

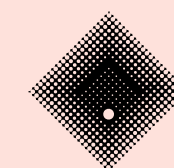


Bloody good idea: Free period products at sports and leisure facilities

Insights to help governments and sports drive change



share*the*dignity



**VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY**

MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

Contents

Moving Forward together	03
Why the need?	04
Objective	04
Research approach	05
Online survey	05
Respondent recruitment	05
Our respondents	06
Grouping	07
Key Findings	08
Members who have, or do not have, access to free period products	08
The impact of accessible period products	13

Governance	16
Non-members' preferences to access period products	17
Opportunities	18
Provide readily accessible period products	19
Build understanding	19
Good practice case studies	20
Council/Sport partnership	20
State sport/Sport facility partnership	21
References	22

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<https://www.sharethedignity.org.au/periods-and-sport-education>

Moving Forward together



Thank you to everyone who took part in this study. In 2024, our Bloody Big Survey revealed that 68% of respondents had missed sport due to their period, and we knew we had to dig deeper. The current study helps us understand the barriers and solutions. Providing period products in every sporting complex is a small cost for a huge return. We want to keep girls in sport, boost participation, and set them up for a brighter future. Menstrual equity is more than just provision of period products, we want to ensure no girl misses a day of sport, school, or work by ensuring access to period products, education around periods and by removing the shame and stigma. Together, we can ensure menstrual equity here in Australia.

Rochelle Courtenay

Share the Dignity Founder and Managing Director



Thank you to every person who completed our survey - your voices have been heard and are integral to this Guide. Findings reveal the majority of respondents skipped playing sports due to anxiety about their period or risk of leakage. They emphasised the importance of accessing period products at sports facilities, which then removed a barrier to play sport. Notably, among those who had access to free period products, no person took these to stockpile; instead, these products were used when periods arrived unexpectedly or when personal supplies were forgotten.

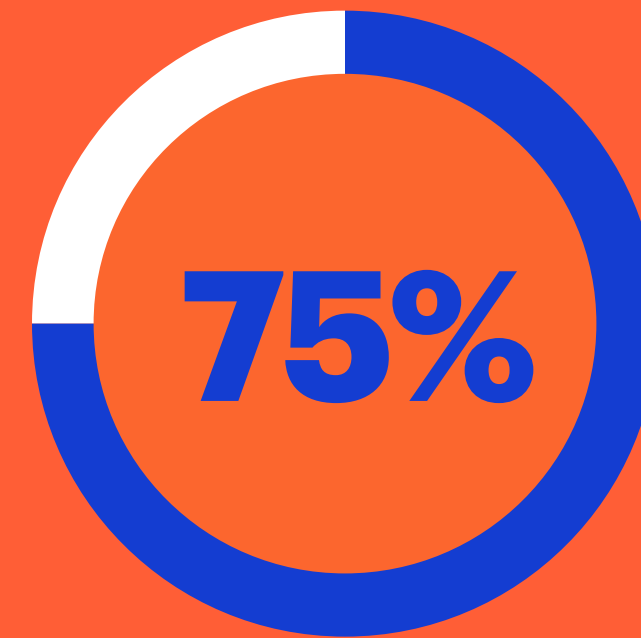
These insights provide clear opportunities for sports organisations and facilities to act, as demonstrated by two case studies in this Guide. Together, let us break down barriers for people who menstruate enabling them to play sports, and build inclusive environments that drive growth in membership.

Professor Clare Hanlon

Susan Alberti Women in Sport Chair, Victoria University



Why the need?



**of high school students
have skipped playing
sport because of their
period³**

Fear of leaking is the main reason why people who menstruate skip, stop, or avoid playing sport¹⁻².

If legislation exists to provide free period products and menstruation information in schools, universities and libraries⁴, why not in sports facilities? Free period products were provided by the New Zealand and Scottish governments for one-year in community sport clubs⁵⁻⁶.

What can government, sports, and commercial providers do to move from one-off trials to embed free period products at sports and leisure facilities permanently? Let us provide you with the evidence to help stimulate action.

Objective

To create an evidence-based Insight Guide that highlights why the need for free period products in sports and leisure facilities.

Research approach

For the purpose of this Guide, ‘sport’ is an umbrella term representing formal or informal exercise that contributes to physical fitness conducted at facilities e.g., sports grounds, leisure centres, gyms, and swimming pools.



Online survey

A cross-sectional national online survey was conducted (February - March 2025), with people aged 15 years and over, who menstruate.

The survey comprised a mixture of multiple-choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions designed to capture quantitative and qualitative data.



