

MENSTRUAL HEALTH IN EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

REGIONAL PROGRESS REVIEW MONGOLIA



COUNTRY CONTEXT

Mongolia is a landlocked country in East Asia with a population of more than 3.3 million people, including nearly 1 million adolescent girls and women of reproductive age (10–49 years).¹ In 2018, 22 per cent of women aged 15–49 years had an unmet need for contraception. An estimated 63 per cent of schools in Mongolia had access to basic sanitation services while 41 per cent had basic hygiene services.² Around 68 per cent of households had access to at least basic sanitation services and 86 per cent of households had access to basic hygiene services.³

OBJECTIVES

1. Document the state of policy and programming to support menstrual health. Collate lessons learned and stakeholders' insights on barriers and enablers to effective action.
2. Review the evidence for menstrual health interventions across the region. Document lessons learned and the barriers as well as the enablers of high-quality monitoring and evaluation.

This review report assesses the progress and opportunities using five dimensions of the definition of menstrual health.⁴ Menstrual health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity in relation to the menstrual cycle. Achieving menstrual health implies that women, girls and all other people who experience a menstrual cycle throughout their life course can engage in the following five dimensions.



Access accurate, timely, age-appropriate information about the menstrual cycle, menstruation and changes experienced throughout the life course, as well as related self-care and hygiene practices.



Care for their bodies during menstruation such that their preferences, hygiene, comfort, privacy and safety are supported. This includes accessing and using effective and affordable menstrual materials and having supportive facilities and services, including water, sanitation and hygiene services, for washing the body and hands, changing menstrual materials and cleaning and/or disposing of used materials.



Access timely diagnosis, treatment and care for menstrual cycle-related discomfort and disorders, including access to appropriate health services and resources, pain relief and strategies for self-care.



Experience a positive and respectful environment in relation to the menstrual cycle, free from stigma and psychological distress, including the resources and support they need to confidently care for their bodies and make informed decisions about self-care throughout their menstrual cycle.








Decide whether and how to participate in all spheres of life, including civil, cultural, economic, social and political, during all phases of the menstrual cycle, free from menstruation-related exclusion, restriction, discrimination, coercion and/or violence.

PROGRESS: ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Policies and plans

The Government of Mongolia has integrated menstrual health into water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools, with a focus on infrastructure in dormitories. Menstrual health is explicitly included in these national documents:

- **Norms and Requirements for WASH in Schools, Dormitories and Kindergartens (2015)**, which includes provisions for adolescent girls' practical menstrual health WASH requirements. This includes facilities and materials, such as sanitary pad disposal facilities and private washing or changing rooms, and a private space must be provided health education and counselling by trained staff. The document also outlines requirements for gender and reproductive health curriculum and education on menstrual cycle tracking.
- **Secondary School Dormitory Environment and Services General Requirements (MNS 6781:2019)**, which is one of three approved standards aimed to improve the secondary school environment. This standard is the only one that explicitly mentions menstrual health, yet the government is also using the two other standards to strengthen menstrual health, which are Environmental Hygiene Requirements for Education Facilities (MNS6799:2019) and *School Environmental Safety: General requirements* (MNS 6782:2019)

 Information and education	 Services and materials	 Care for discomfort and disorders	 Supportive social environment	 Non-discrimination and participation
<p>✓ Ministry of Education and Science: Norms and Requirements for WASH in Schools, Dormitories and Kindergartens (2015) requires trained staff, gender and reproductive health curriculum and education on menstrual cycle tracking.</p>	<p>✓ Ministry of Education and Science: Norms and Requirements for WASH in Schools, Dormitories and Kindergartens (2015) requires sanitary pad disposal facilities and private washing or changing rooms as well as WASH facilities.</p> <p>Ministry of Education and Science: Secondary School Dormitory Environment and Services General Requirements (MNS 6781:2019) includes detailed provisions on menstrual health.</p>	<p>✗ Not included.</p>	<p>✗ Not included.</p>	<p>✗ Not included.</p>

Lessons and insights: Opportunities to link existing policies to menstrual health

The review identified four opportunities to strengthen the linkage between national policies and guidelines and menstrual health:

- **Education Sector Mid-term Development Plan (2021-2030)**, which aims to improve schools' including boarding schools' water and sanitation conditions with standard facilities based on needs by gender.
- **National Plan on Maternal, Child and Reproductive Health (2021)**, which aims to improve adolescent health and presents an opportunity to address menstrual health.
- **National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDs and STIs (2010-2015)**, which incorporates implementation of comprehensive sexuality education which is an opportunity to include menstrual health.
- **Resolution on the approval of the National Program of Action for Child Development and Protection (2017)**, which aims to improve sexual and reproductive health knowledge of adolescents and strengthen government capacity.

