

**Submission
No 58**

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC TOILETS

Name: Cr Paige Johnson

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Paige Johnson Councillor for Newcastle | Ward 2

Dr Amanda Cohn MLC
Inquiry Chair
NSW Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

2 December 2024

Dear Committee

Subject: Submission - Portfolio Committee No. 8 - Customer Service - Inquiry into Public Toilets

I write to make an individual submission to the NSW Legislative Council *Inquiry into Public Toilets* under Portfolio Committee No. 8 - Customer Service. In making this submission, I draw on my knowledge from my career as an engineer in local government infrastructure asset management and public works, representations members of my community have made to me as a Councillor for the City of Newcastle as well as my own lived experiences.

Local and general provision of public toilets:

Local governments should develop *public toilet strategies* in association with their asset management plans and adopted levels of service. I believe in urban areas, the provision of public toilets within a 5 to 10 minute walking distance from all locations should be desired. Further guidelines from the NSW government and additions to industry standards would assist with this.

Accessibility, safety and general design principles:

Public toilets must be accessible for people of all abilities and should apply universal design principles.

This includes accessible single room gender neutral (often known as unisex) toilets, with their own sink and hygiene facility provisions, with a full height door that faces externally directly out to open, visible and well-lit areas like a park or main corridor with multiple clear sight-lines.

It is noted that design and building layout for public toilets are heavily informed by Australian Standards and the National Construction Code which provide for minimum requirements.

Where cubicles enclosed in buildings do exist, pending replacement with facilities applying the above principles, they should not have excessive gaps in between the doors, walls and should maximize stall height. The cubicle dividers should be sized as to limit the ability for viewing under or over, including when standing on the toilet and seat.

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Noted as per Australian Standards, fully accessible toilets require handwash facilities to be included in the cubicle. When locating hand wash facilities for other cubicles, consideration can be given to placing the location of the facilities outside the toilet in a communal area that increases use and surveillance of the overall facility.

Facilities, hygiene and cleanliness:

All public toilets should be clean and well maintained. Sanitary bins should be included in all stalls and should be regularly maintained.

I believe free sanitary products should be included in all public toilets and the provision of free period products should be considered with the same essentiality as the provision of toilet paper. To me, this is basic human right and health necessity. This an important element of ensuring public toilets cater for everyone in our community and also goes a long way to addressing period poverty in an inclusive and accessible manner.

National charity *Share the Dignity* provides vending machines at half a dozen sites in the Newcastle LGA, including at three City of Newcastle facilities, that dispense free period packs including tampons and pads. This is only a tiny fraction of locations of many public toilets across the city.

City staff have raised with me challenges with respect to antisocial behaviour and vandalism hindering providing facilities such as soap dispensers, free menstrual products and other minimum amenities. The general design principles outlined in this submission are an important part of reducing risk of vandalism. Fitting existing facilities with features such as foaming soap dispensers to minimise theft, reflective metallic mirror surfaces as opposed to glass, stainless steel fixtures that are concealed to reduce visual clutter and opportunities for vandalism are ideal.

Inclusivity:

Public toilets should be inclusive, welcoming and safe for everyone in our community. Gender based signage should be avoided in favour of signage to simply identify 'toilets' along with information on what features are within the facility. This is inclusive to all family groups, gender diverse communities and provides clear interpretation from a non-English speaking background and people who are neurodiverse. Examples noted by [TransHub](#) are included below.





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Local government facilities should consider the inclusion of designated change rooms, parents spaces as well as accessible adult change facility toilets that cater for users with high support needs and their carers.

Public toilet locations should provide clear and legible site access and wayfinding interacting with effective lighting, path networks and signage in line with Australian Standards.

Provide lighting that is a warm hue and a brightness that meets Australian Standards for illumination. Avoid blue lighting as it is perceived as threatening and has been shown to be ineffective.

It is encouraged to integrate local public art with public toilet facilities as a place making initiative that foster a sense of community, increase the welcomeness of spaces and passively deter vandalism.

Materials and maintenance:

Stainless steel for fixtures such as doors, toilet roll holders, taps and steel bowls integrated within a concealed cistern is preferred to avoid damage and suitable to resist corrosion in coastal environments.

Floor finishes should be non-slip. Consider non-porous sealing options for flooring such as epoxy which are long lasting and easy to clean. An unsealed concrete floor may cost less initially, but the concrete absorbs liquids including urine and it is difficult to remove odors once ingrained. Adequate floors crossfall should be provided to prevent ponding of water.

LED lighting fixtures are preferred for their long lifespan and low energy consumption. The amount installed should be sufficient to brightly illuminate the facility, and if it's a standalone block, the surrounds. As indicated in this submission, lighting is an important factor in minimising the potential for vandalism.

Resourcing:

Resourcing for local governments to deliver and maintain facilities that provide the levels of service noted in this submission is a present and critical challenge. As noted in the recent report from the Inquiry into *ability of local governments to fund infrastructure and services* published on 29 November, the NSW Government should improve access to grants, reduce barriers for Council's to receive income as well as redesign the local government rating system, including reassessing council base rates and should seek to implement measures to provide local government greater flexibility to set rates in response to actual cost increases and community service demands and expectations.





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Summary of key features for public toilets:

Inclusive and in addition to the items highlighted in this submission, a summary of important amenities for inclusion with public toilet facilities is listed below:

- DDA compliance
- Gender neutral, externally opening toilets
- Hand wash, soap and hand drying facilities
- Waste bins and feminine hygiene and sanitary product disposal
- Mirrors
- Concealed cisterns
- Baby change facilities
- Good natural light
- Light coloured walls (preference for tiles)
- Good natural ventilation
- Resilient and resistant materials for structures and fixtures

Should you require further information or wish to discuss any matters within this submission, please contact me at paige@paigjohnson.info.

Yours sincerely,

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