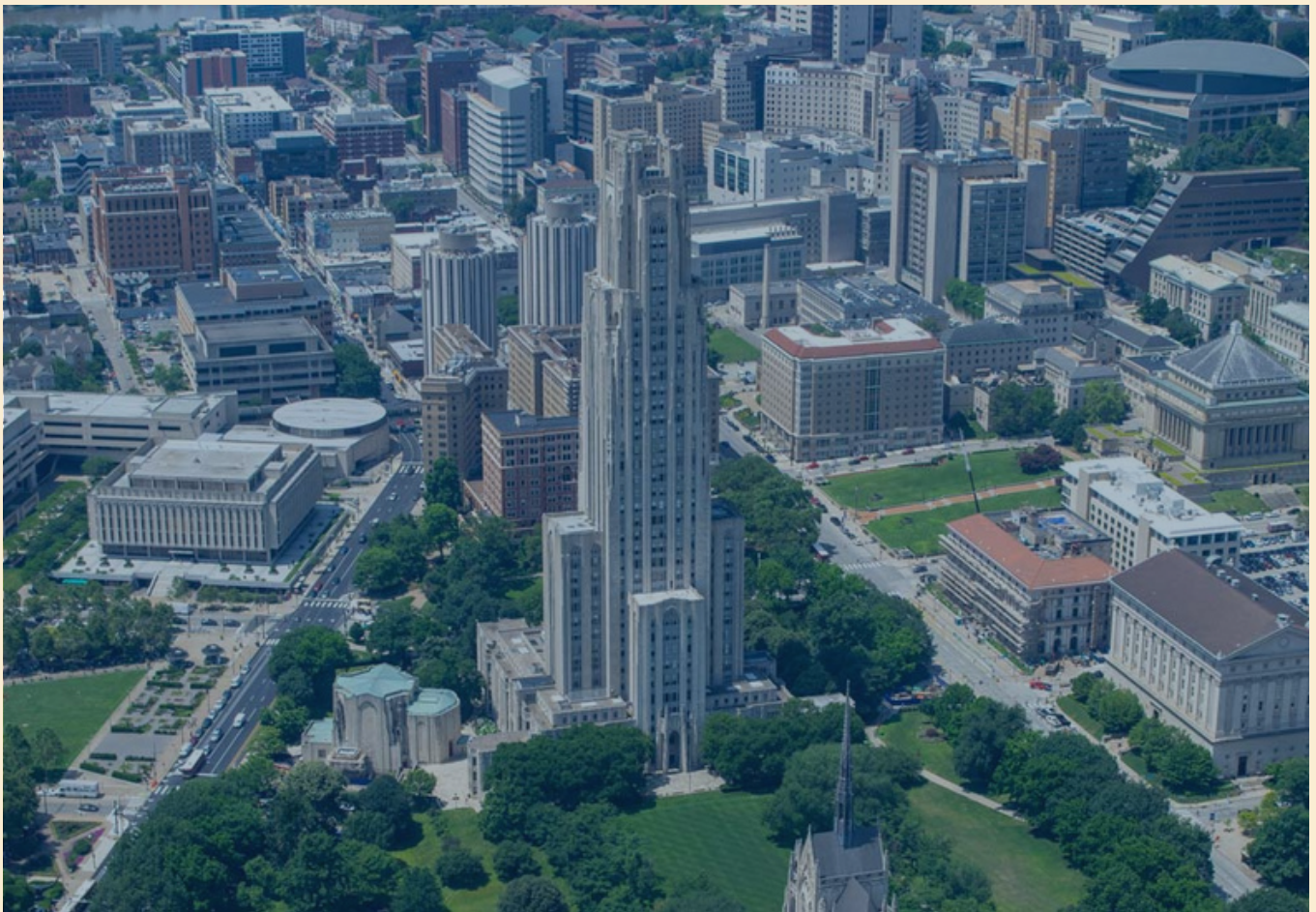

How Pitt Can Support Post-Roe Reproductive Health



Written and Researched by Kate Madden

Table of Contents

2	Introduction
3	Reproductive Health in College
5	Abortion Access in PA
7	Pitt's Reproductive Healthcare
10	Other Universities' RH
12	Future Steps
13	Conclusion
14	References

Introduction

Access to proper reproductive healthcare is essential for college students to succeed in all aspects of their lives. While the term “reproductive healthcare” covers a broad range of topics, according to the [World Health Organization](#), it refers to “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes.” Reproductive healthcare plays a crucial role in allowing individuals to make informed decisions about their bodies and their futures.

