

- Response to supplementary questions

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(1) Is there any specific policy that needs to be examined or amended to address barriers for people with disabilities accessing public toilets?

Currently, there is no universally mandated national policy in Australia that specifically addresses access to public toilets for people with disabilities. However, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) provides the legal framework aimed at ensuring accessibility to public places, including public toilets. Under the DDA, it is unlawful for public facilities to be inaccessible to people with disabilities.

To improve access to public toilets for people with disabilities, the following actions could be considered:

- **Examine Existing Legislation:** Review the DDA to identify any gaps or areas that may require clarification or strengthening in relation to public toilet accessibility.
- **Develop Clear Guidelines:** Establish specific guidelines or standards within national or state laws that dictate the design, location, and maintenance of accessible public toilets to ensure compliance and consistency across various jurisdictions.
- **Promote Awareness and Training:** Implement training programs for facility managers and local governments to raise awareness about the necessity of accessible toilets and the requirements under the DDA.
- **Encourage Community Involvement:** Involve people with disabilities in the planning and design processes to ensure that their needs are accurately represented and addressed in public toilet facilities.

By examining and potentially amending existing policies, Australia can take significant steps towards eliminating barriers that inhibit access to public toilets for people with disabilities, ensuring a more inclusive environment for all members of the community.

- (2) **Could you provide an overview of the 'Bins4Blokes' initiative and where these have been installed? (referenced in submission no. 66).**

BINS4Blokes is an initiative spearheaded by Continence Health Australia, aimed at addressing the challenges faced by men with incontinence. The program promotes the installation of disposal bins specifically designed for incontinence products in male public toilets, raises awareness about male incontinence, and provides information on where to seek help.

Key Features of Bins4Blokes

- **Long-term Initiative:** Bins4Blokes functions as a secondary prevention health promotion campaign intended to mitigate the impacts of incontinence for males, encouraging them to engage in social activities without fear of anxiety of improper disposal of incontinence products
- **Need for Disposal Bins:** Despite the need, safe and hygienic disposal bins for continence products are still not widely available in male public toilets. The lack of discrete disposal options creates barriers for boys and men with incontinence, hindering their participation in activities outside of their homes.
- **Goals:** The initiative is focused on increasing the number of BINS4Blokes installations to create a more inclusive environment for men dealing with incontinence.

Current Installations:

- There are currently 431 male toilets registered that provide continence product disposal bins. The National Public Toilet Map data indicates that additional bins are installed in other male toilet facilities that are not registered.

Support and Adoption:

BINS4Blokes has garnered widespread support across Australia from various sectors including:

Local Council: 31 councils across the country are participants.

Health Services: 24 health facilities have adopted the initiative.

Venues: 4 stadiums and specific venues are supporting installation of disposal bins.

Other organisations: airports, leisure centres, RSLs, construction companies and aged care services

High-Profile Supporters:

- Perth Airport
- Swinburn University
- Melbourne City Council
- Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre
- MCG – Melbourne
- Hazelwood Rehabilitation project
- Lend lease Construction
- Murdoch Research Institute/ Royal Children’s Hospital
- Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre
- Chadstone Shopping Centre
- Cooleman Court Shopping Centre ACT – Region group
- Grafton Shopping World NSW
- Stockland – Wendouree VIC

The BINS4Blokes initiative reflects a significant commitment to improving the quality of life for men dealing with incontinence and encourages a supportive community response to this often overlooked issue.

(3) **What is the current level of community engagement by local and state governments when designing new public toilets?**

Currently, there is no legal obligation for local government to provide public toilets beyond certain types of buildings. However, there is widespread acknowledgement of the importance of public toilets in promoting health and well-being within communities.

In recent years, there has been a positive shift towards enhancing community engagement when designing new public toilets. Local and state governments increasingly recognise the value of involving the community in the planning and design processes to ensure that facilities meet the needs and preferences of users. While these efforts represent a progressive trend in public infrastructure planning, it is important to note that such engagement is still not mandatory

(4) **What challenges do people with incontinence face when using public toilets?**

People with incontinence encounter several significant challenges when attempting to use public toilets. These challenges can be categorised into two main areas: accessibility and hygiene.

