REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 8 - CUSTOMER SERVICE

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC TOILETS

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At Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Sydney on Monday 17 March 2025

The Committee met at 9:15 am

PRESENT

Dr Amanda Cohn (Chair)

The Hon. Stephen Lawrence
The Hon. Aileen MacDonald (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones

PRESENT VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam

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The CHAIR: Welcome to the first hearing of the Committee's inquiry into public toilets. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Amanda Cohn. I am the Chair of this inquiry.

I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures.

Ms KATHERINE ANNE WEBBER, Public Toilet Researcher and Advocate, Churchill Fellow, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Welcome, and thank you for making time to give evidence today. Would you like to start by making a short opening statement?

KATHERINE WEBBER: Yes, please.

The CHAIR: Go ahead.

KATHERINE WEBBER: Good morning. I'm flushed with excitement to be here today to provide evidence to the Portfolio Committee No. 8 - Customer Service regarding its inquiry into public toilets. I have travelled from the Bundjalung Nation in the Northern Rivers to be here today and I acknowledge all the traditional custodians of the lands I've lived, worked and researched public toilets on. A little bit about me: I'm a cisgendered, white, heterosexual, menstruating woman who is housed and I have no permanent disabilities or caring responsibilities. Each of these impact when I need to go and where I can access public toilets. I'm also a researcher and advocate for public toilets. In 2019 I completed the Rodney Warmington Churchill Fellowship to increase accessibility and inclusion in public toilets by researching taboos, design, policy and legal barriers. Last year I completed a master of philosophy thesis on the topic of Australian local government public toilet policies. The evidence I will share today is from the many interviews and research I've conducted, rather than my own personal experience of using public toilets.

Public toilets are essential for the realisation to human rights to sanitation. The right to sanitation exists both within and out of the home. A human rights approach to manage sanitation in public spaces ensures a comprehensive, inclusive coverage in a way that fully respects human rights and dignity and, crucially, leaves no-one behind. According to the United Nations, in order for states to realise their human rights obligations to ensure water and sanitation in public spaces, they must provide services in line with the normative content of the rights—namely availability, accessibility, affordability, safety, quality and acceptability, privacy and dignity.

An article I'd like to table today is called *Addressing sanitation injustice through local government public toilet strategies* and was published in December 2024 based on my master's thesis. This article identified four priority areas to drive change in improving access to public toilets. It identifies that public toilet planning needs to be responsive to community needs and rights, address actual and perceived risks, adopt a holistic and systematic planning and assessment, and detail clear responsibilities. Additionally, as part of my Churchill Fellowship, I created a list of 12 public toilet principles. I'd like to add them to my submission today. It is my hope that these principles can be adopted and used to guide legislation, planning, design and management of public toilets to ensure adequate, accessible and inclusive toilets for all. The principles provide an alternative way of thinking about public toilets and what is required to ensure that the benefits they provide can be accessible by all. Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence today. I look forward to answering your questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much and thank you for sharing your very broad expertise with the Committee. We're certainly very interested in your research. I have a couple of questions to start off with. I'm certainly very interested in the legislative and regulatory framework for toilets, or lack thereof, in New South Wales. It has been very difficult to work out who is actually responsible for toilet design, maintenance and regulation. What's your understanding of whose responsibility is this in New South Wales?

KATHERINE WEBBER: When you've got a building, the Building Code applies. Within Parliament, the Building Code would say how many toilets are required and then what standard they need to be built to. When we leave buildings, there is a lack of legislation or guidelines about where they need to be provided, who provides them and how many there need to be. The gap that we've currently got—not just in New South Wales but across Australia—is that there aren't any guidelines outside of a current building footprint, which means as soon as people leave the house and go walking about, catching public transport, there's not necessarily going to be access to public toilets that they can use.

The CHAIR: As part of your Churchill Fellowship, you looked at a number of other jurisdictions, including overseas. Can you speak to some of that experience? Who's doing this well?

KATHERINE WEBBER: Each place I travelled to had a variety of different strategies for addressing public toilets. I travelled to North America. I went to Portland in Oregon. The community had worked with, I think, the council to design the Portland Loo. There was a local manufacturer that was building these toilets. It was prototyped and the community had input into the design. The Portland Loo is now in situ in countries around the world. That was a great way that the community engaged with, I guess, manufacturing and planners to get a design that met their needs.

In Berlin, they also had a public-private partnership where they did network planning across the whole city, so looked at residential areas versus tourist areas, to kind of see where that need was, and then they designed the Berliner toilet, which was more of an automated toilet. We have some automated toilets here in Australia, but it was a different design. They've got a contract to a private company to manage all of their toilets, and so there is that opportunity to partner with private companies around the design, around the management of them. But I think it's when there's that planning in consultation with communities you're going to get the best outcomes, because the toilets are going to be responsive in the places that people need them.

The CHAIR: I'm interested in the paper that you tabled about local government, particularly because this Committee is going to be speaking to a number of councils here in New South Wales. I'm aware that some councils have done their own, off their own bat, public toilet strategies. How effective have those been?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I guess I can't talk to the effectiveness of them. I've looked at several local governments with public toilet strategies—the one in New South Wales was the Inner West one. I think what is useful in a strategy is when it assesses their current infrastructure, so they acknowledge where they are, because some councils don't necessarily have a database of where all their infrastructure is, so acknowledging what there is. It then looks at detailing the responsibility: Whose responsibility is it for the design, the implementation and the management of them? Then it's making a plan for going forward: where new ones will be and what the funding sources of those are, because we know that they can be expensive to build and, once they're built, there's also the additional maintenance costs as well.

The CHAIR: When you were speaking about the overseas jurisdictions, you talked about the need for co-design or meeting the needs of community, but were there any overall design principles or maintenance principles that you've seen across different spaces in terms of what best practice might look like?

KATHERINE WEBBER: If I refer to my 12 design principles, I guess it's a way of—people have different needs when they go to the toilet: Some people can wait longer, some people can't; some people need larger spaces and some people need support. We do need toilets that can be adaptive, or a variety of toilets that meet different people's needs. But also it's no use if you can't find the toilet or if it's down a back alleyway, up a couple of stairs, around a corner and you need a key to access it but the key is five minutes away. It's actually a holistic planning and thought process around toilets. The first one, the national public toilet principles, is linking it in with the life of the city, so where we've got activity spaces, where people are, that's where the public toilets are; making sure that they are safe, that they're clean—you've got those hygiene requirements.

Ensuring that there is safety and privacy so that people—public toilets are a unique space. You are doing a very private activity but you're in a public space. There are people around you that you're not normally used to being around, so making sure there is that visual privacy, but also audible privacy can be important. Making sure there's all those little functional details that were being discussed earlier, so hooks on the backs of doors for clothing, for bags, all the accessories that people have with them. Also, people travelling with prams or luggage, where can that be stored safely?

Accessibility is very key. Often toilets that are designed for a wheelchair won't necessarily meet a mobility scooter. Wheelchairs come in different shapes and sizes, so just because a toilet might meet the accessibility standards doesn't necessarily mean a wheelchair user is going to be able to get into it. Often doors can be too heavy for someone to open or, if there's a wheelchair user with a child, is there enough space for everybody to use the toilet or can the wheelchair user go in with their child. Talking about location and availability, having signage that people can find toilets is really important as well. It's thinking about that whole design process of where people are, how they get there, how they find them, can they get in, use them, keep them clean. A whole user experience needs to be considered in the design.

The CHAIR: Having had a look at a couple of the local government strategies in quite a lot of detail, do you think that it's local government that's best placed to lead this work? What input do we need from State or Federal governments?

KATHERINE WEBBER: Local governments are often in charge of planning public spaces. I know there's some limitations to that, but often the level of government that is closest to the people often does a lot of consultation. Public toilet strategies are one way that local governments can drive this work. However, local governments need support with funding for public toilets, as well as some guidelines or some support around when they're required, how many are needed, that can be adaptable to the local situations. In Wales, their public health Act did make some legislation saying that local governments needed to do toilet needs assessments. In the UK, there's been a lot of closure of public toilets because there isn't clear responsibility for them.

When public toilets get too difficult because they're expensive, or they're not accessible, or they're being damaged—if local governments don't have a responsibility to keep them open, it's easier to close them because

then that risk is removed. If there's a responsibility that they need to be there, they then have to do that assessment and plan for them. It doesn't actually mean that local governments have to deliver all of them. There can be a network of on-street and off-street toilets that are available in parks, but also ones that you might get in businesses or in shopping centres that people can use. In the UK, they've got a Community Toilet Scheme where private businesses might get some funding to make their public toilets available to non-customers. There are different ways that local governments could facilitate toilet access without necessarily being the key deliverer of them.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Thanks so much, Miss Webber, for your work and your submissions and coming along today. I think you've really sparked something. I've got a few questions. You talk in your submission about human rights in terms of access to water and sanitation. Are you able to talk more about where those rights come from?

KATHERINE WEBBER: There's a UN special rapporteur on the rights to water and sanitation out of the home. There are other Sustainable Development Goals which also mention the rights to water—I'm going to get my SDG wrong. There are the Sustainable Development Goals that mention water and sanitation, so it is linked into the United Nations human rights framework.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Thank you. We'll be able to find that. You talk in your submission about self-limiting behaviours. I was wondering if you are able to expand on that? What sort of self-limiting behaviours are we talking about, and what are the dangers to health that might arise?

KATHERINE WEBBER: Yes. From conversations I've had and research I've done, if people are unsure if they're going to be able to find a public toilet safely or in the time they need it, some people won't leave the house. The first self-limiting behaviour is not participating in work, in education, in recreational activities; staying at home. The second one could be limiting food and water intake to reduce the need to go to a toilet. I'm not a medical professional, but that can then have health implications. Then people are going to restrict their movement to places where they know there is a toilet, so they might not be catching a bus or travelling to a new place. They might only be travelling to a few known locations, which limits their broader participation in activities, participation in community events and celebrations.