For college students, access to adequate reproductive health services is essential for a fulfilling educational experience and the ability to make autonomous choices about their lives. The department of Student Health Services (SHS) at the University of Pittsburgh has a responsibility to provide a comprehensive range of reproductive healthcare services to its students. This includes access to both contraception and emergency contraception, menstrual supplies, and abortion services, as well as providing accurate medical information. By ensuring that students have access to these essential services, the SHS can help support students' overall health and well-being and ensure that they are able to fully commit to their academic pursuits.

RH in College

Abortion access is imperative for college students, as unwanted pregnancies often hinder educational and career opportunities. A study conducted by the medical journal *Women's Health Issues* analyzed a group of women who sought abortions over the course of a few years, some of whom were granted abortions while others were not. The study found that both groups graduated at the same rate, but the group of women who gave birth completed postsecondary education at lower levels (27%) than those who had abortions (71%). Access to abortions allowed these women to complete higher levels of education which typically results in higher-paying jobs.

For young and impressionable college students experiencing an unwanted pregnancy, crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs) are dangerous. According to the *AMA Journal of Ethics*, CPCs are deceptive organizations that pose as authentic health clinics. These establishments target people with unplanned pregnancies to talk them out of getting an abortion. Typically, CPCs are founded on religious beliefs that are prioritized over the welfare of the people that pursue help from these centers. College students are especially vulnerable to these types of institutions. In fact, a study from 2017 found that crisis pregnancy centers are disproportionately grouped around college campuses. CPCs recognize college students as a vulnerable group and target them accordingly.

In addition to abortion access, menstrual equity is another pressing reproductive

issue that impacts college students. Many states still tax menstrual products as luxury items. According to the Alliance for Period Supplies, [Pennsylvania](#) has not taxed menstrual products since the early 1990s, as they are classified as “paper goods”. Yet, the cost of these products still imposes a burden upon menstruators, particularly college students. Even if students can comfortably afford menstrual products, there is often a severe lack of products. The information in the following figure was provided by a [study](#) commissioned by Thinx & PERIOD that surveyed students.