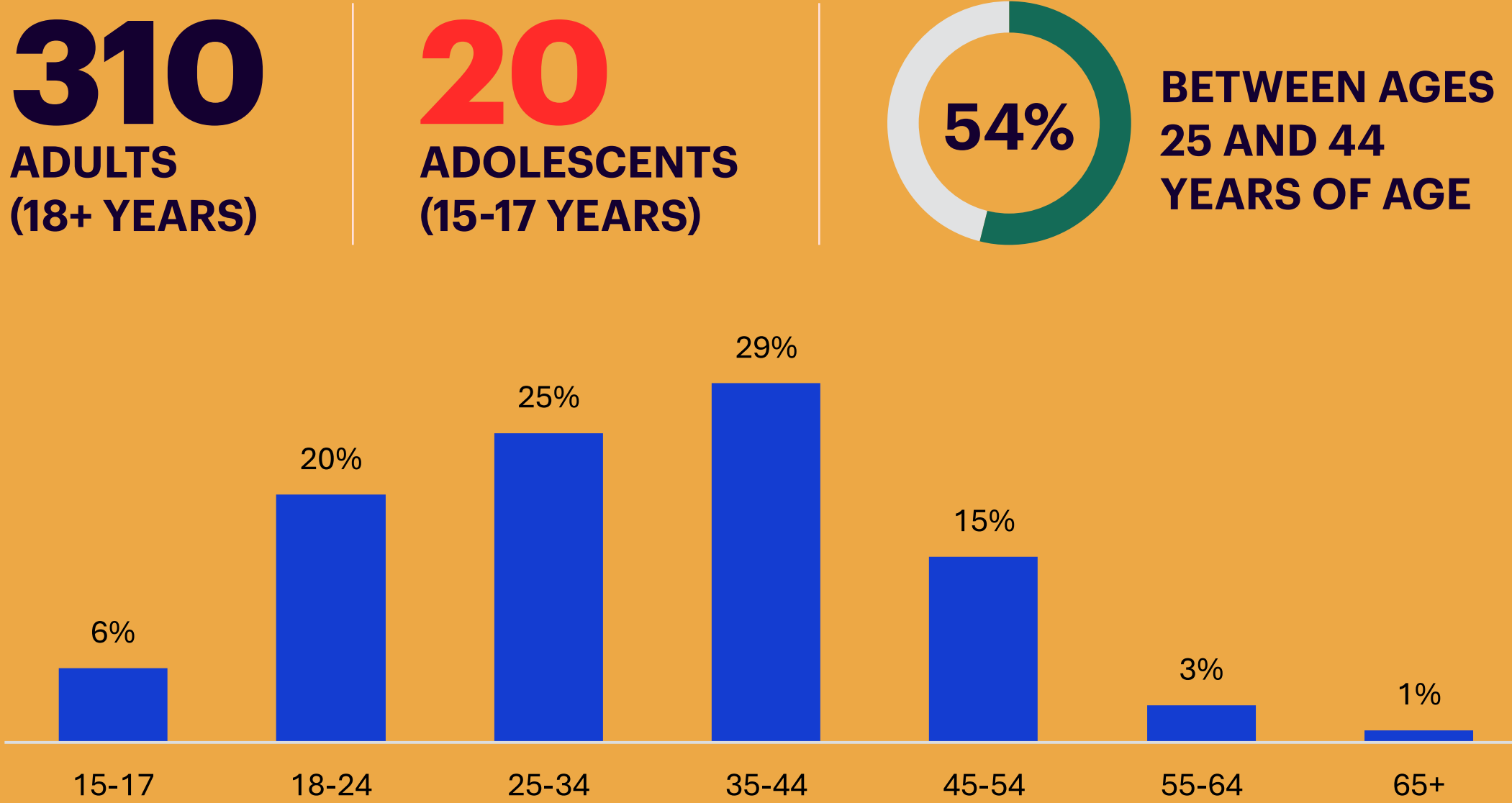
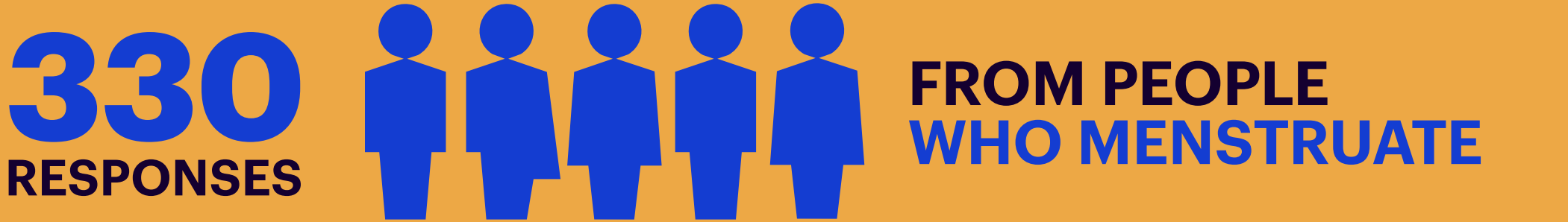
Respondent recruitment

Participants were recruited through open social media invitations from stakeholders, sports, governments, and individuals, internal and external to the sporting sector.

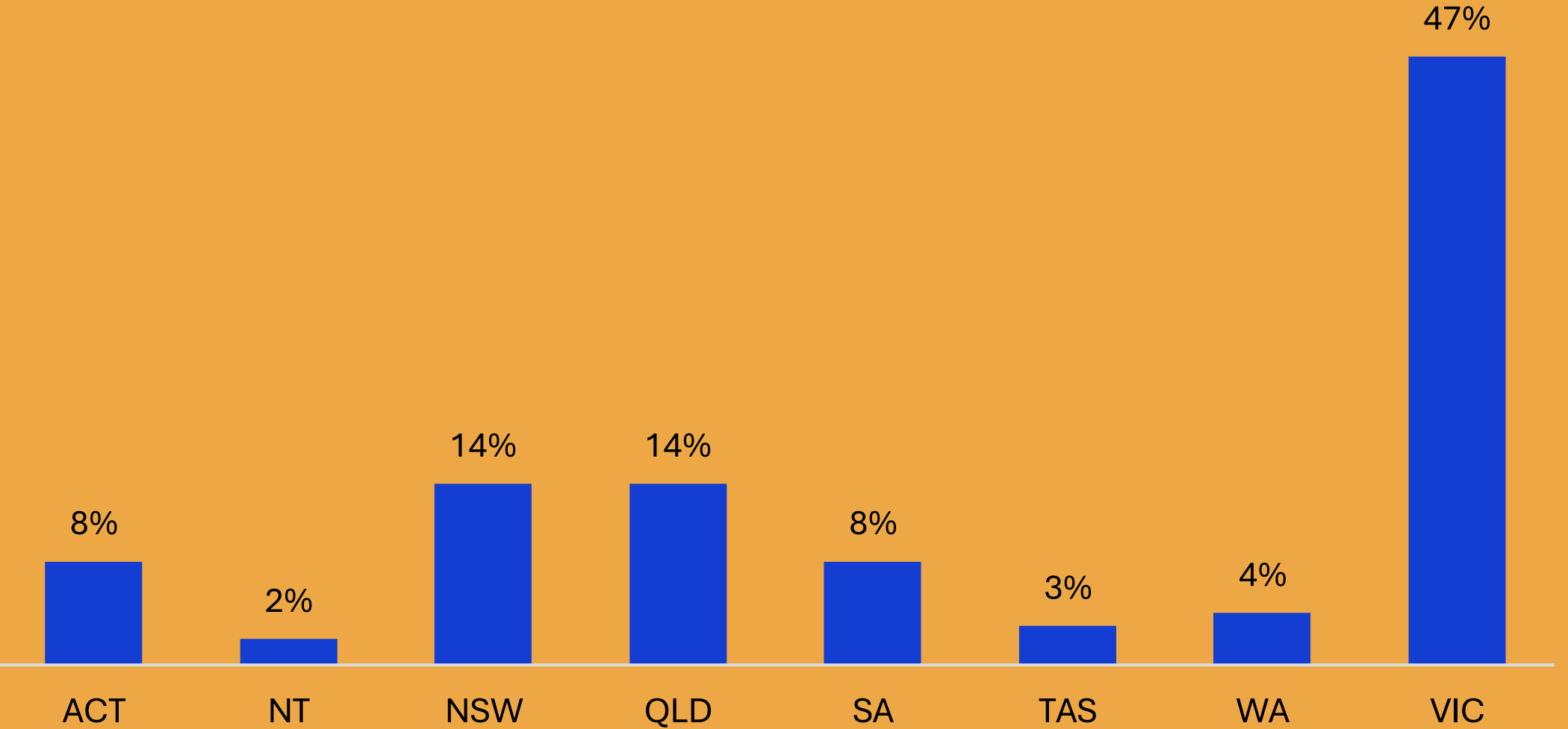
This strategy aimed to reach a diverse sample of individuals with varying experiences related to periods and sports participation.

