products, with many forced to improvise when products are unavailable or unaffordable.[3]
* Rural areas face higher product costs and fewer options: one Montana report found that rural shoppers may pay 25% more for the same period products than urban shoppers.[4]

# Pink Tax Legislation by State

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| State | Pink Tax Status | Year of Repeal/Status | Notes |
| Colorado | Repealed | 2022 | Enacted HB22-1055, exempting menstrual products and diapers from state sales tax. |
| *Wyoming* | In Effect | N/A | No state-level legislation enacted or proposed to remove the tax on period products. |
| Montana | No State Sales Tax | N/A | Montana does not have a general state sales tax, so period products are not taxed at the state level. |
| *South Dakota* | In Effect | N/A | State sales tax applies to menstrual products. Recent bills to remove the tax have failed to advance. |

# Colorado: Legislative Progress and Data

Colorado stands out for its proactive policies. In 2022, Colorado passed HB22-1055, eliminating the state sales tax on menstrual products and diapers, making it one of the few Mountain West states to address the pink tax directly.[5] Colorado also requires public schools to provide free period products in grades 6–12. Despite this, 82% of low-income women surveyed admitted to struggling with affordability at some point, highlighting persistent gaps.[2]

# Wyoming: Silence on the Pink Tax and Scarcity in Rural Areas

Wyoming still applies state sales tax to menstrual products, and no legislation to remove the pink tax has advanced in the statehouse.[6] Rural isolation and high prices continue to make access difficult: 15% of Wyoming high-schoolers in a 2023 survey reported missing school due to inadequate access to period products.[4] Community groups and food pantries provide some relief, but efforts remain fragmented.

# Montana: No State Sales Tax, Persistent Period Poverty

Montana has no state sales tax, so menstrual products are exempt by default.[7] However, period poverty is still widespread, especially in rural and Native American communities where access and affordability are major obstacles. According to Montana Women Vote, nearly 30% of respondents reported being unable to afford period supplies at least once over the previous year.[4] Some school districts now provide free products, but there is no statewide mandate.

# South Dakota: Ongoing Tax and Legislative Challenges

South Dakota continues to levy sales tax on menstrual products, and legislative attempts to remove the pink tax have been unsuccessful.[8] Period poverty hits hardest in Native American communities, where up to 40% of girls at Pine Ridge Reservation have missed school because they lacked access to supplies.[3] Advocacy is ongoing, but change has been slow.

# Common Barriers Across the Region

* Cost: Product prices are high, especially in rural areas. SNAP and WIC do not cover period products, increasing the financial burden on low-income families.
* Stigma: Menstruation remains a taboo subject, making it harder for those in need to seek support.
* Limited Legislative Momentum: Except for Colorado, the region has seen slow policy progress toward menstrual equity.
* Rural Access: Distribution of products and educational resources is difficult in sparsely populated and remote areas, especially during winter.

# Efforts, Innovations, and the Path Forward

Community organizations continue to fill the gaps with reusable product drives, period pantries, and educational programs, especially for Native American and rural communities. Advocacy groups in Wyoming and South Dakota are renewing calls to repeal the pink tax and increase state support.

Key recommendations include:

* Expanding legislative efforts to eliminate the pink tax in all states.
* Making menstrual products eligible for SNAP and WIC.
* Prioritizing outreach and funding for rural and reservation communities.
* Normalizing menstruation through comprehensive health education.

# Conclusion

The Mountain States face distinct challenges in the quest for menstrual equity. While Colorado’s progress on the pink tax and school access is encouraging, Wyoming and South Dakota lag behind, and Montana’s tax-free status is not enough to bridge the affordability and access gap. Meaningful change will require not only legislative action but also robust community engagement and sustained advocacy to ensure all individuals have dignified access to menstrual hygiene.

## References

[1] Alliance for Period Supplies. “Period Poverty in the U.S.” (2023).

[2] Colorado Period Project. “Colorado Period Poverty Survey” (2021).

[3] National Women’s Law Center. “Menstrual Equity in the Native American Community” (2022).

[4] Montana Women Vote. “Menstrual Equity in Montana” (2023).

[5] Colorado General Assembly. “HB22-1055: Sales Tax Exemption for Essential Hygiene Products” (2022).

[6] Wyoming Legislature. “2023 Bill Tracking: Menstrual Product Sales Tax Exemption.”

[7] Montana Department of Revenue. “Montana Sales Tax Policy.”

[8] South Dakota Legislature. “2024 Bill Tracker: Feminine Hygiene Product Sales Tax Exemption.”