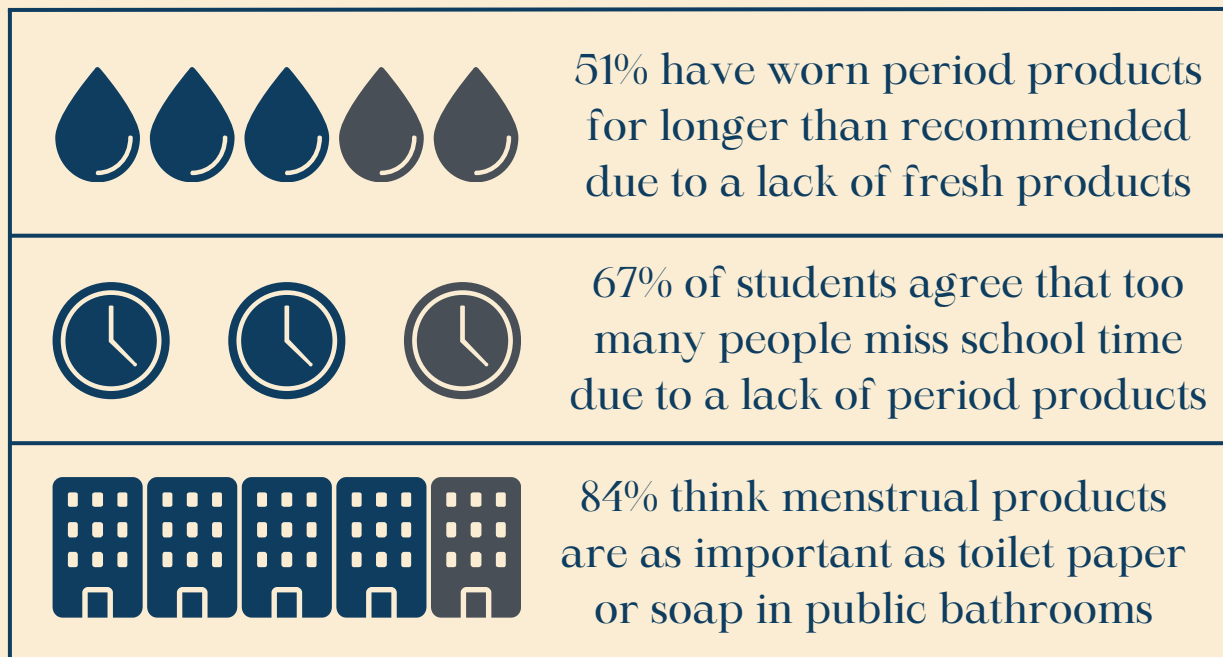


Figure 1. State of The Period 2021, designed using Canva

Students are disadvantaged by not having access to products that they need just as much as other available products in bathrooms, like paper towels and toilet paper. The result of lacking products increases the severity of the issue. Students at Pitt, or any other university, should not have to disrupt their education by worrying and stressing over accessible menstrual products.

Abortion Access in PA

In 1973, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) ruled on a case that would ultimately define abortion rights for the next 50 years, Roe v. Wade. An anonymous woman filed a lawsuit against a Texas district attorney regarding a law that prohibited abortion except in instances where the mother's life is in danger. She claimed this law violated her right to privacy that is guaranteed by multiple amendments of the Bill of Rights. Ultimately, SCOTUS exercised their right of judicial review to set the precedent that the right to personal privacy includes medical decisions and procedures, such as abortions.

Years later, SCOTUS decisions further refined abortion access in the state of Pennsylvania specifically. In the late 1980s, the state legislature passed new abortion laws requiring parental consent for minors, spousal notification and 24-hour waiting period before the procedure. Many abortion clinics and providers fought these provisions, and Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania eventually brought a lawsuit against Governor Casey regarding these stipulations. The Supreme Court's ruling upheld the majority of the laws, only striking down the spousal consent condition. Even though this ruling restricted abortion access in Pennsylvania, it also reinforced the ruling of Roe v. Wade, that abortion is protected.

After nearly 50 years of the right to privacy protecting abortion, the conservative Roberts Court broke precedent and ruled that abortion is not a

Constitutional right. In the case of Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, the sole certified abortion clinic of the state of Mississippi challenged a law that banned all abortions past 15 weeks. Planned Parenthood Organizing and Policy Intern Anushay says that upon hearing this case would go to the Supreme Court in December 2021, "almost everybody who worked in this field was 99.9% sure that Roe v. Wade was going to be overturned." Ultimately, the Roberts court overruled the two previously mentioned cases on the grounds that abortion is unmentioned in the Constitution and is not a necessary element of "ordered liberty."

