

Inquiry into Public Toilets

Answers to Supplementary Questions – Dr Lorraine Dickson

(1) From my experience, what are the main reasons people with continence issues avoid leaving their homes?

Many people (not all) people with continence issues are reluctant to leave home because they are afraid of experiencing an accident which will make them shamed and embarrassed. They say these accidents mean they need to carry extra clothing, washing equipment and protection (pads etc.) They say the toilets are often:

- Very hard to locate and often difficult to get to,
- Have long queues,
- Are unclean and smell,
- Are unsafe,
- Do not always have bins for disposal of their pads or equipment,
- Do not have toilet paper, suitable seats or handwashing and drying facilities.
- Do not have sufficient privacy because they do not have good doors or locks.

Many people who experience or are afraid they will experience incontinence will restrict their fluid intake before they go out and while they are away from home in attempts to avoid the need to find a public toilet because of the reasons above. This is not good for their health or their bladder and bowel management.

If they have an accident this makes these issues even more problematic. Many women will not sit on the public toilet seats because they say they are dirty or they feel they'll "catch something". As a result, they "hover" over the toilet and that makes them feel even more unsafe.

(2) What features make a public toilet suitable or unsuitable for someone with incontinence?

People who desperately need to urinate or defecate, especially when they are in an area where they are unable to find a public toilet, will seek somewhere they feel is safe and private enough for them to empty their bladder or bowel.

Therefore, public toilets should:

- Have good and clear signage to be easily and quickly identified
- Be in accessible places
- Be in sufficient numbers to cater for people's needs without long queues (women need a greater number than men).
- Have regular cleaning and maintenance - some may need cleaning more often.
- Be provided with a safe environment, toilet seats, toilet paper, privacy, good lighting, disposal bins, handwashing and hand drying facilities.

- Have an area for changing children and people with disabilities. These should be included in a larger area with a bench set-up, handwashing and drying facilities, toilet seats, toilet paper, privacy, good lighting and disposal bins.
- Be about every 40 – 50 kilometres (about ½ hour drive) on major roads and motorways – this should assist with road safety through allowing people to break their journey.
- Have ready notification of the location of public toilets on GPS Apps and maps.

Public toilets should be planned for when roads and infrastructure is planned.

(3) Can I describe the physical and emotional toll on people who cannot find or access toilets quickly?

People who cannot find toilets quickly become panicked and are in fear of accidents. Many already have impaired mobility which means they are unable to hurry so have a fear and risk of falling and some have dexterity issues which makes it difficult for them to quickly get in position to safely toilet without enduring an accident. These issues make many of these people reluctant to leave home or venture into unfamiliar surroundings. The fear of embarrassment and shame manifests in isolation and depression. They also often suffer in silence because they are reluctant to seek assistance for the same reasons of fear, embarrassment and shame so it is further compounded or exacerbated.

When people who experience incontinence do venture from home, they often wear multiple padding systems and clothes and need to take a lot of baggage with them to address any accidents. Then they have difficulty disposing equipment and transporting wet or soiled clothing home again. That is then followed by the need to deal with disposal and wash clothing.

This means it's easier for them to stay at home rather than going out – again compounding their emotional feelings and reluctance to get assistance.

(4) What improvements would you like to see in toilet cleanliness and accessibility?

Many toilets need cleaning more frequently and the cleaners should be encouraged to do a thorough job so need to be given the time to do it. I suspect many are encouraged to clean quickly rather than properly. Disinfectants need to be used and floors need cleaning. Toilets should have seats. Toilet cubicles should have ventilation and lighting, preferably natural lighting such as high windows or sky lights.

Toilets should be well and clearly signposted and readily accessible – not hidden in back corners where they can't be located easily and not used as store rooms.

There needs to be more public toilets and they should be free. Those already available in sporting grounds should be opened to the public and put on regular cleaning rosters and not just opened when the grounds are in use.

(5) What role do I believe health services or councils couple play in improving toilet provision?

Health services should work with councils to advocate for more and improved toilet facilities. There should be discussion about toileting facilities between health services, councils and Government planning managers (such as those responsible for the highways which are not council controlled), When public toilets are being planned the designers should encourage the input from consumers with and without disabilities and front-line health workers ie. Nurses and Occupational and Physical Therapists who are directly working with clients (not the health managers who are not working with health consumers).