Accessibility:-

- **Urgency of Use:** People with incontinence often require immediate access to toilets due to urgency in emptying their bladder or bowel, as well as the need to replace or dispose of continence products quickly.
- **Difficulty Locating Toilet:** Public toilets can be hard to find due to inadequate or unclear signage, poor lighting, or locked facilities that restrict access.
- **Insufficient Space:** Many toilet cubicles are too small to accommodate people with mobility issues or wheelchair users. Additionally, these cubicles may not have enough space for a parent or carer to assist comfortably.
- **Queuing Issues:** In gendered-segregated toilets, particularly at events, women may face long queues exacerbating the urgency of their situation and further impacting their experience.

Hygiene: -

- **Cleanliness of Facilities:** Public toilets are often not maintained to an adequate standard. People with incontinence require clean toilet seats and flat surfaces to manage pads, catheters, and other products hygienically
- **Lack of Disposal Bins:** Many public toilets do not provide appropriate disposal bins for continence products, or they may not be emptied regularly. Furthermore, when these bins are available, they should be located in discreet areas to maintain privacy and dignity for users.

The challenges faced by people with incontinence in public toilets highlight the pressing need for improved accessibility and hygiene standards in public facilities. Addressing these issues is crucial not only for the comfort and dignity of those with incontinence but also for promoting inclusive public spaces that cater to the needs of all people.

(5) **How do inadequate public toilet facilities impact health and social participation?**

Inadequate public toilet facilities can significantly affect health outcomes and social participation particularly for specific groups that require more accessible options. These groups include people with disabilities, older adults, parents and caregivers, and people with certain medical conditions. They all share a heightened need for easily located, clean, and well-maintained toilets.

Health Impacts:

- **Increased Health Risk:** Poor hygiene in public toilets, such as insufficient flushing, dirty, broken, or absent toilet seats, can increase the risk of infection. Pathogens like E. coli, Salmonella and Norovirus can thrive in unclean facilities, leading to severe stomach illnesses, food poisoning and gastrointestinal distress and diarrhoea. Vulnerable populations such as children or older adults are particularly at risk from these infections.
- **Pelvic Health Issues:** People may resort to squatting or hovering over toilets due to concerns about cleanliness which may result in incomplete emptying of the bladder and/or bowel. This practice can weaken the pelvic floor muscles and increase the risk of urinary incontinence and urinary tract infections and further exacerbating health issues.

Social Participation Impacts:

- **Reluctance to Engage:** The lack of adequate public toilet facilities can deter people from participating in social, recreational, and educational activities. People may be hesitant to leave their homes or may cut outings short due to concerns about finding clean and accessible toilets.
- **Feelings of Exclusion:** The inability to access suitable toilet facilities can lead to feelings of shame and exclusion from social environments. Many people experience stress, anxiety, and depression because of these barriers, which can significantly impact their overall well-being and quality of life.

Inadequate public toilet facilities create substantial barriers to health and social participation for those who require accessible and sanitary options. Addressing these inadequacies is essential to foster inclusive communities where all people can participate fully and safely in public life without fear or discomfort.

(6) **Can you explain how sanitary bins in men's toilets would improve dignity and inclusion?**

Incontinence is a Widespread Issue Among Men:

- Currently, 2.4 million men and boys in Australia are living with some form of incontinence, and 36% of these people are under the age of 50. This statistic emphasises that incontinence is not solely an issue for older adults, it significantly affects a substantial number of working-age men.
- Men with incontinence often face barriers when participating in social, work, and recreational activities due to the absence of proper disposal facilities. This can limit their engagement and quality of life.

Mental Health Benefits:

- Incontinence is associated with higher rates of depression, with **20-43% of men** experiencing mental health challenges related to their condition.
- Providing discreet, hygienic disposal options for incontinence products in public toilets would help reduce the stress and embarrassment many men feel. This improvement could lead to better mental health, enhance quality of life, and decrease social isolation by reducing the anxiety of leaving home.