Lessons and insights: Government support for menstrual health is growing

Review informants reported that the government was predominantly focused on addressing water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) nationally in Mongolia due to vast challenges and low coverage. There has been growing support for menstrual health and increasing opportunities to build solutions into WASH programmes with government and non-government stakeholders.

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The provincial health departments are ready to cooperate on implementing a national programme, we just need one – Review informant, government

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Implementation arrangements

The Norms and Requirements for WASH in schools and dormitories is jointly implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Health and Sport. The Ministry of Health and Sport's National Centre for Public Health is responsible for delivering hygiene and environmental health information to the public, and works closely with the Ministry of Education and Science, which is responsible for WASH in schools. The Water Service Regulatory Commission of Mongolia addresses sanitation in households but lacks implementation responsibility for menstrual health.

Informants reported that cross-collaboration between education and health ministries was improving, with growing ministerial interest in menstrual health. There is also a new General Authority for Education department being established within the Ministry of Education and Science that could create greater opportunity to address menstrual health. Informants reported that school-level ownership of menstrual health is strong.

 Information and education	 Services and materials	 Care for discomfort and disorders	 Supportive social environment	 Non-discrimination and participation
<p>✓ Ministry of Education and Science are responsible for curriculum and dissemination of menstrual health education to students. National Centre for Public Health are responsible for environmental health and hygiene behaviour change in schools and households.</p>	<p>✓ Ministry of Education and Science are responsible for WASH in schools.</p>	<p>✗ No evidence was found.</p>	<p>✗ No evidence was found.</p>	<p>✗ No evidence was found.</p>



Lessons and insights: Evidence led to greater action across government departments

Review informants highlighted that a menstrual health study done in schools in 2017–2018 by UNICEF resulted in greater attention towards menstrual health by multiple government ministries, and a deeper understanding of how menstrual health solutions need to be comprehensive.

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We conducted one study of menstrual health in schools. It helped to boost discussions between the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education. At that time, everyone was thinking that when we start talking about menstrual health, it was a health topic. But since that time, the Ministry of Education has somehow realized it is not about health but about human rights and providing conditions to girls whether they study in a dormitory or are studying in remote schools.

– Review informant, UN agency representative

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Financing

The amount of public budget allocated to menstrual health was not available, despite the requirements for menstrual health included in the Norms and Requirements for WASH in Schools, Dormitories and Kindergartens (2015). Responsibility for the annual WASH budget was assigned to the to the Ministry of Finance, but guidance on costing the implementation of the Norms and Requirements was not available. Informants reported that a state-owned copper mining company provides funding for the government’s commitment to eliminate outdoor latrines in schools. Review informants reported that funding was focused on WASH facilities only.

PROGRESS: SERVICE DELIVERY AND PROGRAMMING APPROACHES

Government actions have focused on ensuring menstrual-health-friendly WASH services in dormitories and schools. International non-government organizations and local civil society organizations have supported menstrual health education and information, including online formats. No information was found about programmes addressing care for menstrual discomfort or disorders.



Information and education: UNICEF and WASH Action of Mongolia developed a website with menstrual health information (www.namuu.mn) in 2016. Building on this effort, they developed and launched the Oky mobile phone application in 2020. Both organizations also collaborated with the Ministry of Health and Science to develop information, education and communication materials, such as the 'Good Personal Hygiene Handbook for Dormitory Students' (2015) and a menstrual hygiene handbook. In schools, UNICEF also supported the establishment of hygiene clubs which provide menstrual health education. A UN Youth Advisory Panel led online campaigns to raise awareness, gaining media coverage through blogs and interviews with famous Mongolians.



Services and materials: UNICEF piloted 'girls' rooms' in three schools in Byanakhongor, Gobi-Altai and Zavkhan provinces which provided sanitary pads, with funding from Maßvoll Stiftung. Both WASH Action Mongolia and UNICEF have supported WASH in schools programmes with a strong focus on menstrual health. For example, UNICEF rehabilitated six dormitory WASH facilities using the Three Star Approach and have supported schools to provide sanitary pads. Private companies are also producing pads locally in Mongolia.



