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Seeking Sustainable Solutions to Period Poverty Amongst Homeless Women in Camden County, NJ

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Seeking Sustainable Solutions to Period Poverty Amongst Homeless Women in Camden County, NJ

BACKGROUND

Health Careers Opportunity Program (HCOP) - National Ambassadors is an effort for underserved high school, undergraduate, and medical students to collaborate on a research-based community service project to equip future health professionals with tools to heal their communities.

The average woman spends up to 3500 days of their life menstruating. Menstrual health is therefore not just a fundamental human right, but a robust indicator of community well-being. Despite the biological inevitability of menstruation, barriers to practicing adequate menstrual hygiene, or “Period Poverty,” are far common and often ignored in public forums. Period products face a luxury goods sales tax in 35 states and cannot be purchased via social services programs such as Food Stamps or Medicaid. Most recent estimates suggest 66% of women from low-income households are unable to afford period products on a monthly basis. This lack of access is amplified in the homeless population.

While initiatives to eradicate period poverty exist, they are lacking. Some states have legislation which mandates period products be accessible without fee in public spaces such as schools, but this often goes unenforced. Social service agencies distribute donated menstrual hygiene kits when available, but this is not a sustainable solution. Further, Period Poverty is rarely discussed in conversations regarding equality, healthcare, and human rights.

Addressing Period Poverty requires understanding the specific barriers to why women within a particular community cannot practice adequate menstrual hygiene to inform sustainable solutions. We propose a service-based intervention targeting period poverty amongst homeless women in Camden County, NJ.

OBJECTIVES

1 - Design a sustainable service project to reduce Period Poverty

2 - Analyze intervention outcomes to inform ongoing service work, funding, advocacy, and research

PROPOSED INTERVENTION

1. ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS



2. INCREASE IMMEDIATE ACCESS

Create and distribute a list of where to access free menstrual hygiene products



3. ADVOCATE

Advocate for more effective legislation based on project outcomes

PROPOSED INTERVENTION

- DivaCup and CamCare conduct a pilot study on the sustainability of DivaCups as a longer-term alternative to traditional period products for homeless/underserved women.
- Conduct a drive with Rowan University School of Osteopathic Medicine and SimplyTheBasics to collect menstrual hygiene products and monetary donations for the Rowan Community Health Center.
- Compose a list of where to access free period products for distribution by local social service agencies
- Write to local lawmakers highlighting the impact of proposed interventions to support more effective and attentive legislation to combat Period Poverty.

CONCLUSION

- An integrated approach involving healthcare providers, community stakeholders, and the target population is essential to enacting sustainable solutions
- Research on Period Poverty is lacking
- Despite existing legislation, enforceable measures are needed to make it effective
- Period Poverty represents a broader issue of access to equal healthcare in general, but especially amongst underserved populations, such as homeless women
- HCOP National Ambassadors are an effective way to combine mentorship with providing future health professionals the training required to effect change in their communities

REFERENCES

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