Our respondents

Responses were gained from 330 people who menstruate, including 310 adults (18+ years) and 20 adolescents (15-17 years). Approximately half (54%) were between the ages of 25 and 44 years of age.



Respondents were disproportionately distributed across Australia. Approximately half (47%) lived in Victoria, followed by New South Wales (14%) and Queensland (14%), and the final quarter were represented by the remaining states and territories. Two-thirds (66%) lived in metropolitan areas, while the remaining respondents were located in rural (26%) and regional (8%) areas.



The vast majority (91%) of respondents identified ‘Australian’ as one of their ethnicities, specifically 2% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Followed by British (6%) and Italian (4%). Approximately one third of respondents (34%) had at least one of their parents born overseas.

Grouping

Respondents categorised themselves according to the following groups:



Group 1 (access)

Members of sports clubs/leisure facilities who **have access** to free period products (n = 30, 9%)



Group 2 (no access)

Members of sports clubs/leisure facilities who **do not have access** to free period products (n = 264, 80%)



Group 3 (non-member)

Non-members of sports clubs/leisure facilities and their period is a barrier to play sport (n = 36, 11%)

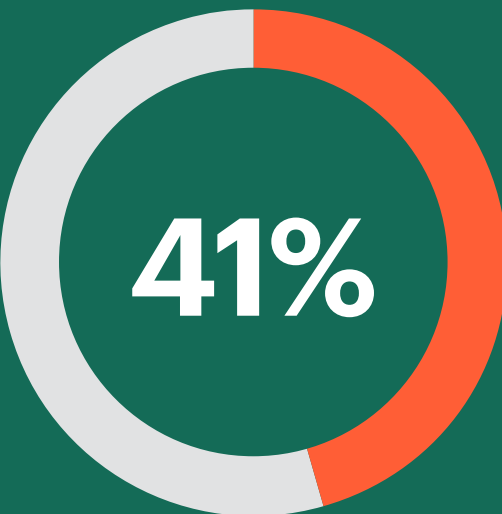
Findings primarily focus on the 294 responses from members (Groups 1 and 2), based on their experience of playing sport at facilities during their period. The final section of this Guide ‘Non-members’ preferences to access period products’, represents responses from Group 3, focused on their preferred user experience, if they were to play sport at a facility during their period.



Key Findings

Members who have, or do not have, access to free period products

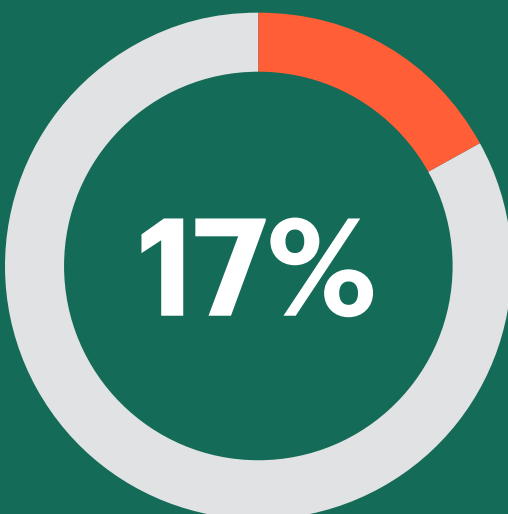
Primary type of facility where respondents played sport at were sports club or association facility (41%), gym/fitness club (30%), or a sports/leisure centre (17%).