Transport is key. Having accessibility or known toilets on transport routes is really key to address that, particularly on public transport when people are going for long car trips. The need is also increased for people with incontinence and varying levels of disability that might need assistance. People who require changing places, if there isn't one that's easily accessible, it's going to reduce not only when that person but when their whole family or their care group can go out and participate. It's not necessarily just one person that's being impacted. It can be quite a few people.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: You talk in your submission about councils closing public toilets at night in response to antisocial behaviour. What's the answer to that, do you think? I've got a personal interest as someone that drives a lot in the country at night and is often encountering this. What's the answer to it? Obviously councils have to respond to antisocial behaviour. Is there a way of design that helps to get around these issues?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I think it's working out what is the antisocial behaviour that is occurring. Is it vandalism to the public toilets, in which case it could be a change of materials. If it's a porcelain bowl that's being destroyed, maybe it's putting in a stainless steel bowl. If it's mirrors, the same. It could be putting in stainless steel mirrors. If it's people who are unhoused and are using public toilets for shelter, that's a different solution. I don't think closing them or a design solution is necessarily going to address that. If it's drug use, whether it's looking at the lighting, whether it's making sure that there are sharps bin so it's a safe space, or whether it's making sure that there can be increased observation during the evening. You could have maybe a maintenance check-in or a cleaning check-in at different times throughout the evening to make sure that it is kept safe and clean rather than a security check-in that's just moving people along.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Are you able to suggest a way that the people working on our report might be able to work out where are the particular problem areas in the State in terms of provision of public toilets? Is there some sort of online material? We've got lots of local council submissions, but we haven't, for example, got submissions from every council, let alone every council suggesting where there's problems in terms of provision. Is there a way that we can access that sort of information?

KATHERINE WEBBER: Australia is really fortunate. We've got the National Public Toilet Map. That maps currently over 23,000 toilets across Australia. It maps the toilets. You can filter by what you're looking for. If you're looking for an accessible toilet, if you're looking for a male or a female toilet, you can filter for those. You can't filter by owner, so there will be toilets on that map that are privately provided. They might be in a petrol station or in a train station. But I think that map could provide some visual representation.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: In terms of what's not there?

KATHERINE WEBBER: Of what's not there. But then there's no guidelines to say how many there should be or what the radius should be in different areas.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Is that document accurate in terms of it's able to be relied upon, do you think, as to what is there? Is it updated regularly? Does it consult councils?

KATHERINE WEBBER: It's open source data, to the best of my knowledge. Every year, the Continence Foundation runs the annual Dunny Hunt, asking people to add submissions. If you are a public toilet owner, like a local government, you can update that map yourself. So maybe one way is asking councils to check their data to see if that map is accurate, but any data source is only going to be as accurate as the information that's in there. But during the annual Dunny Hunt, people do go and check and update features, and there's been prizes to participate in that, so there's a bit of an incentive to do so.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: I've noticed in recent decades that there has been a distinct trend towards the construction of public toilets that consist of single-use cubicles accessible from public space. Is that something that now is the prevalent mode of construction or style of construction? Or are we still seeing significant numbers of councils that are building the old-style block of boys and girls, and then cubicles where there is shared public space?

KATHERINE WEBBER: From my experience of the toilets that I've visited is the new ones being built are as you described, those single stalls with entry from a public space, often with a shared handwash facility. Sometimes they will have male and female and unisex or all gender in between, with an accessible one on the end as well. I think there's a lot of benefits to that design in the fact that you can see who's going in and out of them. There's less likely to be queues in that type of space. People can jump into the other gendered one if they want. I think it also facilitates parents with children who are of the opposite gender, so you can use those. I think it is the prevalent design. It does come down to who's designing new public toilets but also what the request is. I don't think it is the only design that is currently being built. Also, there's a lot of upgrades to existing facilities, which are the traditional two gendered, walk-in, double doors.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Where I live in Dubbo, the local council recently built what I would call the old-style, cement, boys and girls block, and it was pretty controversial. Are there circumstances where that design is still appropriate for some reasons that I don't currently understand?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I guess this is when it comes back down to what the community wants. I think if it is attached to a change room, if it is in a sporting area for swimming, or fields, and there's those other activities occurring, that could be more beneficial. I know in some venues, like entertainment venues, having that space where people can check their clothing, wash their hands, have a little bit of privacy, but also have some of that communal space can be really valued as well; where people can have a bit of a time out, which you're not necessarily going to get in those single stalls. I think it's worth an area of conversation about what are the benefits of having both designs.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: The loo that I'm talking about is in a medium-sized park next to the river, quite close to the centre of Dubbo. It's not a sporting fields area. It's on a cycle track that goes around a big part of the Macquarie River near Dubbo. It's got an MLAK facility for people with disability. But otherwise, it's just that old-style male/female. Then when you go in, you go around a sort of curved corner into the loo, and then it's just male and female cubicles. I think there's three or four cubicles in each of them. You talked about what communities want. Are there circumstances where, like in that situation that I've described to you—say the council put out for consultation and you got the usual, relatively small amount of people responding, and they were, by majority, in favour of that old style, would you then proceed and do it on the basis that's what the community wants? Or are there design principles that you would say would suggest to the contrary?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I'm trying to think of the best way to answer that question. I think there's a lot of fear around public toilets, and people want to feel safe. For some people, having gender-segregated toilets will make them feel safer using those spaces. Those designs will exclude other people and make other people feel unsafe. In some way we're creating a hierarchy of who gets their safety prioritised by having the gender-segregated toilets. I think when we're coming to toilets, we're talking about bodily functions, the things we normally do—we do them behind closed doors. We don't want other people necessarily to know what's happening. So when consultation is happening around them, people are bringing all of those fears. They're bringing those beliefs around what should and shouldn't happen in a toilet.

Part of it is, I guess, changing hearts and minds around—let's talk about who needs to use public toilets, or what are all the different functions that happen in them. It's also using medication. As I said, it could be having that time out; just pulling yourself together, or hiding away if something's happening. But making people feel safe

using them, as well. I don't think there is only going to be one design that is going to make people feel safe, which is why I refer back to having a network approach of public toilets, that people can choose where they're going. If they can't go to that particular park in Dubbo because they don't feel safe, is there an alternative that they will feel safe in? So we then get providing people options in the spaces that they need them to be.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: I should be fair to the council and say that, prior to the construction of that loo, all of the public toilets constructed in the local government area for at least the previous 10 or 20 years were a number of single-use cubicles accessible from public space. Normally some male, some female, some unisex. I think I'm correct in saying that; I could be wrong about that part. But in terms people's fear being heightened by particular designs, that model where you've got, say, four or five single-use cubicles, some male, some female, some unisex, maybe shared water facilities outside, but sometimes inside, does that cause fear or concern for anyone in particular, as opposed to a block where men are entering from one side and women from the other? Is there a heightened fear factor in that situation?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I don't know if I can answer that question. I just don't know. I haven't seen the research around that. Most of the research has been written around having the gender-segregated toilets, rather than having those. I know there are some cultural reasons that people don't want to share toilets with people of the opposite gender, but whether or not that design of having the opened toilets meets that need or not, I'm unsure.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: In terms of what the law should be, do you think there should be legislation at a State level, whether in the Public Health Act or the Local Government Act, that puts particular obligations on local governments to, for example, do a mapping of requirements and then, in compliance with certain principles, make a provision for public toilets?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I think that would facilitate the right to sanitation out of the home by having that legislative requirement. I think potentially that does sit with local governments. Whether they're going to agree, I'm unsure. But I think having local government as the level of government that does that community provision, requiring them to assess the needs across their community and then create a plan for access on implementation would be important.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Do you think that if there was such an obligation that it should be mandatory and, if so, should there be a funding stream developed? Because we hear a lot about cost shifting in terms of local government and continually casting more and more obligations upon them.

KATHERINE WEBBER: Yes, I do think funding should support the planning and then implementation. I know some local governments use the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure funding, it was Federal funding. While public toilets weren't specifically an identified eligible project, some councils did use that funding for public toilets. So I do think funding does need to be required. I think also one of the challenges is, public toilets kind of don't sit in an area of council yet. So would it sit in the urban planning team or the parks, the open space team? Is it facilities? I think one of the reasons public toilets may have been missed is that there's not a public toilet planner. That's not something that you study. It's not a particular role. I think there's probably the need to have consultation with local governments about where they think it sits. Is it in public health? Is it in infrastructure planning? How does that work?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Just following on from that, particularly around the funding, I'm similar to a number of colleagues here and come from a regional area. You quite often see a very stark difference between metropolitan toilets versus even just travelling country roads. If it were that it would be the responsibility of local government, should there be a loading for rural and regional versus metro? Or would it make any difference?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I'm not sure I understand what the loading means.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Financial. Because you're saying that sometimes they can use it out of roads funding. When you go to a regional area, they're already still looking for more money to fix roads in some of those country areas. Would councils from rural and regional areas need to be provided with additional resources or are we already sitting on an equal playing field, metro versus regional areas, when it comes to public toilets?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I think it would really depend on how provision was defined. So if it was for every X number of kilometres of road in a rural area you need a public toilet or a rest stop, and all of those things, versus in a township, how many public toilets you need based on either population or radius. You might say that in an urban area you want a public toilet every 500 metres because that's a 10-minute walkable distance, but if you're out travelling on a road, you want one every, 50, 100, 20—I'm making up these distances. I think the funding potentially could be based on a standard amount to do the planning and then whether councils could apply for funding based on what their need was or what their plan was going forward.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: But you still think it needs to be run at a State level. So that overarching assessment, review, what are the key principles, all areas need to meet, that should be managed at a State level as opposed to local government area by a local government area?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I think there could be some State guidelines that say, "In rural areas, this is what we expect. In urban areas, this is what we expect." That could be at a State level. It also could be at a Federal level.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: The National Public Toilet Map, do you think that is a good enough tool for an assessment, or an audit level, or do you think there should be something done at a State level to say we need to do a bare-minimum assessment of what toilets are publicly accessible at the moment?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I think it also comes back down to your definition. So if you're just looking at public toilets provided by local governments, it might be that that assessment could be done that way, via local governments or via local government data. But if you wanted to also include—if you're looking more broadly about how people access public toilets, I think using the National Public Toilet Map could assist, because you've then got some of those other data sources as well. So it comes back down to your parameters of what you want to look at.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to the examples you talked about overseas—I think it was Berlin with the public-private partnership, and then the UK, the business toilets that were used—were both of those models free to the public, or was there a charge to access any of the toilets?