Social Justice and Equal Access:

- Female toilets commonly feature bins for the disposal of menstrual products, yet men are often denied equivalent dignity or privacy for incontinence product disposal. This disparity represents a social justice issue that warrants attention.
- Ensuring equal access to disposal facilities for men with incontinence will promote inclusivity, reduce the stigma, and allow people to feel more comfortable and supported in public spaces.

Environmental Impact:

- Incontinence products are frequently disposed of improperly, leading to environmental pollution. Without disposal bins, these products may be flushed down toilets or discarded inappropriately, contributing to environmental harm.

- The widespread installation of incontinence products disposal bins would address this issue, minimizing environmental impact and contributing to cleaner public facilities.

Workplace Productivity:

- A significant portion of people living with incontinence are of working age (15-64). Providing proper disposal facilities in public toilets can improve employment participation, reduce absenteeism, and improve overall productivity.

The absence of incontinence product disposal bins in male and unisex public toilets presents a critical gap that impacts millions of men and boys. It leads to emotional distress, social isolation, environmental hazards, and lost productivity.

Installing these bins in all male and communal toilets is not merely about convenience; it is a fundamental step towards enhancing social inclusion, promoting mental health, fostering environmental responsibility, and improving workplace productivity. By advocating for these changes, we address a basic sanitary need while significantly enhancing the quality of life for millions of men living with incontinence.

(7) What role does the National Public Toilet Map play in supporting people with continence needs?

- The National Public Toilet Map is an invaluable resource for people with incontinence, providing accessible information about public and private toilet facilities throughout Australia. With over 24,234 toilets registered, the map plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for those who require frequent access to toilet facilities. Here are some key aspects of its role:
- **Accessibility:** The National Public Toilet Map enables users to easily locate nearby public toilets. This feature is especially beneficial for people with incontinence, who may need quick access to facilities.
- **Detailed Information:** The map provides essential details about each toilet facility, including opening hours, accessibility features, and the availability of additional services such as baby change facilities and showers. This information allows users to plan their trips more effectively and reduces anxiety about finding suitable toilets.

- **Empowerment:** By offering reliable and comprehensive information, the map empowers people with incontinence to participate in community activities, travel, and enjoy outings without the stress of locating appropriate toilet facilities.
- **Awareness and Advocacy:** The National Public Toilet Map raises awareness about the crucial need for adequate toilet facilities and highlights the specific needs of people with incontinence. It serves as an advocacy tool for improved public restroom access, encouraging communities to address these important issues.
- **User-Friendly Platform:** Accessible online, the National Public Toilet Map can be easily accessed via mobile devices, making it a practical resource for people on the go. Overall, the National Public Toilet Map significantly enhances the quality of life for people with incontinence by facilitating better access to public and private public toilet facilities.

(8) **What are the top priorities for toilet design from a continence health perspective?**

Designing public toilets with a focus on continence health is essential for ensuring comfort, dignity, and accessibility for people experiencing incontinence. Here are the top priorities for toilet design from this perspective.

- **Adequate Lighting and Signage:** Toilets should have sufficient lighting both outside and inside, along with visible signage to help users easily locate facilities.
- **Safety and Privacy:** Each toilet should be equipped with a functioning lock to enhance safety and privacy for those using the facilities.
- **Ease of Cleaning and Maintenance:** The toilet design should facilitate easy cleaning and regular maintenance to ensure high hygiene standards, which are crucial for users with continence needs.
- **Functional Toilet Lids:** The toilet design should include lids that can be easily cleaned and are maintained on a regular basis.
- **Handrails:** Toilets should have cubicles with handrails for people with mobility issues.
- **Adequate Space:** The toilet design should provide adequate space for an accompanying carer or parent.
- **Handwashing and Drying Facilities:** The toilet design should include both washing and drying facilities that are regularly cleaned, maintained and restocked to ensure high hygiene and safety standards.
- **Disposal Bins:** All toilet facilities should be provided with a discrete bin for the disposal of continence products.