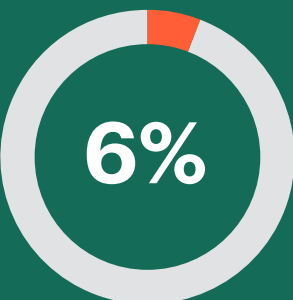
Sports club or association facility



Gym/Fitness club



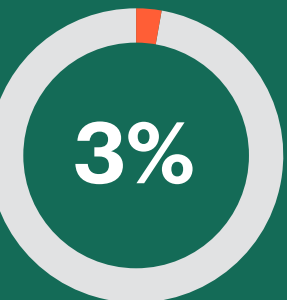
Sports/Leisure centre



Private or commercial premises

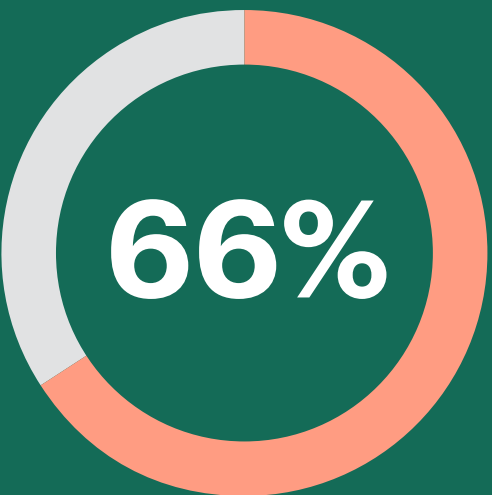
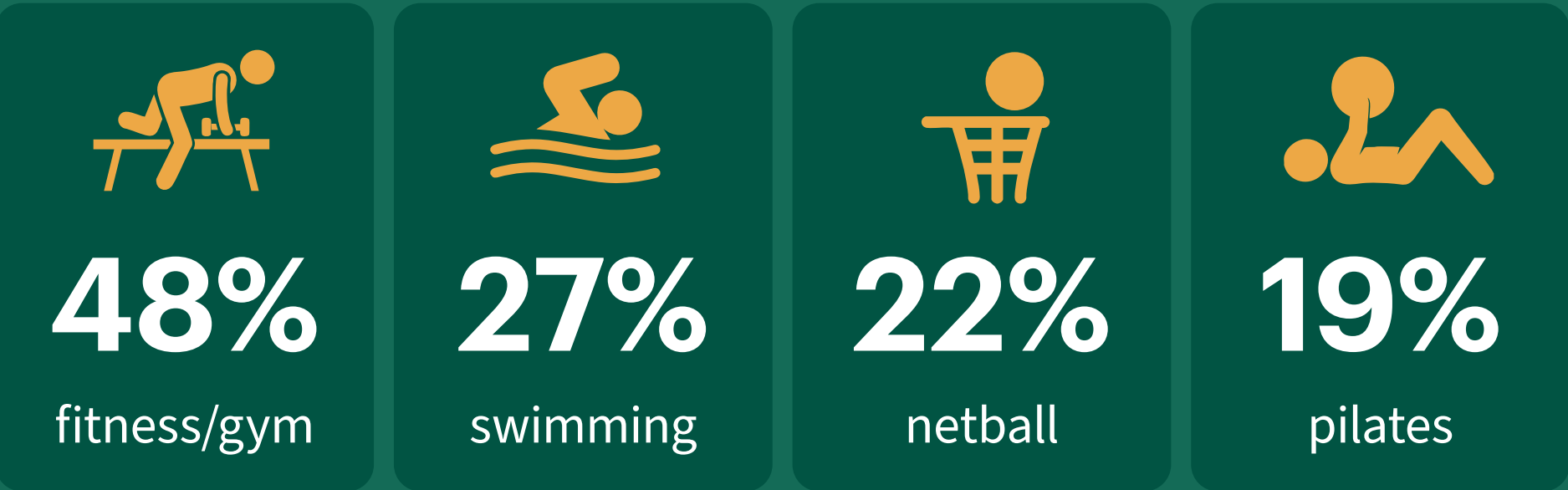