KATHERINE WEBBER: In Berlin there was a fee. I can't remember the amount of it, but there was a fee to access. I travelled in 2019. They'd started using card payments. As a tourist, I guess that's part of the cost of travelling. You have a euro or a couple of euros—every now and then you need to go. I think for residents, for people who need to use toilets more frequently, that could get expensive. I think also for people who are unhoused, that's a real challenge. The decision in Berlin to include the cost was they thought it would reduce vandalism. People aren't going to pay a bit of money to then vandalise the toilet. So that was their rationale for including the payment. What was the other you wanted?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to the UK business toilet model.

KATHERINE WEBBER: No, I believe there was no fee, to the user. A business might be given some money to buy extra toilet paper, for extra cleaning costs, but then it was free for the community to use.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In your submission, you refer to a network approach to public toilet infrastructure. What do you mean by that?

KATHERINE WEBBER: Rather than just looking at one park and going, "Do we need a toilet in this park," it's actually looking across the whole local government or the whole area and going, "Where do we have toilets and where do we not?" In the Inner West public toilet strategy, they've got a picture of all their toilets with a radius map around it, so you can see which areas of that local government area you're going to have to walk a long way to find a public toilet. By having a network, you're not just looking at each individual toilet by itself. It's a bit like having a road network. How do people get from place A to place B? So is this a high area for exercise? Therefore, where are people going to need to stop along the way? Or the network could be the trains or the bus system. If people are travelling along this bus route, where can they go to the toilet? So that's what I mean by network approach. Does that make sense?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yes. That's fine.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thank you, Ms Webber, for your evidence so far. I want to clarify a couple of things on record. Your evidence is that there's actually no statutory or other requirement for local government to provide toilets at the moment. That's correct?

KATHERINE WEBBER: That's my understanding, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How prescriptive is the Building Code in terms of design and fittings? We talked earlier about shelves, hooks and those kinds of fittings. Is that captured in the Building Code or does the Building Code just specify that you need this many toilets for this much floor space?

KATHERINE WEBBER: To the best of my knowledge, I don't think it captures all of those accessories unless you're in an accessible toilet, which will have—dimensions are definitely covered. Having toilet pedestals, having wash basins, urinals—that is what is captured. In the accessible toilet, it also includes handrails and the certain heights of items. But I believe all of the additional features are not covered by the Building Code.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So the Building Code's really a point-in-time obligation. As far as you're aware, there's no obligation in terms of ongoing maintenance or cleaning. Are there any legislative or other regulatory requirements in terms of maintenance and cleaning?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I'm not aware. I can't answer that question.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The other thing I wanted to ask about is something I think you touched on just earlier in your evidence about an allocation principle. Is there a best practice example of guidance in relation to how many toilets should be provided per head of population or per square kilometre of urban space? Is there anywhere, either in Australia or across the world, that you can point to that says, "This is the best practice in terms of how many toilets you should have within a particular area"?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I think the number of toilets is what's missing. From conversations I've had with planners, it's like, "We're not really sure how many we need to provide based on this public space." Crohn's and Colitis UK was calling for public toilets in the high streets in the high-use areas every 500 metres because I know 400 to 500 metres is used as a walkable catchment in urban design. That could be potentially how you could look at the frequency of toilets. But as for the numbers, I don't think that piece of work has been done.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The final question from me is about primary and ancillary purposes for public toilets. One example that comes to mind for me is in my local government area. They've put in a very harsh ultraviolet blue light in the toilet to discourage intravenous drug users, but it effectively renders the toilet unusable for all the ancillary purposes that you have talked about like grooming, having a rest break or doing your hair or your make-up. None of those things are really possible in that space. Would it be your recommendation that there should be some firmer guidance, in terms of toilet planning, about incorporating those ancillary purposes beyond the core function of being able to go to the toilet?

KATHERINE WEBBER: Yes, I think toilets provide a whole range of functionality. Medication actually could be a core function as well. People who have diabetes, people who need to change colostomy bags—they're functions that need to occur in toilets as well that need to be recognised as part of the design, which links back to that functionality. I think it's acknowledging that toilets have multiple uses but also multiple users. It's getting that balance to make people feel safe for people to be able to use them so that their right to sanitation is met. But it's really tricky. It's really challenging because you will sometimes have those conflicting needs.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What factors do you think should be considered when designing inclusive public toilets? I'll give you an example. Would you design something, say, for breastfeeding? Would that be a factor? What are the factors that you think should definitely be included in the design of public toilet space?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I think it really depends on the location that the toilet is in. Breastfeeding might occur in toilets, but also some people aren't going to want to breastfeed around toilets because they also feel like they're not a clean space. I think that's why that consultation is needed. Is it a park that has a lot of children's birthday parties in it? Therefore maybe we need to have some family toilets that have larger cubicles that have pedestals at two different heights so the whole family can go. Is it on a highway? Maybe they actually want to add a couple of showers in so it's a decent rest stop. I think it really does depend on the location of the toilet.

The level of use it's going to receive—but then also the higher level of use needs the higher level of maintenance: the higher frequency of cleaning. Public buildings like art galleries and museums will have a lot of people using them but then also have quite a regular cleaning schedule, which you often don't see on your on-street toilets. I think it is really finding a balance. I know I sound like I'm hedging my bets, but that's why that network approach is required: so we're not just looking at one specific toilet; we're looking at what people need across a whole region when they're out and about.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Say at this point in time the factor was that, because we're near a shopping centre or whatever, we want this, this and this. But, as the community grows, maybe they don't. Is there a flexible toilet design where things can be changed or added with community needs? If so, what expense does that put on? Do you consider it to be local or State government that needs to provide this in the public spaces?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I think one of the big challenges for public toilets is that they are expensive to build, and they last for such a long time. I have not seen any adaptable designs. I'd love to see some, but I'm not sure what that would look like. I don't really want to see movable partitions because they're often attached to the sewerage. Sewerage points are not easy to relocate. It's a tricky one.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I'm just thinking, if a local council is the body that provides the public toilet and they've got all these other competing provisions of services that they need to do, how can we ensure that they provide the best or better toilet accessibility without compromise while also being able to provide

what the public needs? I get that, yes, there's the bare minimum and sometimes you won't go to one. Then there's a top-of-the-range design, but not everyone can have that top-of-the-range toilet design. What can local councils do to ensure that they meet toilet accessibility requirements?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I would say the building codes are the bare minimum of what should be provided. They're standards that at a point in time say this is what is needed, but those accessibility standards or the inclusions in the Building Code aren't necessarily going to meet the needs of everybody. I think the building codes are the minimum, but there's the opportunity to strive for more than the minimum, and I think either architects or designers might be better placed to answer that flexibility component.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: So sometimes it would be based on a wish list rather than—so you have the Building Code as the minimum and then a wish list of what you would like?

KATHERINE WEBBER: The Building Code doesn't talk about what am I going to say is the urban form. This is my personal experience. Some of the public toilets that I've loved to visit are the ones that have public art involved. They make you feel welcome; you learn a little bit about the community. That's not something that's going to be captured in the Building Code. Yes, it might be seen as an additional, but it also makes the space more welcoming, and it might make people more likely to use it. The shelving, the hooks—those features that may not be included in the Building Code could be a standard that a local government sets that says, "We want to make sure that all our toilets have these."

I think it really is working out what are those features that are required. Do we have a lot of people that need a change in colostomy bags? Therefore we're going to need extra shelving, or we need to redesign how the toilet functions. More people using menstrual cups means we might want to actually have our wash basins in the stall with us as opposed to going out to wash your menstrual cup while washing your hands. I think the standards are the bare minimum, but there's that opportunity to have that flexibility, depending on funding, depending on the level of use of a toilet and its location et cetera.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I think you've answered this, but I'll just ask for clarity, should the New South Wales Government mandate toilet provision in all public spaces? If so, is it local government or is it the State Government that should be financing this?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I guess those are the recommendations that you will put forward, based on—

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: In your opinion.

KATHERINE WEBBER: I've worked for local governments. I think they're probably best placed to identify the best locations for public toilets, but I think there is that funding constraint. Whether that comes from the State or Federal government, I'm unsure.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Accepting everything that you say about design standards and the rest, moving more to the situation right at the moment, what would you say are the biggest problems that we've got in terms of the provision and design of public toilets?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I think there's that lack of certainty that people will necessarily know that they can access a public toilet when they need one. I think there's varying quality where they are available. Once an infrastructure is built, it's built to the code of the day, and it's not necessarily upgraded when building codes change, and that's part of the challenge of infrastructure and an expensive infrastructure. Often toilets are "set and forget". They might be maintained, but they're not necessarily going to be upgraded. I think one of those biggest challenges would be having old facilities that don't necessarily meet current user needs and not knowing where they are—if they're not located on the National Public Toilet Map, how people can access them.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Would you agree that, in terms of provision, there's an acute problem in regional New South Wales?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I haven't done that yet. No, I don't know. I haven't looked across different regions to where they are and aren't located.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Is there anything you'd like to say particularly about adult change facilities, the availability of those? Is there anything we should be thinking about there?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I think they are a really important feature, that more are required. They are very important to allow people with higher toileting needs to participate and to get out and about, both them and their families or their caregivers. I would love to see more of them, whether they're changing places that have the hoists, whether they've got that specific name or just meet that need. Yes, definitely would love to see more of them out there.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Are there any particular issues in relation to people working in the transport industry that we should be thinking about? Obviously there's provision on highways for truckies and so forth, but any other issues that you may not have thought of?