Supportive social environment: In support of the Ministry of Education and Science, UNICEF supported training for teachers and girls to conduct monthly education and peer-to-peer information sharing in rural school dormitories. These dormitories house the children of nomadic herding families during the school year.



Non-discrimination and participation: Mongolia's comprehensive national review on the implementation of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2019 included one reported indicator on menstrual health in official responses to the questionnaires.



Lessons and insights: Local rights groups are getting involved in menstrual health

Review informants highlighted growing action on menstrual health by local women's rights organizations, which could bring greater attention and action to the issue.






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Recently some local non-governmental organizations ...working for women's rights included some menstrual health. [They are] not implementing specific projects, but ...provided to student's menstrual pads and are talking about menstrual health as women's rights. So, I think we have some support from local non-governmental organizations, so we need to cooperate with them and need to work with them. – Review informant, civil society organization

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PROGRESS: MONITORING, EVALUATION AND EVIDENCE

Monitoring, evaluation and review of menstrual health in Mongolia is limited. Monitoring of the School Dormitory Environment and Services General Requirements is done through the National Center for Public Health. In support of the Ministry of Education and Science, UNICEF uses indicators from the Three Star Approach to monitor WASH in schools progress with local governments, which includes sex-segregated toilets. Stakeholders highlighted two opportunities to potentially strengthen monitoring of menstrual health: integration into the education management information system, and the National Statistics Office's tracking of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals that could include menstrual health.

 Information and education	 Services and materials	 Care for discomfort and disorders	 Supportive social environment	 Non-discrimination and participation
❌ No monitoring data were found.	❌ No monitoring data were found.	❌ No monitoring data were found.	❌ No monitoring data were found.	❌ No monitoring data were found.



Lessons and insights: Limited monitoring corresponds to limited numbers of programmes

Stakeholders highlighted that until there are strategies, policies or frameworks that clearly and comprehensively address menstrual health, limited monitoring will be done. Given the limited number of menstrual health activities in Mongolia, there has been limited effort to embed it into monitoring frameworks.



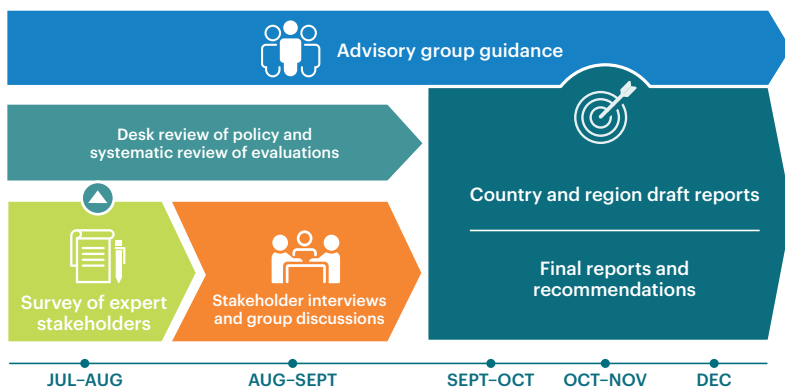
Currently there are not enough activities on menstrual health in Mongolia, so there is no national survey on tracking the progress of menstrual health. – Review informant, government



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Review methods

Regional progress review methods



6 policies reviewed across the education, health, and WASH sectors

4 informants participated in interviews and surveys capturing programme and policy action

Acknowledgements

The research team gratefully thanks the valuable contributions made by the review informants who generously shared their insights and evidence through the survey and interviews.

Suggested citation: Huggett, C., Chea, P., Head, A., Suttor, H., Yamakoshi, B., and Hennegan, J., *Menstrual Health in East Asia and the Pacific Regional Progress Review: Mongolia*, UNICEF, Burnet Institute and WaterAid, 2023.

The *Menstrual Health in East Asia and the Pacific Regional Progress Review* report is available at: <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/menstrual-health-in-east-asia-and-the-pacific>

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Endnotes

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3 UNICEF and WHO, *Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000-2020: five years into the SDGs*. New York: UNICEF and WHO, 2022. <<https://washdata.org/reports/jmp-2021-wash-households>>

4 Hennegan, J., et al., 'Menstrual Health: A definition for policy, practice and research', *Sexual Reproductive Health Matters*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2021: 1911618. doi: 10.1080/26410397.2021.1911618. PMID: 33910492; PMCID: PMC8098749.