

**Submission  
No 12**

## **INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC TOILETS**

**Organisation:** Country Women's Association of NSW

**Date Received:** 13 September 2024

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# Country Women's Association of NSW

*Incorporated in 1931 by an Act of NSW Parliament  
Constituent Society of the Associated Country Women of the World*

ABN 82 318 909 926

06 September 2024

Committee Secretary  
Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service Inquiry into Public Toilets  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

## **Re: Submission to Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service Inquiry into Public Toilets**

The Country Women's Association (CWA) of New South Wales (NSW) is the state's largest women's rural issues advocacy group with well over 8000 members and close to 400 branches across NSW. There is no other rural, regional, remote member-based organisation that has the breadth and depth of membership on matters affecting country people.

CWA of NSW aims to improve conditions for country women, children, and families by advocating for its members, helping local communities, creating a network of support and meeting together in towns and cities across NSW. The CWA of NSW advocates for positive action on a range of issues that impact the lives of women, children and families throughout NSW.

CWA of NSW welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service inquiry into public toilets. As a leading advocate for rural and regional women and communities across New South Wales, the CWA of NSW is committed to promoting access to safe, accessible, and inclusive public facilities, including public toilets. Public toilets play a crucial role in supporting dignity, inclusion, and participation in public life, particularly for individuals with disabilities, carers, parents, and guardians.

This submission addresses the terms of reference and is informed by the following CWA of NSW policy positions:

1. The need for the addition or retrofit of adult disabled changing facilities in public toilets.
2. The compulsory requirement for bins to be installed in male public toilets for the disposal of continence aids.
3. The need for facilities that enable parents or guardians of either sex to take their children of opposite sex to public toilets without fear of prosecution.

## **(A) PROVISION, DESIGN, ACCESSIBILITY, AND INCLUSIVITY OF PUBLIC TOILETS ACROSS NEW SOUTH WALES.**

### **Accessible Adult Changing Facilities**

The CWA of NSW urges the Committee to support the promotion of Accessible Adult Change facilities in public toilets, in alignment with the 2019 National Construction Code (NCC) requirements. These facilities, based on the Changing Places designs, are essential to cater to the needs of people with significant disabilities, allowing them to participate in public life with dignity and independence.

While the NCC mandates the inclusion of these facilities in certain classes of public buildings, there remains an urgent need to extend this requirement to a broader range of public spaces, including parks, recreation areas, and regional towns where these facilities are not yet available.

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To ensure comprehensive coverage, CWA of NSW recommend that the NSW Department of Health and the Local Government Association partner with City and Shire Councils to audit existing public toilets and identify priority areas for the addition or retrofit of adult disabled changing facilities. Collaboration with organisations like Changing Places and the Continence Foundation of Australia would help address specific user needs, ensuring facilities meet best practice standards.

### **Bins for Continence Aid Disposal in Male Public Toilets**

The CWA of NSW advocates for a compulsory requirement to install bins for the disposal of continence aids in male public toilets. Currently, these facilities are often only available in female public toilets, which is inadequate and discriminatory against men who use continence aids, particularly older men and men with disabilities. This lack of provision compromises their dignity and ability to manage their health needs while using public spaces.

The inclusion of bins in male public toilets would align with best practice standards and help ensure that public toilet facilities are inclusive for all users. CWA of NSW recommend that this requirement be embedded within public health legislation, ensuring local councils and facility managers are responsible for providing these essential services. The provision of bins in male toilets should be standardised across all public spaces, including government-owned and privately managed premises accessible by the public.

### **Parent and Guardian Facilities for Opposite-Sex Children**

Public toilets should be safe and accessible for all users, including parents and guardians accompanying children of the opposite sex. The current lack of suitable facilities poses significant challenges for parents, particularly fathers or male guardians, who may face legal or social stigma when attempting to take their daughters to the bathroom. Existing disabled toilets could be adapted to serve as unisex family toilets, providing a solution that enhances convenience and safety for both parents and children.