KATHERINE WEBBER: You talked earlier about when toilets are locked at night. We do have an increase of people who are driving—Uber drivers—transporting food et cetera as well as long-distance travellers. Making sure that toilets are, first, available and that they're open would depend if it's in an urban or regional area—I think is really important. Bus drivers and train drivers have commented about having enough time to go to a toilet and having a toilet available between routes. When you've got people who don't have a fixed workplace, making sure they've got access to toilets as well—public toilets is one way of meeting that need.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: It has been suggested that there should be a place for people to charge phones at public toilets. Do you have any thoughts on that?

KATHERINE WEBBER: Yes, accessing fresh water to drink and to wash clothes, and charging phones. I think our connectedness is really important. How that works in reality, I'm unsure, whether it's just a power point that people can use or whether it's the full-on cords, I don't know.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Why do you think some councils or commercial premises are still building public toilets and not putting a hook on the inside of the door, at the very least? Why is this happening?

KATHERINE WEBBER: I think the hook on the back of the door—if it's not in a building code that says this is what you must do, every additional item is an additional expense. If you're not thinking about the user experience—if you've got pockets and everything fits in your pockets, you're not thinking about all the bags that somebody else is carrying. I think it comes back down to that user experience—the hooks on the door, the shelving, making sure the locks work, making sure cubicles are wide enough, and making sure that the menstrual product bins are not too close to the toilet so you don't touch them when you sit down. I guess it's thinking about that user experience when they're designed and the hardware is put in.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: It has been suggested that public toilets should have access to water and that in some circumstances—maybe not all—that should be outside the public toilet. I think they're suggesting that you would wash your hands at a facility outside the immediate structure and that you should be able to refill water bottles and so forth there. Are there any disadvantages to having those wash and water facilities outside rather than inside?

KATHERINE WEBBER: Yes. If you're using menstrual products and you've spilt, or it's a re-usable one that you need to wash out, having a sink in the cubicle can be advantageous—really useful. Cleaning a spot in the privacy of a cubicle can be really helpful. I have not seen many in my public toilet journeys, but I do think that's probably where the design needs to move to.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: I have more questions, but I think we're at time.

The CHAIR: We are. Thank you so much for making time and sharing your experiences with us today. The secretariat will be in touch if there are any supplementary questions, which it sounds like there may well be. Thanks again.

(The witness withdrew.)

Dr CHRISTIAN TIETZ, Senior Lecturer, Industrial Design, School of Built Environment, Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture, UNSW Sydney, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Good morning. Thank you for making the time to give evidence today. Would you like to start by making a short opening statement?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Yes. I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and their Elders past, present and future. I pay my respects to them and acknowledge that they've never ceded the land. I'm an industrial designer. Most people don't know what industrial design is about, but we are the people that design all the things that you've got in your home, perhaps except the artefacts that you brought along from a trip or so. But it's generally the kettle, the toaster, the fridge, your cutlery, your cups, the light switch, the doorhandles, the toilets, the toilet roll holders and so on.

You've probably first experienced my profession right after you were born. The cutting of the umbilical cord was carried out with a surgical scissor, and that's an industrially designed product. Ours is the world of products and things, and that's my background. In particular, I guess one of my specialities is design for environmental health—designing health hardware and all the things required to practice healthy living practices. That might include the whole array, let's say, for washing hands, from the water supply through to the tap, to the soap dish, to the towel hook, to the door to the facility to be in and the drain where the water gets drained away. I think I might leave it at that.

The CHAIR: Thank you for your very detailed written submission. It's got a number of suggestions there of ways that toilets could be more welcoming, more useful and more accessible, and I'm sure we'll come to them in some more detail. But I feel like the million dollar question is why aren't toilets like that already? What do you see as the barriers to best practice design? Why are public toilets so awful?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: I think part of that is—the previous person giving evidence, you spoke about the national Building Code. It's very well documented in terms of what the physical requirements are from an engineering and maintenance perspective, like build structure—is it structurally sound? Is it safe? Are there non-slip floorings? All these items are actually reasonably well documented and designed—and of course there's room for improvement—but it doesn't really go into the human dimension of things. It approaches it very much from a physics and scientific perspective where we are the subject, but it doesn't address emotional and other personal needs that people have.

I think that's a lack of the code, hence the code is a minimum standard that ensures that buildings stand up and don't fall down, and if you walk in and it's wet, you don't slip. These are basic good things, but they are the bare minimum. That's why all our houses and interiors of our homes are different, because we sort of have this structure and then we furnish it to suit ourselves. The public toilets provide a skeleton, I guess, and it's not really furnished as such. I guess my suggestion in the submission here is that we try to domesticate it a little bit. One of the submissions that I've read said, "Please don't make public toilets feel like prisons." That is a really interesting comment. That's what we get when we adhere to all the standards: We get something that's cost effective and doesn't require much maintenance, and therefore it provides a service.

But the service goes beyond, in my mind anyhow, the provision of a facility to go and have a poo and pee. It's a private space in public. The other provision was I think from the Narrabri council and the Inner City Legal Centre. I think those were the only two that I read—I haven't read all of them—that actually made reference to the alternative uses of the toilet. It's more than a space to fulfil these urgent biological needs. It's a private space. If I spilt something on my suit or my jacket or whatever, where do I address that in public? The space that I've got, then, is the cubicle—and the cubicle is not designed for that. It's just designed with a singular use and function in mind. I think that's where we need to expand what that means and what it could offer and what it could provide.

The CHAIR: Can you give any examples perhaps elsewhere—it could be overseas—of where this is done really well?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: In my submission I wrote Singapore airport—amazing! Those toilets, I would go there and just seek them out. Like, there's greenery in there. If I wash my hands, I'm looking at greenery. When I go into the cubicle, it's spacious. It's got shelving, it's got hooks. I can walk in, if I have a bag or a wheelie case or whatever it might be, and it feels comfortable. I might be able to do that in a normal toilet as well, but I feel awkward. It's about this feeling of, as a citizen, being appreciated and respected in the environment that we're in. The public toilet is the place where that can be expressed. I think Singapore airport in particular, by doing this, is telling me they understand me, they care for me. I'm important, they respect me and they accommodate a broad range of needs.

If you look at customer service and the user experience or the customer experience, if you remember when you got your iPhone or your phone and you unpack it, you have probably still got the packaging at home because the experience, the attention that these people paid to you engaging with this thing is very, very extensive. This is not the experience that we have with public toilets. Everyone that I've mentioned to that I've been invited to speak here, I got a uncomfortable laugh—"Public toilets, right!"—and then the conversation changed. There's not much appreciation and interest in the topic. I think it's rather remarkable and amazing that we actually have this inquiry about it, and it's wonderful. I lost my train of thought now.

The CHAIR: That's all right, I have another question. The common sort of objection that we might hear from people that have to build or maintain toilets is these questions of risk, whether there's real or perceived risk of vandalism or antisocial behaviour. Do you have recommendations for how that can be mitigated without making the toilet feel like a prison, which was the example you gave?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Of course it can be can be addressed. That's what design does: If you give the brief, they can address it, and they can address it in multiple ways. I guess it's my colleagues in the interior architecture school or discipline that perhaps don't treasure the opportunities when they get to design a public toilet. From a professional point of view, it is not a thing that you aspire to. If you do design, then some of them have very nice gestures as buildings in the landscape, right? There are various ones that are designed well, but no-one then follows through with paying attention to the cubicle. It is something that is specified that needs to be provided, there is a standard and the job is done if the standard is implemented. It is then the job of the designers to really think about how we can make this better. How can we improve on that?

I was recently in the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Downstairs on the third floor they have gender neutral toilets. The cubicles there have the toilet, they've got a basin, they've got a hand dryer and they're longer. It was amazing. It was a really nice experience. I could be in there and could wash my hands. I felt that I had privacy and control over the space. It was remarkable. It was one of the few examples that I've come across. I would say, however, in general, from my perspective, the standard is not too bad that we encounter in this country. Other countries are not quite as good as we are doing here. It's not all negative.

The CHAIR: In your written submission, you mentioned that, in your experience, charging for access to public toilets hasn't actually improved the quality. I wanted to ask you about that, because some other submissions have suggested that public toilets charge for access to be able to fund better maintenance.

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: My experience, primarily in Germany, is that public toilets are kind of like Fort Knox. Some of them are really hard to get in. They've got turnstiles. They're very hard to enter. You need change, you need money, to actually get in. Some have machines on the door where you have to drop in a coin in order to unlock the lock to go in. It does not necessarily mean that they are of a higher standard, cleaner or better maintained. It just means that they're better secured and access is restricted, which then deflects people into nearby parks or other environments to do what they need to do. There's not a guarantee that if you pay for it, you get better service. If you pay for it, you pay for it. You get better service if you have motivated cleaners that do that and look after the place well. That necessarily doesn't go hand in hand. They can just sit there and do other things. It depends how they're supervised, managed and instructed.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I might start on your comments about Singapore. I'm interested because, as I understand it, that's where the World Toilet Organization began, and then, obviously, World Toilet Day. Is it a focus that the Singaporean Government had about saying, "We want to be world leaders in that," or was it something that organically developed?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Honestly, I can't say. It would be my hunch that they purposefully pursued that. I fly to Germany regularly because I visit my mother, who lives there. The other stop I go to is Doha. When I stop in Doha, access to toilets is restricted. Even in the lounge, there are free toilets. There's 100 people in the lounge. There's always a queue. I might decide that next time I'd rather go via Singapore because it's easier there. It's a smart decision to attract business by providing great services. They are really exceptional.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Do you know if there is a national plan within Singapore or other countries?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: No, I don't.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: We heard earlier this morning about some of the principles around what should be considered for public access to toilets. Do you have any particular views? You've listed quite an extensive list of different things that should be. What would you see as the top five things that are a priority that should be in all public toilets?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Very basic things. It's the cubicle design and having a larger cubicle. The standards and that whole notion of the anthropometry of people and the size of the space that we need is from the '40s. I think Henry Dreyfuss developed the human measure. That's what those standards are based on. We have changed as a society, as people—some are larger; some are taller—and we carry things with us, which I don't think is considered there. The cubicle design and the inside of the cubicle would be number one. There's the provision of hooks. It doesn't need to be hooks. Hooks can come off. There can be other design solutions that provide shelves or recesses that are built in that are more durable that could work. That would be one thing.

