

**Submission
No 57**

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC TOILETS

Name: Mr Matthew Hayes

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Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to provide input to this inquiry.

Living with a hidden disability, it is not always obvious to people that I need to use a disability or unisex toilet. I need to be able to use the disability or toilet for 2 reasons.

I am on the Autism Spectrum, which means that being in a traditional communal toilet, I and other people on the spectrum can get sensory overwhelmed by those kinds of toilets. This can include flickering lights, noises from multiple hand dryers, and sinks, and conversations going off at once. Without a unisex or accessible bathroom, it can be difficult to use the bathroom when going out in the community, hindering independent living skills.

I also have Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS), which means that I struggle going from sitting to standing quickly and standing up for too long. This can make traditional communal toilets, especially large ones without many spaces to hold onto a handle or wall dangerous.

Over the past few years, we've been very lucky to see new developments turn away from the traditional communal toilet design towards an individual, unisex bathroom design.

A great example of this is the bathrooms built at the 7 new metro stations as a part of the Sydney Metro City & Southwest project. These complexes have 6 separate bathrooms each: 2 male, 2 female, 1 male ambulant, 1 female ambulant, 1 unisex, and 1 unisex wheelchair-accessible bathroom. This helps not just people with hidden disabilities but also nonbinary people, those with PTSD, and many more!

But we still have a little bit more to go until we get a good public bathroom template. Wheelchair Accessible Change Rooms (e.g. Changing Places) are still very difficult to find in public places like shopping centers, train stations, parks, tourist attractions, etc. Without these change rooms, it can make it very difficult for people with complex disabilities and their carers to access community services. These places have critical facilities for people with complex disabilities when out and about in the community. These include hoists, showers, adult-sized changing tables, etc.

We also still have an issue with the stigma of people who "don't look disabled" using accessible or unisex bathrooms. I have been verbally attacked multiple times before for using the disability bathroom when I "don't look disabled". This can make you lose confidence when you're already struggling with maintaining independent living skills as a person with a hidden disability. And lots of people with hidden disabilities go through this daily.

We need to make the general public aware that you can't always see who is eligible to use a disability bathroom. Having more unisex bathrooms as described earlier will meet the needs of many disabled and vulnerable people who currently only have the option to use wheelchair-accessible bathrooms. This in turn will make the larger wheelchair-accessible bathrooms available for those who need the physical infrastructure.

Once again, thank you so much for allowing me to lodge a submission!

Thanks,

Matthew