Free community facilities

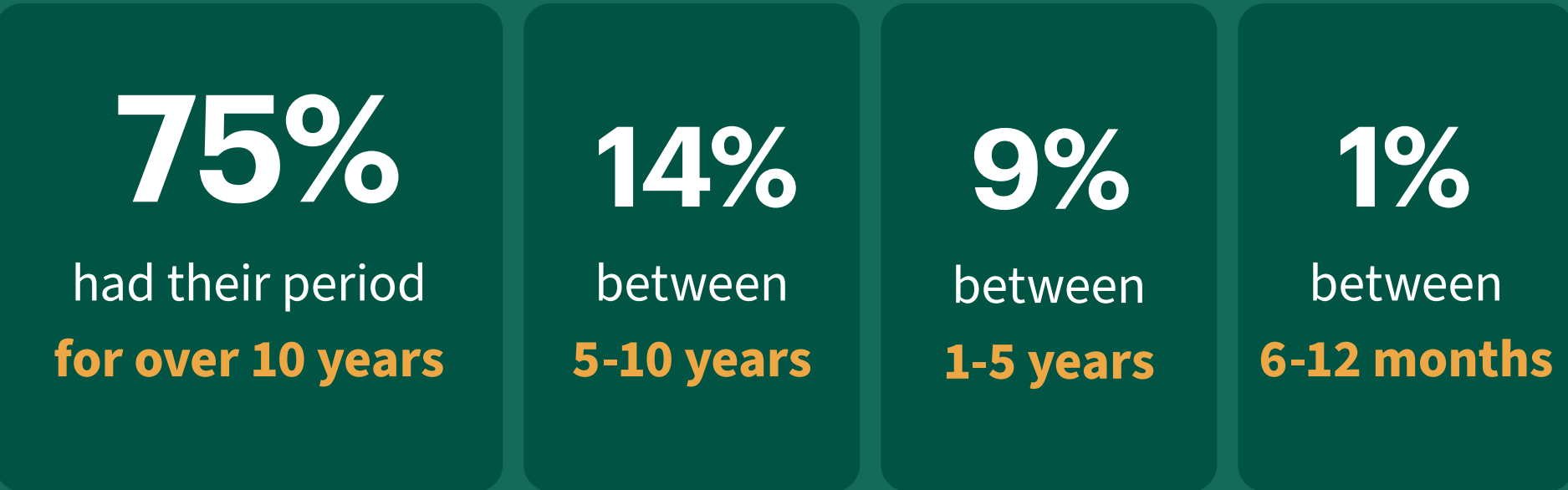


Recreation club or association facility

Primary sport activities represented were



PLAYED SPORT BETWEEN **ONE AND THREE TIMES** PER WEEK



Skipping sport



**SKIPPED PLAYING
SPORT BECAUSE
OF THEIR
PERIOD*1**

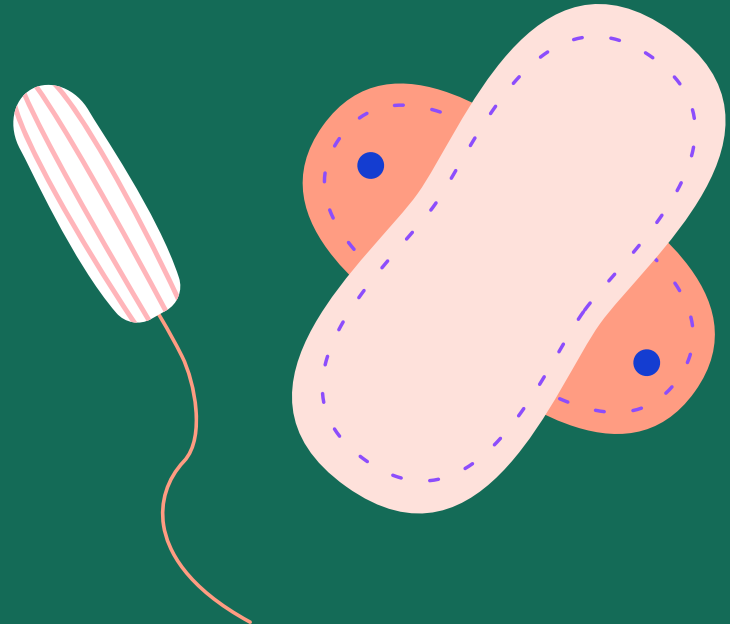
Of these people, 69% skipped playing sport at least 3 times per year.

Primary reasons for skipping sport because of their period included: concerns about leakage and embarrassment, product related issues, lack of understanding and support, pain and physical discomfort, and psychological/emotional factors.

- “ It doesn’t feel like there’s any support or acceptance in this sport, and while I still participate, I am afraid of an expected period in case of another leakage
- “ The bathroom facilities are horrible, a lot of the time there is no soap or period product disposal facilities so you can’t manage your period
- “ There was no support when I started menstruating, to understand how to use period products when playing sport. Getting used to it was difficult, especially with a heavier flow and playing on certain days but I’m fine with it now, it’s just annoying
- “ It came unexpectedly as I was playing. Disappointingly the Centre didn’t have anything to help me continue playing so I had to leave



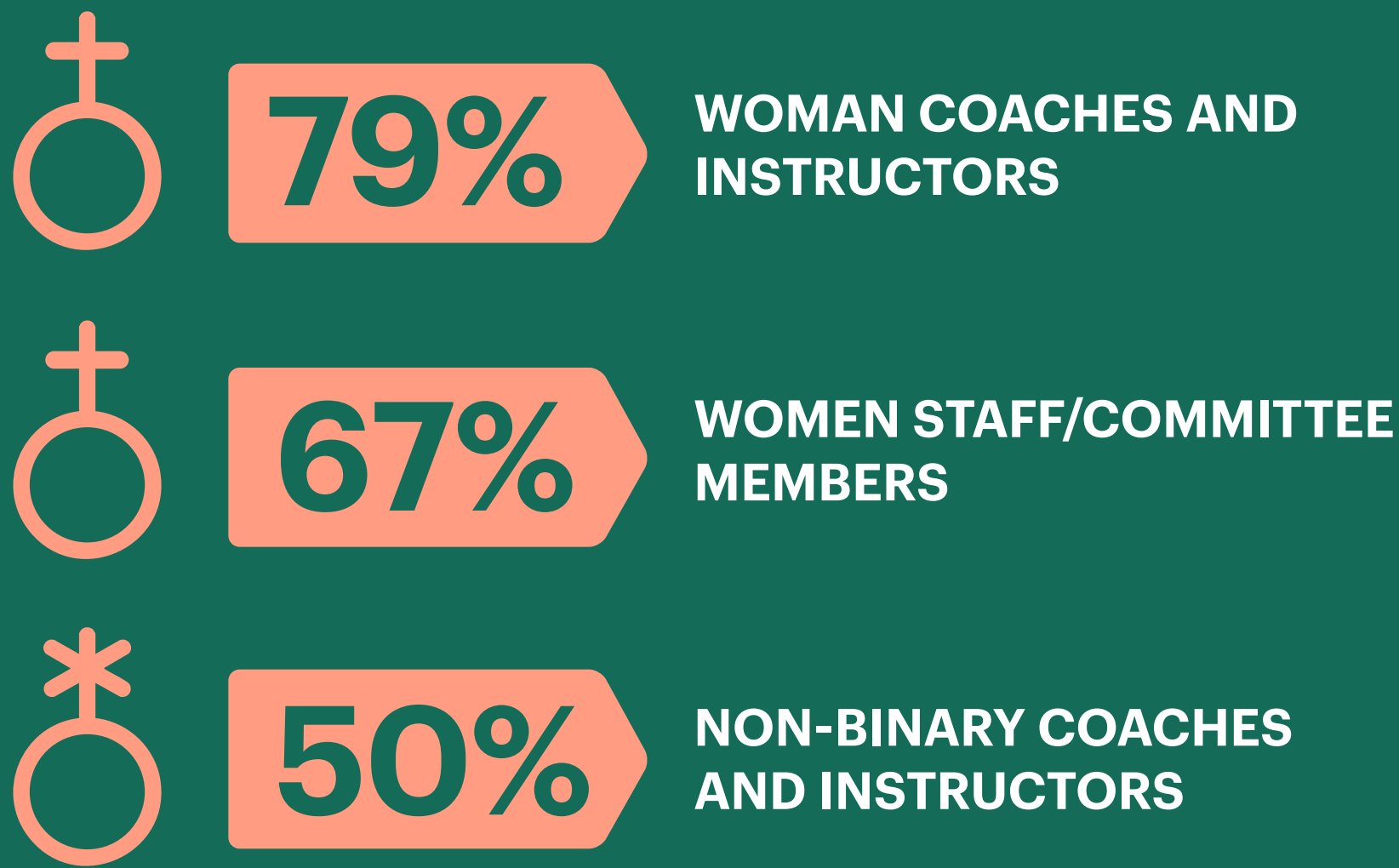
**ACKNOWLEDGED
DESIGNATED
DISPOSAL BINS
FOR USED PERIOD
PRODUCTS WERE
AVAILABLE IN
CHANGE ROOMS**



*This reflects findings from the Bloody Big Survey 2024 (<https://www.sharethedignity.org.au/end-period-poverty/bloody-big-survey-2024>)

Communication on managing period-related needs

Respondents appreciated communicating about their period-related needs to staff. They felt most comfortable talking with:



Other noted sources included: male coaches and instructors, friends/teammates, and staff with the designated role related to periods



Of the 30% who needed to talk about their period with staff at their club.