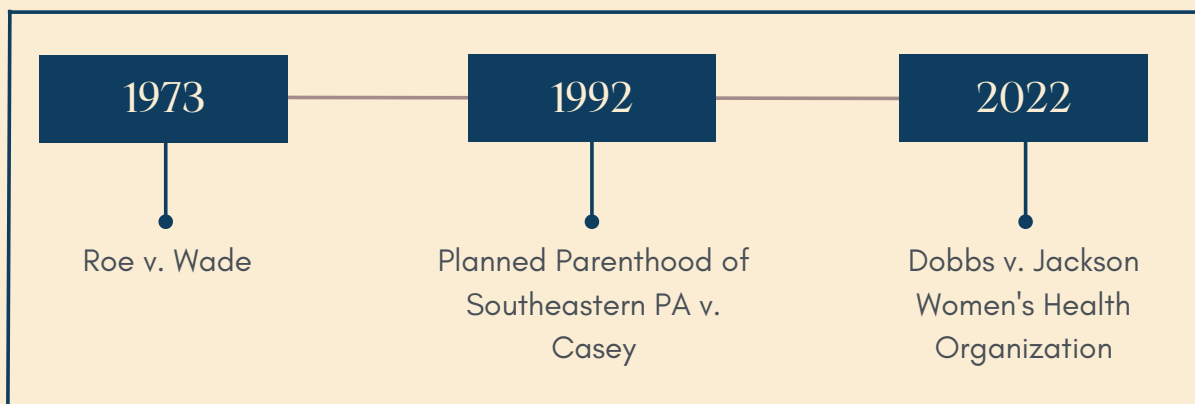


Figure 2. Timeline of Abortion Cases in PA, designed using Canva

The Supreme Court's decision that the the Constitution no longer protects abortion does not ban the procedure, but leaves the decision up to the individual states. The election of Governor Josh Shapiro during the midterm elections last November secured the right to abortion in Pennsylvania for a couple more years.

RH at Pitt

Similar to many other universities, SHS provides many reproductive health services. In terms of gynecological health specifically, SHS lists the following services on their website:

- Routine gynecologic exams
- Screening for cervical cancer
- Screening (e.g. sexually transmitted diseases, breast cancer, intimate partner violence)
- Pregnancy testing, counseling, and referral
- Evaluation and management of thyroid disease(s)
- Evaluation and management of breast complaints, including nipple discharge and breast lumps
- Preventive care, including counseling on bone health, administration of HPV Vaccine
- Evaluation and management of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)
- Consultation on contraceptive issues
- Evaluation and treatment of common gynecological complaints, including genital skin lesions, including ulcers and bumps
- Sexual assault evaluation, management, and referral
- Counseling and prescribing emergency contraception

Figure 3. Gynecological Care, designed using Canva

On top of these medical services, SHS provides students with contraceptive counseling and prescribing of both non-hormonal and hormonal methods, including IUD insertions, birth control pills, and contraceptive patches. Levonorgestrel, also known as the morning-after pill or Plan B, is available at the University Pharmacy for \$15. In addition to counseling and prescribing these methods of contraception, the Student Health Center provides students with free condoms. While the SHS does not provide any sort of abortion services like the abortion pill, they refer students to local reproductive health providers and list places to purchase emergency contraception (EC), as well as pregnancy and abortion hotlines under the [Reproductive Health FAQs](#).

In addition to listing medical services, SHS recounts a group of Pitt students from the Pitt Graduate School of Public Health identifying the lack of [menstrual products](#) in the dispensers on campus in 2019. They started a chapter Period the Menstrual Movement. One of their first projects was to fill said dispensers on campus, with the support of student organizations such as the Student Government Board, the Student Office of Sustainability, Pitt Planned Parenthood and TreasurHER. Hearing the cries of the students, Pitt updated the feminine hygiene dispensers in 23 women's restrooms across campus and planned to stock them regularly.

Although menstrual equity issues pose a short-term threat to students, crisis pregnancy centers (CPC) are a real long-term danger to Pitt students. According to the Crisis Pregnancy Center map, there are 8 CPCs in Pittsburgh, meaning that CPCs outnumber genuine abortion clinics 4:1. One CPC, Women's

Choice Network, is more dangerous to Pitt students than any other, as it is located in Oakland less than a mile from the heart of campus. The streets surrounding Pitt are littered with signs and posters instructing students with unintended pregnancies to contact them. Unsuspecting students will blindly believe any resource thrown at them during such a frightening time. Chaudhry recalls that one of her friends thought she may be pregnant and accidentally ended up at a crisis pregnancy center. They told her she would have a miscarriage so there was no need for an abortion, which was based on no medical grounds whatsoever. Organizations like CPCs will try to persuade people out of getting abortions by any means necessary, and Pitt does not warn its students of the threats they pose. There is no information relating to CPCs on the Student Health Services website, nothing under the Reproductive Health FAQ or the Gynecological Care tabs.