We call upon the Minister for Local Government to require local councils to provide appropriate facilities for parents and guardians. These facilities should include clear signage and guidance to ensure that parents can confidently use the toilets with their children without fear of legal repercussions or social judgment. Collaborative engagement with parent advocacy groups, disability organisations, and planners can ensure the design and provision of these facilities meet user needs.

## **(B) STATE, NATIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE FOR THE PROVISION AND MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC TOILETS**

Public toilets serve not only as essential infrastructure for health and hygiene but also play a significant role in promoting social inclusion and economic development.

Australia's National Public Toilet Map, managed by the Continence Foundation of Australia, provides valuable information about public toilet locations and accessibility features. However, much more can be done to ensure public toilet networks are comprehensive, accessible, and user-friendly.

There are no desired standards of service for public toilets in our economic centres, suburbs, parks or other outdoor places. This provides a lack of guidance to indicate how many toilets are needed or the best location to meet community needs.

The CWA of NSW support the call for a national set of public toilet principles, as proposed by researcher Katherine Webber<sup>1</sup>, to guide public toilet design, provision, and management. Key principles should include

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<sup>1</sup> Katherine Webber. 2020. 'We need to talk about toilets: Policy agendas for inclusive suburbs and cities', in Yarnold, J., Hussey, K., and Davey, A. (Eds), *Policy Futures: A Reform Agenda*, The University of Queensland and The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust

public health and hygiene, privacy and safety, inclusion, ease of maintenance, sustainability, and clear communication around availability. These principles would encourage better oversight and planning of public toilets, ensuring they are located within accessible distances in urban, regional, and remote areas.

In 2019, the Australian Building Codes Board released the National Construction Code 2019, which now requires Accessible Adult Change facilities (based on Changing Places designs) to be included in certain classes of public buildings. The CWA of NSW recommends adopting the "Changing Places" initiative model that provides larger-than-standard accessible toilets with specialised equipment for those with severe disabilities.

### **(C) REGULATION AND FUNDING FOR PUBLIC TOILETS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

The current regulatory framework lacks stringent requirements for inclusivity and accessibility in public toilet design and provision. New standards should be legislated, focusing on the compulsory provision of disabled adult changing facilities, unisex family toilets, and disposal bins for continence aids in all newly constructed or renovated public toilets.

The CWA of NSW has consistently received feedback from local and State Government that funding is the barrier to change, hence CWA of NSW recommend establishing a dedicated funding stream, co-managed by the federal and state governments and local councils, to support the retrofit of older public toilets that do not meet current accessibility standards. This would ensure that all communities, particularly in rural and regional areas, have access to adequate facilities.

The Australian Government's Changing Places program illustrates how this might work with \$32.2 million committed in the 2022-23 October Budget over four years to co-fund Changing Places facilities across Australia. These facilities ensure individuals with disabilities and their carers can fully participate in community life without concerns over toilet accessibility. The Australian Government is providing up to 50% of build costs in Local Government Areas without existing facilities, with funding delivered through Federal Funding Agreements.

### **(D) ANY OTHER RELATED MATTERS**

Toilets in private premises that are accessible to the public, such as shopping centres and large retail outlets, must adhere to inclusive and accessible design standards like those enforced for public toilets.

The CWA of NSW recommends that best-practice guidelines from state, national, and international frameworks be enforced for these private-public facilities. This includes the installation of disabled adult changing facilities, family-friendly amenities, and bins for continence aids in all toilets.

### **CONCLUSION**

The CWA of NSW strongly advocates for the adoption of national public toilet principles to ensure that public toilets are planned, designed, and maintained to meet the diverse needs of users. By embedding access to toilets in public health legislation, conducting audits, and engaging stakeholders, including local governments and user groups, New South Wales can lead the way in providing safe, inclusive, and accessible public toilet facilities for all.

Yours faithfully,

Joy Beames  
President CWA of NSW

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