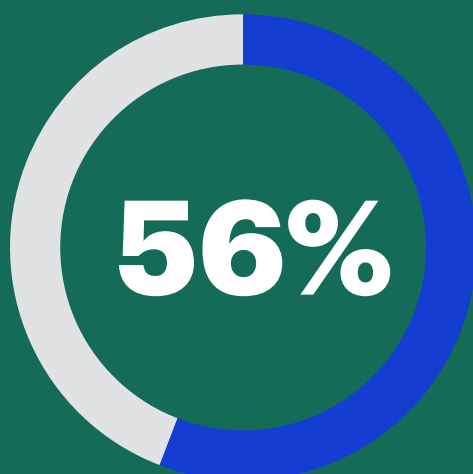


This indicates a need to normalise conversation on managing periods when playing sport.



Only 23% have received education or information about how to manage their period while playing sport.

Most common sources were



would like to receive information on how to manage their period while playing sport.

Period anxiety



were anxious about having their period while playing sport



WORRY ABOUT LEAKING

Of those, 79% believed it was difficult to perform at their best when playing sport

Respondents felt less confident managing their period in a sports facility than they did at school/workplace or at home.

Reasons why respondents did not feel confident managing a period at their sports facility include: **poor conditions, inaccessible products, and gender and safety concerns.**

“ Bathroom facilities are segregated into binary genders, and I would fear for my safety if people at my gym realised I menstruate

Reasons why respondents felt confident managing their period at their sports facility included: **product availability, a supportive and understanding environment, personal experience, and being prepared and planning ahead.**

“ They supply period products in the bathrooms and have bins to dispose of used products. Also, everyone is very understanding and open about periods

“ Over the years I have learnt what works for me to manage my period and prevent future leaking. Items like period underwear and menstrual cups have been an absolute game changer for me and now allow me to continue participating in sport

“ I bring everything I need everywhere, so that I’m never caught out e.g., I have pads, tampons etc in every bag and emergencies in my car so I never get caught out



Product usage

Most commonly used period products were:



**TYPICALLY CHANGED
THEIR PERIOD PRODUCT
WHILE AT A SPORTS
FACILITY**

Of those, 76% usually changed their period product once during a visit

The importance of accessible period products



believed it is ‘very to extremely important’ to access period products at sports facilities

Notably, respondents who had access to period products at sports facilities, placed slightly more ‘extreme’ importance on the need to have accessible period products at sports facilities than those who did not have access. This suggests, the significance of providing free period products at sports facilities is fully recognised when these products are readily accessible.



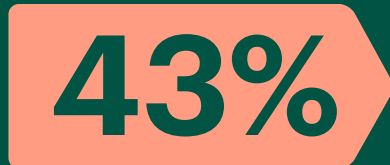
The impact of accessible period products

Group 1 respondents provided information on the impact of accessible period products at their sports facilities.

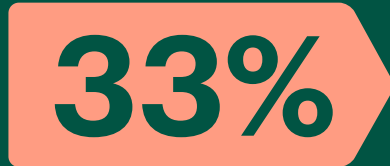


**HAD ACCESSED
FREE PERIOD
PRODUCTS**

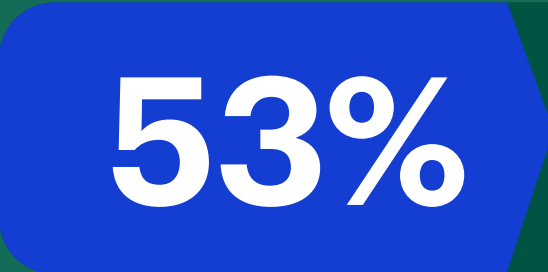
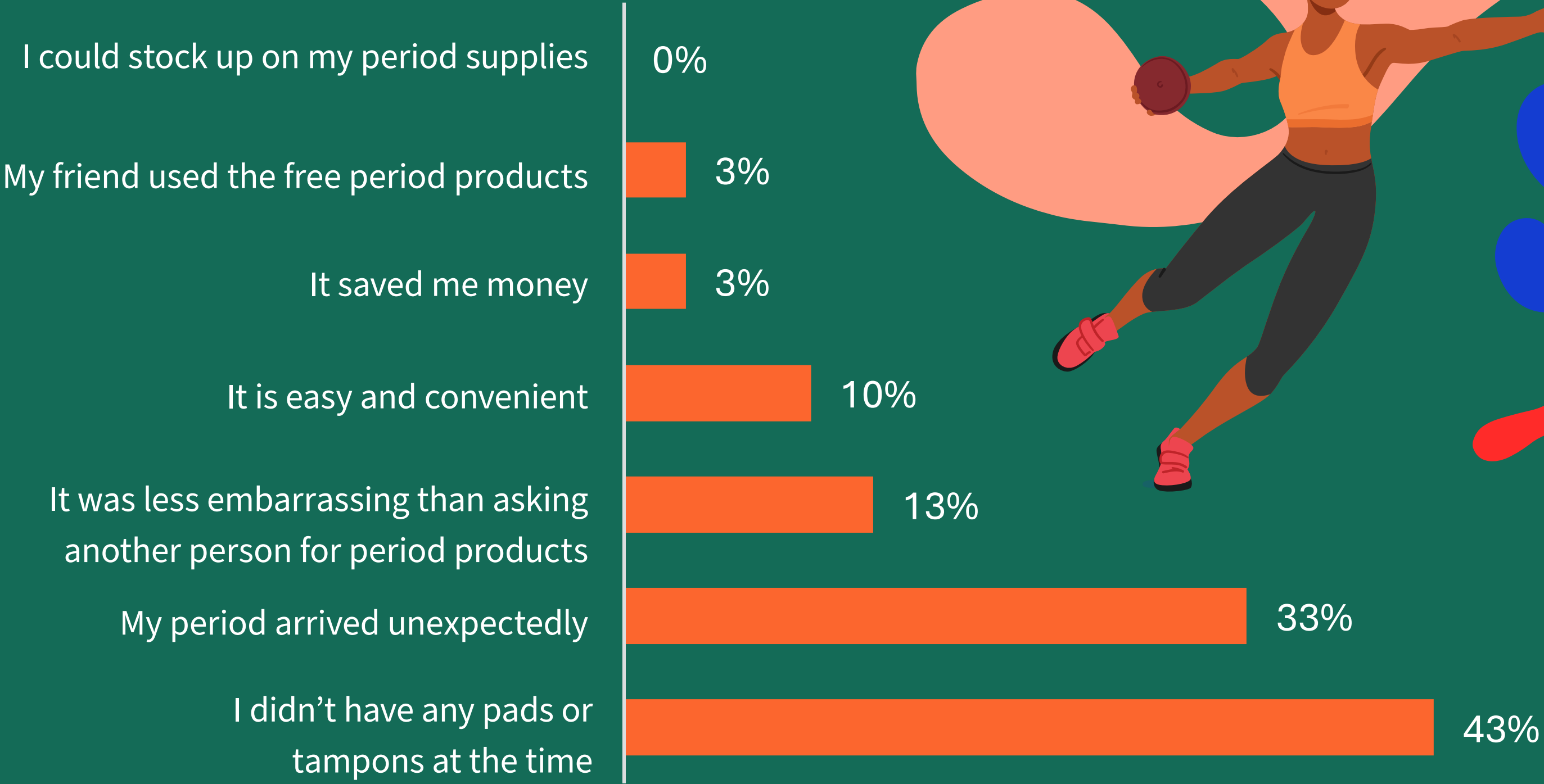
Of those, 43% took period products because they did not have any pads or tampons at the time, 33% because their period arrived unexpectedly. No person took period products to stock up on personal supplies. These findings emphasise that free period products help people who menstruate in emergency situations.