Another point I raised is how, generally, they're very inward looking. Sometimes I'm in the city. Let's say I bought a bunch of grapes and I want to have lunch. I want to wash them. Where do I go to wash my grapes? Where do I access water? I can go into a public toilet. It's a very unappealing thought, right? Hence my provision that, in addition, we could perhaps have facilities on the outside where I can go. Because the infrastructure is already there, why don't we broaden it to something well designed and thought through on the outer? I can go wash some grapes or rinse a container because I had some lunch and keep an eye on the things that I've got on the park bench over there. Broaden the use of what we've got. We could value add by using the existing infrastructure to provide a better experience.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I'm mindful that in some areas you are limited with the space of what the current design is. Some of them are old. Council will be looking at making changes. So your suggestion would be less cubicles but bigger? Or would you be saying to keep the same size but bring out water and other things outside? Do you have a particular view?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: I think both of those. If you said less cubicles but bigger, there'd be uproar because people say there aren't enough cubicles to start with. Maybe make one bigger and then provide provisions on the outside as well.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Thanks, Doctor, for your helpful submission. I've observed that there has been a trend in recent decades towards single-use cubicles where you can access a cubicle from public space and you have your own private cubicle that's not shared public space, as compared to the old style of design where you went into a big room and there were multiple cubicles in the room with a partial wall. You could hear what's going on in the cubicle next to you and you could see under the lower part of it. Are you able to talk us through anything in terms of the history of that transition and when we first started to see the single-use cubicle become more prevalent? Are you aware of that?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: In terms of history, I'm sorry, but I cannot provide much detail. I think it's a good development, however.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: On that point, could you talk us through what you see as the main advantages of the single-use cubicle that's accessible from public space that has become so prevalent as opposed to the old boys-and-girls, cement-style block that we used to see?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: It provides more of a private space. While I'm in there, I feel more private. That would be the benefit that I see in that. I might also use it for respite—to get away, to take a break, to take a breather. It has been intense. Maybe I've had some bad news in the city. Where can I go to regroup? The toilet is the only safe private space that we've got, and it's free. That would certainly help in that, depending on how it's fitted out on the inside. That alone provides that, because I'm not exposed to other noises, sounds and smells like I would be in the other cubicle setting. That would be preferable.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: I've noticed that they seem to be less common, though not entirely absent, in what you might call places of mass gathering—sports stadiums, train stations and things like that. Is that an observation that you've made—that they tend to still have the shared public space model?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Yes. The only place I've come across the single cubicle ones is at resting spaces for cars, where you drive in and park. Roadside situations are where I encounter them. Within stadia or other places of mass gathering, there's an allocated space. When that thing gets designed, it gets allocated. We've got so many people; we need so many toilets. That's how that generally gets dealt with. At that point, there isn't sufficient attention being paid to those facilities. It's interesting to note that in most of the council submissions, there are costs around that and assets.

I think it's the same with the facility managers that are responsible for these huge facilities. They see them as a cost factor rather than an asset that they can capitalise on and use to their advantage. That gets minimised. It doesn't get a lot of attention, except, perhaps, in shopping centres. Some shopping centres are rather remarkable. A friend of mine pointed out Top Ryde shopping centre for its excellent parent rooms. They're actually well designed. They have a commercial incentive. They want to retain their customers, whereas, if I go to a stadium to

see a game, I go there because of the game. That's the overriding motivation, I guess, so less emphasis there perhaps.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: What would you see as the main design attributes that a single-use cubicle should have, say, sitting in a suburban street or sitting in a suburban park? What do you think are the main design facilities that it should have? It obviously should have a loo, but what else should it have?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: It shouldn't look like a prison. I've made the point, domestic use of public space, bring some elements of decoration in there; make it softer. Being able to maintain and clean it doesn't mean it needs white tiles and stark lighting and as few as possible affordances to put things down or whatever. You could actually go the other way and make them comfortable, inviting. They could have an atmosphere or mood that relates to the local setting, history—whatever. I think community consultation or involvement is a really critical element. I would argue that if you involve your local community in the design of the facilities it will significantly reduce vandalism. It will actually introduce an element of pride and protection.

There have been examples where, I think in Canberra, at Garema Place, Street Furniture Australia transformed the space and they involved all the stakeholders. It was, in the end, some homeless guys that defended and looked after things. They had public seating that wasn't bolted down but movable—chairs that you could move in public—which I think is a very good idea. None of those chairs were stolen or moved around, or they were moved around but they weren't misappropriated, and they were looked after. That's a key design feature, I think, that you need to have and then, you know, vandalism—also, I've worked in remote communities a lot, trying to improve environmental health in remote Aboriginal communities.

Generally the attitude was that people don't care for things. The data that we've acquired from surveying and fixing over 6,000 houses was that less than 10 per cent of the non-performing of things in those communities was due to vandalism. Often the vandalism occurred after the thing had broken down, as a frustration. The reason why things didn't work was not because people didn't know how to use them; it was because the wrong thing was installed, it was not installed properly, it wasn't maintained, it wasn't looked after, it was not fit for purpose—and then something goes wrong. What I'm trying to say is, if you make sure that what you put in there is fit for purpose, is well installed, well maintained, vandalism I think will not be as big an expense as it might be if you don't do these things.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: You talk in your submission about external access to water and power. Are you suggesting, say, in the case of single-use cubicles, that you wouldn't also have water inside the cubicle?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: No, you should have it inside as well. I think that's preferable. But, in addition, also have it outside. If I'm in a rest area, I park the car and want to wash out some containers, I can do it outside rather than go inside. So I wouldn't use up a cubicle for someone who actually needs it and I could do what I need to do, rinsing something out or washing something on the outside, which would be easy. In general, I've noticed that provision and access to drinking water and to power in the city is not easy to come by. I think we used to have more drinking fountains than we have today.

I don't have the data to back that up, but that's my observation. Access to water is a fundamental human right. I've seen security guards trying to fill up a kettle in the park opposite Central station because obviously they didn't have water in their security cubicle. The same with power. We all have these devices. They need power to be charged. People sometimes squat near vending machines to try and plug in. It's awkward. It's about how do we want to make these things that we need easy for our citizens to access and not feel like they're doing something untoward or, yes, not sanctioned really.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: I noticed in your submission that you referred to the quite frustrating experience of trying to fill up a water bottle in a very shallow basin.

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Yes.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Is there some sort of standard that those basins are constructed with reference to?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: No, I think that's a designer's decision. It looks nice. Even here, in the toilet I just used, it looks good, impressive, but I couldn't get a water bottle under there. It's a nice slab of stone. It's similar at Central station. Sometimes the water temperature is set to warm, which I guess is a public health measure, so you can't scold yourself. You get warm water and, yes, that's nice for washing my hands, but if I want to fill up a bottle it directs me to vending machines. I think one of the issues is that there's a lot of commercial options available. I can pay to charge my phone, I can pay to get drinking water, I can get a hotel room if I need respite—all of this—but it's the public space and how we furnish that for people like us and others to make it more usable,

because what we do in public are things that we also would do at home, for example, but they're not provisioned for. It is my view that we need more provisioning for that, and that's free access to water and power.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Another experience I think that people have that they probably don't like is finding the public toilet that doesn't have any soap. Is that something that you think has improved in recent times?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: I think it improved a little bit since COVID, because there was such an emphasis on having soap there, but I've heard from the health department, or people that actually work with the health department that schools don't provide soap because it's a cost factor. If kids go to the toilet in school, there's no soap because sometimes soap gets misused. But it's an expense and they've got to cut their expenses, so toilets have no soaps.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: How are they misusing soap, do you know?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: They might throw it at each other. I don't know what kids do, but it shouldn't be the reason to not provide it. But I guess that's what sometimes happens.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Are there particular design issues that you're aware of in relation to the provision of soap and toilet paper? Are there particular ways that you can do it to stop theft or vandalism?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: There's a plethora of options out there, really, from foam soap to liquid soap to actual soaps. Foam soap seems to be a very efficient way, I guess. Some are gravity-fed dispensers; there are some others where you've got to push. Some of those are not always working. Some of them don't look appealing. Toilet roll dispensers: I guess there's room for improvement. You've got very big rolls. It's very fiddly to get the toilet paper out of there. You've got other ones that are sort of the zigzag folding mechanisms. They're hard to use as well. It's a standard roll and there are some that have a number of rolls on top that drop down. We need to do some user testing there to really find out what is the best. It's a tricky issue, actually, and I don't think we've found the right solution to how to provide that successfully yet.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Are there any innovations that you've noticed? I'm just thinking particularly of public toilets in quite remote parts of the State. I drive around those places a fair bit and you now quite commonly see a small public toilet constructed, I think, with a steel frame, light cladding, a drop toilet, and it's very sort of rudimentary and basic, but does the job I suppose. Have you got any particular observations about design standards in respect of those sorts of toilets in places where practically you're probably not going to be able to get the same level of maintenance, the same level of expenditure? Are there smart, cheap ways of doing things well that you're aware of?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: I think they're a good example. In my experience as well, I think they're actually surprisingly well designed and perform really well. There's sufficient space, they don't smell and generally they are well supplied as well.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: If you could highlight a particular main issue around design in terms of public toilets, what would you identify as the biggest issues we should be thinking about?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: I guess it's a social aspect, you know, the emotional aspects that I mentioned earlier that are not considered in the standards. I think what I've written in here as well is that they communicate our values and expectations, like what is the public conduct, and they set a tone. If they are well designed—and they should be exceedingly well designed. They should be so well designed that they really become an attraction in themselves.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: I was interested in something that you said in your submission about the changing meaning over time of the word "toilet". That it used to denote:

> … the process of washing oneself, dressing, and attending to one's appearance. ...their toilet completed, they finally went back downstairs…

Is that suggesting that, in the past, there was a different concept of public toilets? Or were you referring more to just a semantic issue?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: No, there was. They were more generously appointed. They had anterooms where you could sit and take a break and actually check your appearance, and all those kind of things. Now they've been whittled down to this single issue cubicle where you go in and fulfil this one function. Then you get out again as quickly as you can, generally, because it's such an unpleasant machine-like processing design there. Previously, it was more generous. They were referred to as "restrooms", which is a nice connotation that has been lost. It's a place to go and also have a rest. Not just to use the facilities, but to just rest and regroup. We've eliminated that. I think that's a shame. Those sort of thoughts should be reconsidered and reintegrated into it, really.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Have you got any thoughts, just lastly, about the legislative frameworks? There's been suggestions that this should be the subject of public health legislation because there's obviously health issues with it. There's been suggestions about the local government legislation that should maybe incorporate it, or maybe it should be some sort of planning instrument that requires councils to do things. I know that your focus has been more on internal design but, I was just wondering, do you have any thoughts on that, on how legally this could be achieved?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: If you have to legislate for it, then it's always people will meet the requirements and often won't exceed them. What would be good would be to reframe them as a treasured asset in a community that is a must have, rather than need to have. There should be a motivation for having the best toilet in the country, or something like this. It needs to be promoted through other means than just legislative. Of course, that would be very good to back them up, but there needs to be a drive for awareness and utility and function about them to turn them into more than what they are at the moment.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Just out of interest, in jurisdictions where they're charging money for people to use public toilets, how does that work? Do you have to swipe a credit card in Germany to get in?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: No, you need change. You actually need money. It's awkward. Today, I just have my phone with me. I have no physical currency on me, so it wouldn't work. It often doesn't work. At petrol stations you get a voucher, and then you can redeem it if you pay for your fuel or for a coffee or something like that. They're trying to minimise the charge there. But in public settings, yes, you've got to pay. There is no change machine in there. If you've only got notes, to get the change, if you go to the adjacent businesses they're not very happy to give you change for that because it happens quite often. It is not really well considered at all. It's a deterrent, really, rather than—it's an absolute last resort, really.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Have you got any thoughts on the drying of hands in terms of the industrial design issues there? Are you aware of what is best practice, what's efficient, what's good energy use?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Yes, well I think the—

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Hand towels as compared to hot air?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Yes. Hot air, probably. The Dyson dryers are probably the best ones on the market, but they're very loud, so some people have issues with that. Other people think it's nice because you know that someone actually washed their hands, so there's a dual approach to that. I think options should be good. The provision of hot air is good also if you have to attend to other issues like you've spilled something, you want to wash something out, you need to dry your shirt or whatever it is. You can do that under the hot air. Much easier if the hot air is not encased, as it is in some of the designs, but freely accessible underneath. That also has to do with the height at which it's mounted. Whereas, paper towels are the options for those for whom the noise is perhaps too loud.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Thank you for your submission and for appearing today. I was just thinking, when you have guests coming to your own home, you always—well, I do—ensure that your bathroom is clean, looks presentable, and that you wouldn't mind that someone uses the bathroom. Whereas, I find in going to public toilets, sometimes it seems to be an afterthought. It's on the outskirts of town, and not very well looked after. How would you think poorly designed public toilets impact public space usage?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Significantly. They lead to people avoiding the spaces, really. If there are no good facilities, why would I want to go there? How can I enjoy them? I wouldn't be able to enjoy them because I probably have to spend time in discomfort, or make huge efforts to go somewhere in order to be able to enjoy them. They're critical from that point of view. Just on that, you mentioned the home and people using the facilities there. One thing I noticed is that, due to the housing crisis and high costs of rents and all of this, people, rather than just share flats—which they did when I was a student, for example—now share rooms. We have situations where people share bedrooms with strangers because the rents are so high. Instead of renting a room, they're renting a bed. It's not uncommon for maybe ten people to live in a two-bedroom flat. A two-bedroom flat generally has one toilet, so we've got environmental health issues right there. We've got communicable diseases. We've got a whole range of issues.

What that means is that these people, they're not only students, they're also—I've come across in my some of my research—retirees, single mums, professionals, tradies, people from out of town that need these facilities. They then use public facilities because they have no privacy at home. Their home is just a bed, so where do they go? They go to shopping centres, or they go into the public space and then use toilets and bathrooms there. We also need to consider them when we think about public toilets. It's not just the commuter or the transient person that is passing through the city or the visitor. It's also those who are in the city on a more permanent basis, but not in these traditional housing arrangements that we assume are—or might not assume, but come to understand as

being the norm because they're changing quite rapidly in response to the costs. They then use these facilities as well. Henceforth, they need to be better.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Would you say that people avoid the public toilets if they're not inviting? Would that mean that they're also missing an opportunity where, say, someone stops to use the public toilet, then they might go and visit the shops and things like that? Are they disadvantaging the welcomeness of their town because of poor public toilet design?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Certainly. If the public facilities are not suitable or appealing or attractive, it will have an impact like that. What could happen as a result, perhaps, people then get driven into commercial environments, which might be shopping centres and so on. Then that might relate to them spending time in those environments. Councils might be—well, I don't know this, whether they're cost-shifting or not, but it would be a way for them to get around that. It is about the provision of facilities in the public sphere that matters, and to provide them free of cost or the commercial pressure that might be as a result of that.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you think that New South Wales should adopt, say, holistic public toilet planning rather than purely functional approval?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Well, the first thing would be to maybe expand the term "public toilet" and try and flesh out what more that is. With this inquiry, you got submissions that make plenty of suggestions of what more should be included and considered. I think maybe the result of that—the terminology should change so that the understanding of what that is that you provide to the public is better communicated, because a public toilet is a single-function issue provision. It's not that; it's actually more than that. It's private space in public. It provides for a whole range of situations that it can cater for. We've got good submissions from people that are neurodivergent and their requirements, and all of this, and that needs to be incorporated. I think it needs to be reframed entirely. That would be my suggestion, rather than focus on the toilet and the biological need there. It needs to be broader than that, and then that should be represented in required frameworks, legally or whatever.

The CHAIR: Mr D'Adam, on videoconference, have you got any questions?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I've got two questions. The first one was really about what kind of design measures can be put in place to facilitate more regular cleaning, or ease of cleaning, of public toilet facilities. Are you familiar with particular design measures that might be able to facilitate a cleaner environment?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Yes, sure. I think some of those might actually be specified in the standards, like curving of the flooring to come up the wall for easy cleaning, no sharp corners, things like this. I think they've probably been well addressed.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So you think that, in terms of the national Building Code, those elements are already pretty well regulated?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: I would say so. I'm not an expert on the Building Code. I'm not an architect. But I would say that provisions for floor waste, for drainage, for non-slip tiles, for curving up the walls with the flooring material, for other provisions are there. I think they would have very carefully been considered. I think from the cleaning perspective they're probably sufficient. I don't think we need huge innovations to make the maintenance more efficient.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask about toilet seats? I was recently in Europe, and a lot of the public toilets just had no seat at all. Do you have any observations about the need for seats?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Toilet seats have the least amount of germs on them in the toilet cubicle. Most of them are on the handles. There is a misconception that the toilet seat is not clean. It gets pandered to by providing toilet seat covers and all sorts of things. But toilet seats are not generally the issue. Removing them, I guess, is trying to address an issue in the public perception of them that actually is not really an issue as such. There is data that shows that the toilet seat is the least germ-dense environment in those cubicles, so that's not the issue. I think the toilet could also actually have a lid, a seat you can sit on that is comfortable. That would be something that I'd suggest. The normal toilet seat cover is just a lid, as such, but they're not really designed to be a seat. I think it would be a nice innovation to introduce a seat that you can fold down and sit on and not use the toilet, but you could sit on and rest, if you need to, in that cubicle. That would be a worthwhile addition, I think.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: My final question, and I'm happy for you to perhaps take this on notice if a little bit more reflection is required, but I wonder whether you might be able to articulate the kind of design principles that you think might be usefully incorporated in some kind of regulation around the provision of public toilets.

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: I would need to take this on notice. It's quite a big question. I made some points here, what I thought would be good things to include. As mentioned previously, that's not just inside focused but also provide access to services on the outside: power, USB charging, for example, make it possible to fill up water bottles, and things like this. Provide a cubicle that's spacious and bigger, so if I have a coat, if I have a bag, if I carry something, a shopping bag, I can actually get in there and store that, not on the floor, where it might be wet or dirty, and use the facility in a way that supports all of that, which currently I think I can't. I haven't come across any, actually, except in Singapore, where there's a shelf behind the toilet where I can put things on. It's marvellous.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That's all for me. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: In your written submission, you talk about airflow and ventilation often not being addressed successfully. Can you speak to how that could or should be done better?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Yes. I just, on my way here, used the facility at Central station. I walked in, and it was humid and warm. I was the only one in there, so there wasn't much smell, but often they're not well ventilated and sometimes they're either too cold or too hot. There is a standard, or there's a State guideline on ventilation and how that should happen, and movement of air in those spaces. I don't know how well that's monitored or implemented.