If Pitt's lack of education is not bad enough, in past years, Women's Choice Network has tabled at Pitt's Healthy U fair. This event is intended to promote proper health practices and spread correct health information for students, but instead an organization that wishes to deceive students infiltrated the legitimate groups.

This academic year, Women's Choice Network did not participate in the health fair in order to make room for other organizations, Public Source reports. In addition to tabling at the student health fair, Pitt's Choose Life club frequently partners with CPCs, further spreading misinformation to the student body.

RH at Other Universities

Other universities support students' reproductive health with more comprehensive policies and practices. [The George Washington University](#) invested in a vending machine with morning-after pills for \$25, making them both accessible and affordable to students. Boston University installed an emergency contraception machine as well, only costing students \$7.25. According to [Planned Parenthood](#), when taken within the 3 days following unprotected sex, morning-after pills can reduce the probability of getting pregnant by 75-89%. Emergency contraception is not the same as an abortion pill; it is a preventative measure that stops a pregnancy from happening. The availability of emergency contraception is vital for college students, as it is much simpler and more cost-effective than an abortion.

Some universities are taking access to reproductive health pills a step further. In 2019, the state of California passed a [law](#) requiring that all public universities provide students with abortion pills at campus medical centers. Planned Parenthood affirms that abortion pills differ from morning-after pills because they terminate pregnancies rather than stopping them from developing. There are two pills that make up medical abortions: mifepristone and misoprostol. Some people prefer medical abortions to surgical abortions because they do not require a medical procedure. Surgical abortions can seem daunting to college students, and medical abortions offer a less intimidating and more private alternative.

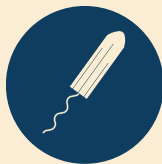
In regards to feminine hygiene products, other universities have more expansive programs than Pitt. According to the [University Record](#), the University of Michigan offers free menstrual products in hundreds of restrooms across their campus, compared to Pitt's 23 restrooms with functioning and free product dispensers. Before they initiated such a large program, they first launched a test program in 100 on-campus restrooms. Michigan has about 2.5 times as many students as Pitt, meaning their test-program to student ratio is higher than the full extent of Pitt's current program. Michigan's program not only supplies women's restrooms, but also men's and gender neutral restrooms as well.

Future Steps



1 / Warn students against CPCs

These dangerous organizations endanger the reproductive health of Pitt students. The university needs to educate students on the dangers of such organizations, through information on the Student Health Services website, as well as university-sponsored flyers around campus to combat the signage from CPCs and show accountability.



2 / Menstrual Product Accessibility

While there are 23 functioning dispensers across Pitt's campus, they are not always stocked and readily available. Pitt's facilities management must stock these dispensers more frequently, possibly introducing a way for students to alert them when the dispensers are empty.

Additionally, these dispensers are only available in a small fraction of on-campus women's restrooms. Many on-campus buildings do not have a single bathroom with free feminine hygiene products, and the menstrual equity project has not expanded to men's restrooms. People that use women's restrooms are not the only ones that menstruate, and the campus bathrooms must reflect this population as well.



3 / EC Vending Machine

Many universities, including others in [Pennsylvania](#), have established vending machines that sell morning-after pills and have proved their effectiveness. Students may be deterred from purchasing emergency contraception in local pharmacies like the University Pharmacy, CVS, or Rite Aid due to the stigma surrounding such issues.

Implementing a vending machine in the SHS provides students with a discreet way to purchase the contraceptives they need. Pitt already provides the morning-after pill at the affordable cost of \$15, and this price would ideally be reflected in the vending machine as well.

Conclusion

The goal of Pitt's administration and SHS department should be to ensure that all students have everything they need to achieve success. In order for Pitt students to lead rewarding lives, they must have access to adequate reproductive healthcare. The overall state of reproductive health does not only impact individual students, but also the university as a whole. Missing class time to account for the gaps in Pitt's reproductive healthcare lowers both grades and graduation rates. All things considered, better reproductive healthcare leads to a brighter future for the University of Pittsburgh.