**DID NOT HAVE ANY PADS
OR TAMPONS AT THE TIME**



**PERIOD ARRIVED
UNEXPECTEDLY**



believed access to period products removed a barrier to play sport

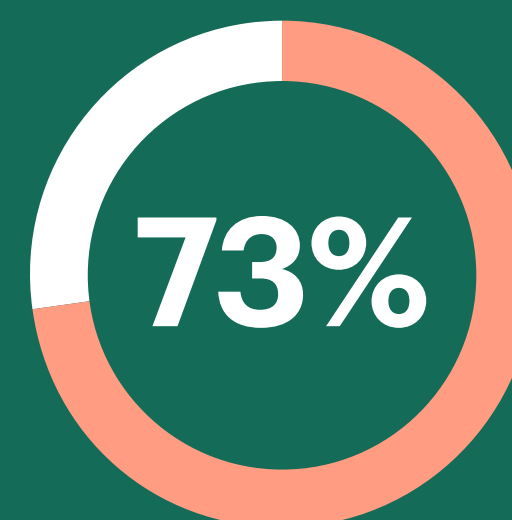
Positive impacts to accessing free period products included: relief from unpreparedness, reduced anxiety, convenience, community normalisation, and community equity.

- “ *It means I will never be in a position of being ‘caught out’ if I get my period unexpectedly*
- “ *It removes anxiety around getting my period during sport. If I get it, there are products available, and it doesn’t have to be a big deal*
- “ *Helps normalise it for everyone that sometimes someone needs a pad or a tampon*
- “ *I am fortunate to be able to afford products, but others have said they appreciate having the free products or feel better knowing they’re available if needed*





Period product distribution at sports facilities



were satisfied with how period products were distributed noting they were easy and convenient to access, placed discreetly, and included a variety of products.

“ They are stored in the bathroom so there is privacy if you need them

Typically, the types of products available included:



46% disposable pads



43% tampons

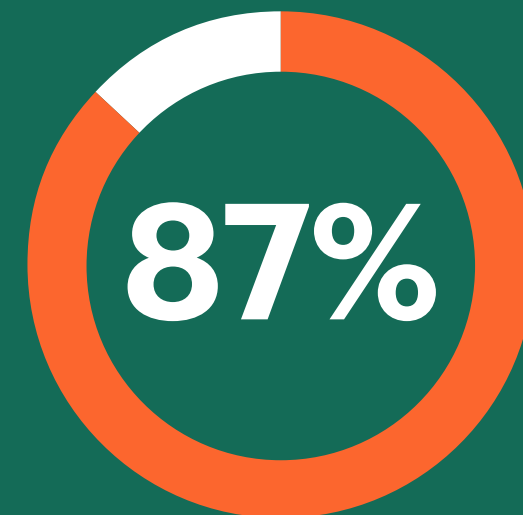


Reasons for dissatisfaction included:

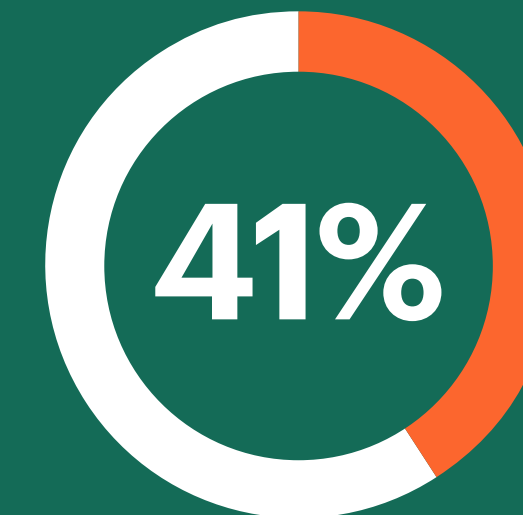
how period products were distributed; lack of products, variety, and visibility; and the need for improved



Governance



agreed that sports facility policies need to recognise menstrual health as a fundamental right, where free period products are provided



believed that sports facilities need to improve their bathrooms to support people who menstruate

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS INCLUDE:

- Focus on the availability of disposal bins and menstrual products
 - “ Bins in EVERY toilet. Have an emergency stash of period products
- Clean, well-maintained facilities to ensure dignity and comfort
- Accessible facilities that provide discreet and private spaces, regardless of gender identity or physical ability
 - “ Disposal units in every cubicle, including the men’s for transgender men who may menstruate



Non-members' preferences to access period products

78%

commonly used disposable pads

Other commonly used period products included:

56%

tampons

39%

period undies

53%

believed access to period products would increase their confidence to play sport

47%

believed access to period products would increase their comfort to play sport

39%

believed that access to period products would encourage them to play sport

This indicates free period products at sport facilities could be a useful promotional strategy to attract new members.