The CHAIR: I appreciate you may not know the answer to this, but is that a fault of the National Construction Code for toilets, or is this one of those legacy issues because so many toilets are built outside of that framework?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: I think it's a maintenance issue, that there's not someone there that actually checks and measures, and perhaps knows what the temperature is and should be. Maybe the thermostat is broken—it could be as simple as that—and no-one checks on that.

The CHAIR: We've talked a little bit already about soap dispensers and other things that could be designed to support use without vandalism and that sort of thing. We've had a couple of other submissions relating to provision of period products and even things like sunscreen in public parks or sporting facilities. Are they things that you've ever seen designed in a way that would be suitable for use in public toilets?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: It's hard for me to comment on the period products and menstruation products. I don't have access to those cubicles. Sometimes, however, at the one at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, there was a container that was in the cubicle at the back, on the side. I assume they work. I've never used them. These containers are designed for the use of the business that supplies and services them. It's not necessarily designed from the perspective of the people using them. I would inquire what could be done there to improve the design. They're probably very well thought through in terms of how many they can get on the back of their utes and how they can empty them and whatever, but how well they've considered the user interaction and engagement, I'm not sure. I don't find the provision of them difficult. Maybe it'd be better if they'd be wall mounted rather than standing on the floor so it's easier to clean underneath. There might be a way to integrate them better.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: On that question of germs that you talked about, are you aware of any relevant sources of information that we could look at in terms of that question of germs and public health risk posed by public toilets? As a follow-up, are there any industrial design issues we should be thinking about in terms of minimising those health risks?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: In terms of sources, I would have to respond to that afterwards. I can't supply them off the top of my head.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Sure, yes.

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: In terms of industrial design, it's the material selection. There's materials that are more and less favourable to germ growth and reproduction. I think that's what we could use, like brass, for example, that was used in handrails and these little exchange dishes that you used to have at the railway. Brass is not really great for bacteria to live on.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Interesting.

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: So there's a very simple reason. Silver is another one. That's why we had silver service as a mark of quality and assurance that this is safe. Years ago, silver nanoparticles had quite a run, but then there were other issues associated with them, and we haven't heard much of them anymore. So there are certainly opportunities where we could look closer into what kind of materials and coatings can be applied to surfaces to make them less susceptible to bacterial growth and transmission. There are also some coatings that are

very repellent, so things fall off and peel off and purl off. They're super-liquid or slippery, sort of thing. There's plenty of material science and industrial design. Surely we could provide some suggestions there.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: In terms of the single-use cubicle that we were talking about before, I've noticed that some of them, where there's more than one—and there's normally more than one, I think, with your normal council-provided public toilet—sometimes there's some male, some female, some unisex. Have you got any thoughts about whether, in the context of single-use cubicles, should we continue with some male, some female, some unisex, or do you think there's not necessarily in that context a need for gender segregation?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: I think some of the submissions that you've received make plenty of points about that. Personally, no, I haven't got evidence behind that, so I would only talk of personal preference. I wouldn't mind either way, but I guess for some of those groups it's important that they have adequate provision. I think you have them already at hand.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: There's a bit of an enduring idea that men are messier.

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Well, actually, some of the submissions dispute that, and there are others that make the other point. I guess it depends if there's a provision, besides the toilet, of a urinal in the same cubicle. So how do we provide that? Because messiness—

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: So a toilet and a urinal in the cubicle?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Perhaps. There's documented spray. There's evidence that, of course, if you pee into a toilet, there is spray, so it is messy in that regard, unless you sit down, and then you would have to make sure that you instruct men to sit down when they pee, and that might reduce the messiness. But otherwise it might be easier to provide a urinal for those, and if it's in a mixed-use cubicle, maybe there's a cover that can be opened and closed in order to be less confronting or something.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Do you have any thoughts about the style of toilets in terms of industrial design? I know that in Asia, for example, you have the squat toilet; in Europe, the bidet, at least in France, I think. I'm not an expert in it. Have you got any thoughts about that question, about the design of the toilet? We obviously have a certain type of design here. Is there any room to move on that that's relevant to think about?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Well, it's a cultural issue, isn't it, so it depends, what is your population? We are quite multicultural, so we could have a provision of squat and sit-down toilets. There were some toilets designed in the '20s that were a combination of squat and sit-down. We have a fold-down seat or a squat toilet. That kind of provided an option for both. Surely that can be done. That can be done in a safe and a good manner. So a broader range, perhaps, to reflect the mixture of population that we've got—cultures—. It would be perhaps welcome, I think. It could be a nice gesture. It's also healthier, right? There are some people that promote squatting's a healthier bowel health position. But it comes back to culture and customs, I guess.

The CHAIR: Thank you. In the couple of minutes that remain, I haven't got any more burning questions, but is there anything else that you were hoping to have the opportunity to talk about that we haven't asked specifically?

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: No. I'm surprised. The hour went by pretty quick. I was a little worried. One point I've got here is, what I've noticed in these submissions from the councils, many of them, as I said, list it as a cost factor. They're quite well aware of how much the facilities cost to maintain. The one that I've read, it's stuck in my mind, I don't know for what reason, was the one from Blacktown City Council. They say they've got 216 facilities, and they paid $15 million to maintain them a year, and they've got trucks and cars and personnel to maintain them. Only 74 of them are open 24 hours.

So I think the opening hours is a critical thing, especially also on the trains. I live up in Blackheath. When I arrive this evening, the facilities will be closed. One of the submissions said, "We don't have a curfew. Why are they closed? We're allowed on the street." They should be open. But the point I wanted to make is that while we've got the costings from councils about what it costs to operate these facilities, we don't have the numbers of users that use them. So while they gather the data about operating expenses, we don't know how many people are benefiting by that.

What I did, I just used those 216 toilets, $15 million per year, and I thought, if they'd be open 24 hours a day, it comes to a cost of $8 an hour. That is not a high cost to provide 216 facilities. If we'd assume, I don't know, is there five or 10 people using them in one hour, then the cost, that seems to be the issue, can suddenly appear rather minor. Because 20¢ per person to use this, that seems really very cheap. Bridge crossing costs more. It would be good to get some data on how many people use these facilities rather than just to have the focus on how much they cost to run. If councils could install some counters and get some data loggers to sort of gather some

data that way, then we could compare. If you have good facilities, how much more traffic do we get there; if we've got bad facilities, how much traffic do we get there? If we make an intervention, what changes? Then there'd be some empirical sort of measurements for them to see. "Ah! We make an improvement here." At the moment, this is all hearsay.

What I've learnt from my work in the remote Indigenous communities, there was a lot of hearsay about those people that had no foundation in reality whatsoever. So I think if you get some more data about how many people use facilities and the impact that has—I think one of your submissions quotes Access Economics, that says it would make a contribution of $12.5 billion to the economy if we would have better facilities. And we would spend another $1.2 billion in salaries that would be disbursed just for maintenance staff. These are very convincing figures, I think. Anyhow, thank you for the opportunity.

The CHAIR: I think you did take a question on notice, so the secretariat will be in touch with you about that, and also if we have any further supplementary questions on reflection.

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: Okay. Thanks for the opportunity. I really appreciate it.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for sharing your time and your expertise.

CHRISTIAN TIETZ: You're welcome.

(The witness withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

Mrs JUDY FINDLAY, Member, Barellan Branch, Country Women's Association of NSW, before the Committee via videoconference, sworn and examined

Mrs HEIDI MORTIMER, Member, Dunedoo Branch, Country Women's Association of NSW, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Good morning. Thank you so much for making the time to give evidence this morning. Would you like to start by making a short opening statement?

JUDY FINDLAY: I can do that for you. Our submission is informed by CWA of New South Wales policy positions. These concern adult disabled changing facilities, bins in male public toilets for the disposal of continence aids and gender-inclusive parent facilities that enable parents to easily assist children in their care to use a public toilet. Public toilet facilities in this day and age need to meet the needs of people with disability and their carers, particularly considering our ageing population. These toilets should be available, accessible and inclusive.

In both rural areas and cities, disabled people and their carers must travel for medical appointments and treatment, as well as for family occasions and business. An accessible adult changing facility is a necessity, allowing people with high support needs to be part of community life and activities without the time restriction and the difficulties imposed by toilet limitations. Availability is a concern. For example, if you were travelling on the Pacific Highway between North Sydney and Brisbane, you would travel for at least five hours before reaching a public toilet with any changing facilities.

In western New South Wales, if you travel west of Dubbo, there are simply none available at all, and this is per the National Public Toilet Map. In today's world, is this acceptable for families coping with care for someone with special needs? Transporting a cancer patient to specialist appointments in Griffith in 2015, we were forced to use the damp floor of a disabled toilet. There was no alternative. We have also witnessed a person with disabilities forced to change in our main street, somewhat shielded by carers, but this was due to lack of available facilities. This is not good enough.

We support the provision of bins in male public toilets for the disposal of continence aids. More than 2.4 million Australian boys and men live with incontinence, and 42 per cent of these are under the age of 50 years. These numbers will likely grow. Half of men aged 85 and over experience urinary incontinence. These men have increased difficulty leaving home and being active in society due to incontinence, and generally have nowhere to dispose of any continence aids. In Heidi's local area, only one out of the 36 public toilet facilities have a suitable disposal bin for men.

Parents and carers of small children of opposite sex need access to suitable toilets. Unisex family toilets, clearly signposted as such, should be universally available in our public spaces to provide comfort, convenience and peace of mind for everyone using these facilities. Without them, parents are forced to make decisions that can lead to fear, social judgement, or requesting strangers to assist their children with something as private and personal as toileting. The Country Women's Association advocates on behalf of women and families. We believe that all community members deserve dignity and consideration when exercising the basic right of using public toilets. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, that was very informative. Was that a shared opening statement or is there another one as well?