References

1. "Reproductive Health." World Health Organization, World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/southeastasia/health-topics/reproductive-health#:~:text=Reproductive%20health%20is%20a%20state,to%20its%20functions%20and%20processes.>

2. Ralph, Lauren J., et al. "A Prospective Cohort Study of the Effect of Receiving versus Being Denied an Abortion on Educational Attainment." *Women's Health Issues*, vol. 29, no. 6, 2019, pp. 455-464., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.whi.2019.09.004>.

3. Bryant, Amy G, and Jonas J Swartz. "Why Crisis Pregnancy Centers Are Legal but Unethical." *AMA Journal of Ethics*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2018, pp. 269-277., <https://doi.org/10.1001/journalofethics.2018.20.3.pfor1-1803>.

4. Swartzendruber, Andrea, et al. "Targeting Young People: A State-Wide Analysis Describing Location of Crisis Pregnancy Centers throughout Georgia and around High Schools and Colleges/Universities." *Journal of Adolescent Health*, vol. 62, no. 2, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.11.137>.

5. "Tampon Tax - Alliance for Period Supplies." Alliance for Period Supplies - It's That Time. *, 21 Sept. 2022, <https://allianceforperiodsupplies.org/tampon-tax/#:~:text=Pennsylvania%20%E2%80%93%20Pennsylvania%20has%20not%20>

taxed, and other material basic necessities.

6. State of The Period 2021. <https://period.org/uploads/State-of-the-Period-2021.pdf>.

7. "Roe v. Wade." Oyez, <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1971/70-18>.

8. "Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey." Oyez, <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1991/91-744#:~:text=The%20Pennsylvania%20legislature%20amended%20its,for%20a%20judicial%20bypass%20procedure>).

9. "Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization." Oyez, www.oyez.org/cases/2021/19-1392. Accessed 19 Mar. 2023.

10. "Gynecological Care." Student Affairs, <https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/shs/medical/womens/>.

11. "Reproductive Health FAQs." Student Affairs, <https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/shs/medical/reproductive-health-faqs/%5C>.

12. "Menstrual Product Dispensers." Student Affairs, <https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/shs/education/menstrual-products/>.

13. "Crisis Pregnancy Center Map & Finder." CPC Map, 14 Oct. 2020, <https://crisispregnancycentermap.com/>.

14. Levin, Sophia. "Pittsburgh, PA Universities Work to Defend Student Abortion Care." PublicSource, 11 Nov. 2022, <https://www.publicsource.org/abortion-college-university-campus-health-services-cmu-pitt-crisis-pregnancy-pittsburgh/>.

15. Reed, Betsy. "George Washington University Installs Emergency Contraception Vending Machine." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 30 Jan. 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/30/george-washington-university-emergency-contraception-vending-machine>.

16. "Emergency Contraception Plan B." Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-massachusetts/online-health-center/planned-parenthood-services-birth-control-abortion-std-hiv-pregnancy-health-care/emergency-contraception-plan-b>.

17. Hernandez, Salvador. "UC and CSU Campuses to Provide Cheap Abortion Pills amid California's Post-Roe Push." Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times, 25 July 2022, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-07-25/uc-and-csu-campuses-to-provide-abortion-pills-in-california>.

18. "The Abortion Pill: Get the Facts About Medication Abortion." Planned

Parenthood, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/abortion/the-abortion-pill>.

19. Fitzgerald, Rick. "U-M Will Offer Free Menstrual Products in Public Restrooms." The University Record, <https://record.umich.edu/articles/u-m-will-offer-free-menstrual-products-in-public-restrooms/>.

20. "Morning-after Pills in Vending Machine." POLITICO, <https://www.politico.com/story/2012/02/morning-after-pills-in-vending-machine072592#:~:text=The%20student%20health%20center%20at,condoms%2C%20decongestants%20and%20pregnancy%20tests>.

Cover Page Image: "The University of Pittsburgh." Pennsylvania Capital-Star, 19 Mar. 2020, <https://www.penncapital-star.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pitt-Art.jpg>. Accessed 11 Apr. 2023.