Opportunities

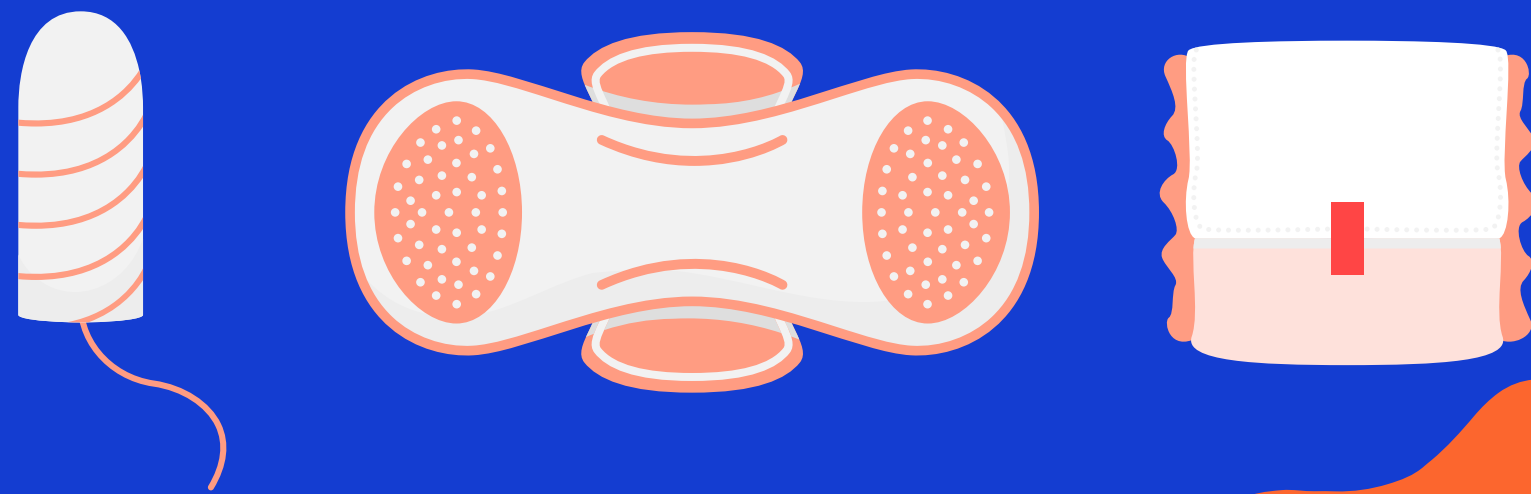
Free period products play a key role in making people who menstruate feel confident managing their period at sports facilities, and removes the fear of leakage and embarrassment when playing sport. A supportive environment with understanding staff, who educate members and normalise conversation about playing sport during periods, is vital.

Evidence from this research provides opportunities for governments, sports, and commercial providers to break down barriers for people when playing sport during their period.



Provide readily accessible period products

- Mandate period product packs in First Aid kits at sports facilities
- Provide period product packs to coaches for their Kit bags
- Collaborate with Council, a dispenser supplier, and clubs to provide free period products in sport facility bathrooms, including unisex bathrooms
- Collaborate with Council and a group of clubs located at various facilities in the area, to potentially gain a discount on installation and the supply of period products
- Regularly monitor baskets or dispensers to ensure readily accessible period products



Build understanding

- As a reference point for local clubs, ask national or state organisations to provide information on their websites on managing periods when playing sport (e.g., [Supporting athletes experiencing menstruation - Australian Sports Commission](#); [Managing your menstrual cycle - Swimming Australia](#); [Menstrual cycle - England Golf](#))
- Access the [Share the Dignity, Education Hub](#)
- Promote the availability of free period products to members
- In recruitment material for new members, when recognising the benefits of joining, include readily accessibility period products
- Acknowledge in the respective sports organisation/ facility policy or regulation, menstrual health as a fundamental right where free period products and disposable bins are provided

Good practice case studies



Council/Sport partnership

Moonee Valley Council, Essendon Little Athletics Club, and Essendon Athletics Club

Process:

Club Presidents met with Council to discuss the need for free period products at their sports pavilion. Council agreed to provide supplier quotes and pay for the dispensing machine installation, noting the machine itself was free, both clubs agreed to cover the cost of refilling the machine. Contract formed between clubs and the supplier.



Outcome:

A wall mounted dispensing machine installed in the pavilion changing room. The cost of refilling the machine, weekly with tampons and pads, is based on the approximate number of girls and women using the changing room, the dispenser size, and the top-up frequency. In this case, the approximate cost of annually refilling the machine is \$900 (ex GST).



State sport/Sport facility partnership

Swimming Victoria and the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre (MSAC)

Process:

The Swimming Victoria Event Manager was approached by a supplier company on accessibility of period products. The Manager then met with their event facility (MSAC), to discuss the need for free period products in the indoor and outdoor changerooms during Swimming Victoria events. MSAC agreed to install a dispensing machine.

Outcome:

A dispensing machine installed in the indoor and outdoor women's pool deck changerooms. The cost of refilling the machine weekly, with tampons and pads, is based on the approximate number of girls and women using the changing room. Swimming Victoria covered the cost of installation, servicing and filling the unit before events, at an annual cost of \$6,715 (ex GST).





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