HEIDI MORTIMER: No, that was shared.

The CHAIR: I might start off with the questions. You've given a really important description of why these kinds of facilities are important to people. What have you heard? If these things aren't provided, what impact does that have on people? What are the decisions that people are making?

HEIDI MORTIMER: The first thing would be social isolation. We're seeing that with incontinence widely, and I'm speaking on behalf of the CWA but I'm also a continence physiotherapist, so I work in this space every day. The social isolation is documented, particularly for men. There are high levels of men having lower quality of life and social exclusion through not having facilities available to them when they leave. In terms of accessing change facilities, you see the same sort of thing: people holding back from attending events in society and being part of the community because they know the risk is there of not having access. And, with toileting, it's a really personal and embarrassing matter, so in terms of the stakes, the stakes are quite high for people.

If something were to go wrong or if they can't access a toilet, often considered a very embarrassing situation, people will just consider the stakes and the risks of that too high and not engage with community. We're seeing a similar sort of thing in terms of parents, the risk of parents going out, and often things will fall back to

mothers being carers of children because it's more socially acceptable, just through our cultural history, with women being the main carers, and a lot of men are less inclined to want to look after their daughters in a public space as well. This is all sort of discussions that have come about when the CWA make these policies.

The CHAIR: You're obviously representing country women and country families. Are there particular considerations you think the Committee should take on board in terms of the needs of rural and regional communities compared to urban areas?

HEIDI MORTIMER: I think it comes down to accessibility and the need for travel as well. Judy mentioned in the opening statement about the need for travel and a lot of the time, if we're talking travel to appointments, travel to see family, travel to access other services, a lot of what comes into travel is the use of public toilets. Rurally, a lot of the time the public toilets are the only ones available because there are no large shopping centres to access change facilities and better disabled facilities, and there are no large fast food franchises with clean toilets. We are just relying on public toilets. In terms of rural areas, I think that's really where it's highlighted, that for anyone with mobility needs and incontinence needs really the public toilet is the only chance they have for accessing facilities.

The CHAIR: Just to follow up, are you particularly talking about roadside stops while you're en route somewhere, or is it facilities in parks and public places as well?

HEIDI MORTIMER: All of that, yes. There are stretches of the country where there are no good accessible roadside facilities, or there aren't any between a certain stretch, so you're relying on a small country town's park public toilet to access.

The CHAIR: You gave a couple of examples in the opening statement about particular stretches of highway where, if you were driving in that direction, I think you said, five hours, which is astonishing—you may need to take this question on notice, but I'm actually really interested in having an understanding from your members if there are other examples like that. Are there particular toilet black spots that the Committee should be aware of?

HEIDI MORTIMER: I think where that information came from is the National Public Toilet Map. A lot of that information will be gathered from there. That's also where we found the lack of change facilities further west of Dubbo, and north of the State as well. There's also a big gap—according to that map—anywhere north of Tamworth. Even towards Inverell, Narrabri, Moree, there are no facilities marked on the toilet map. I would assume that, if a council has gone to the effort of making that toilet, they would register it on the Public Toilet Map. Although, that is generally done by Continence Foundation members. There are lots of methods that influence how that map is made. There would be other, I would say, black holes we don't know about. It would be interesting to gather some information amongst our members of where those might be.

The CHAIR: There's been a fair bit of discussion already around the design of cubicles themselves. In a lot of rural areas, in parks and public spaces, you have the single cubicle that has the wash basin inside it and opens directly onto a park or open space, compared to a design where you have a shared private space and a row of cubicles. It occurs to me—and I'm hearing your recommendations around, for example, parents and children being able to enter together, and people with disability and their carers being able to enter together. Do you feel that more universal design meets those needs? Is that what you'd be recommending?

HEIDI MORTIMER: Yes, I would say so. Judy, do you have a point on this?

JUDY FINDLAY: I was just going to say that the single cubicle, larger area, would be ideal for this, because it allows the parent a little bit of room as well to move about and perhaps change a young child if necessary. Some areas in the Riverina where I live do have these, but they're few and far between. Myself, I am slightly challenged as far as mobility goes. I use a wheelie walker, and I have great difficulty in accessing some of the disabled toilets because the outer door is so heavy. It almost needs a muscle man to stand there and open it for you. If you lean across, and you're trying to manoeuvre a walker, you lose all your strength trying to lean across, let alone open the door. If you try and swing the door, it just doesn't happen sometimes.

The CHAIR: Thank you. That's a great example.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Can I thank you both for the submission. It's incredibly helpful. You zero in on some really specific issues that are really useful. I might ask a question first to Ms Mortimer. I've noticed that in Dunedoo you actually seem pretty well served by public toilets. I was wondering if you could explain to us the history behind that. I stop there regularly on my travels around. It seems relatively well serviced compared to other towns of a comparable size. Is there some sort of interesting history about that?

HEIDI MORTIMER: I think it's to do with our recognition of ourselves as a by-through. We know that a lot of the time people stopping in Dunedoo are stopping to use toilets because they are travelling somewhere.

I think we ended up deciding—I think these decisions were made when I was quite young, so forgive me if I don't quite nail it—but, yes, just recognition that what people were wanting to use our town facilities for was toileting. If we have a good facility, then people are more likely to stop and then spend money at our town centre, particularly accessing our cafes and our supermarket. It came along those lines. Because of the set-up of Dunedoo—one side of the main street being park—it was a recognition of the park and the facilities. The town was just really all for the public toilet being a feature.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: I think I'm right in saying there's actually two significant public toilet facilities on the main street of Dunedoo. Is that right?

HEIDI MORTIMER: Yes.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Are both of those single-use cubicles accessible from public space? Or is there an older style one? I just can't recall.

HEIDI MORTIMER: There's an older style one, and there's a newer style one with the automatic door.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Does the newer one have any other sort of community facilities or storage space or parenting room or something like that? Am I wrong in thinking that?

HEIDI MORTIMER: No, I don't believe there's a parenting room in that one. I think it still needs some review.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: We've been taking evidence about the single-use cubicle—just a question for you both, if I could. It seems that there might be some circumstances where limitations on space, for example, might mean that single-use cubicles are not accessible. For example, a busy train station or a big football stadium, maybe an older one where the old-style toilet is needed. In terms of regional New South Wales, suburban streets, public parks, all those sorts of areas, is it your view—both of you—that we should be aiming towards the single-use cubicle accessible from public space because it addresses those issues that you've raised in your submission in terms of parents being able to access them without concerns about entering an opposite sex space, privacy, and all those sorts of concerns?

HEIDI MORTIMER: As long as it's clearly signposted as such. I think the understanding around single-room cubicles at the moment is that they're just disabled facilities. Whereas, if it's signposted as this has facilities for parents, and it has facilities for the disabled population, I think that would create a better uptake. Right now, like a lot of parents that we speak to, they don't want to be using disabled toilet facilities that have always been branded as such. I understand the need for making use of the space that you have, and wanting to create all these facilities, if we could, but sometimes there is just one space that can serve that or serve those several needs.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Have you got any thoughts on that, Mrs Findlay?

JUDY FINDLAY: I just feel that the single space is ideal, if we could get it. It's possibly a question of money, in a lot of cases. Places that already have a public toilet, the council is probably not going to line up and offer to build an extra one. I think it will be more essential as people are travelling a whole lot more in our area, in the Riverina anyway. We have caravans going through, sometimes four and five in a little convoy, and the people are looking for facilities. They do stop in our town because the facilities are close to the road, the toilets are new, and people find them easy to use. We don't have the changing facilities, but we do have a really good area for the disabled toilet. We do have buses as well that come through, both tourist buses and the rail buses that come through as a routine daily.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Where I live in Dubbo, the council recently built what I would call an old-style toilet with male and female spaces with rows of cubicles, et cetera. It was a bit controversial in the community, with a lot of people expressing the preference for single-use cubicles. Are you aware of women who simply might not use that sort of facility where they've got to, for example, enter around a corner and then enter a large shared public space with a row of cubicles? Do you think that's a disincentive to using those sort of facilities? Do you think that the single-use cubicle—where you know what you're getting, in the sense that you enter through a door and you know what's in there before you enter—is a more attractive proposition for those people?

HEIDI MORTIMER: I see your point, and I see how people have got there. There is no obvious stance amongst our organisation on this question. In terms of multigendered toilets, or all genders being able to access the one facility, as long as the idea behind it is inclusivity and access for the groups that we're mentioning, then I don't see a downside necessarily. It's a particular question that I don't know the stance among our organisation exactly. Judy, do you have any thoughts on that?

JUDY FINDLAY: No, I don't think it's been discussed locally. We've just had our meeting with all the other branches in our area and I asked the ladies if they had any ideas to bring forward, and nobody mentioned that one.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Another concern that was raised in Dubbo in that context was parents of young children, for example, using that park—say, a male parent or father not wanting to enter the girls toilet with a young daughter because it's maybe seen as not acceptable, and that being another advantage of the single-use cubicle. Is that a view that's been expressed by members?

HEIDI MORTIMER: Absolutely.

JUDY FINDLAY: Yes, definitely.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: What's the prevailing social convention around that, do you think? Do you think it's acceptable for a man to enter the girls toilet for that purpose, or would that be seen as a total no-no? I've never been in that situation, personally.

HEIDI MORTIMER: I've witnessed that situation many times. Generally, people don't have an issue with that, but it really just depends on the individuals in the situation. I think it is becoming more socially acceptable, and often the man is the first person to say something about why he's in the bathroom. That's where it comes into that—people asking strangers to care for their children. I've seen that situation many times where a man will say, "Look, I feel awkward about entering the women's bathroom. Can you just look out for my daughter? She's in there." Which puts a whole different level of safety perspective onto this discussion and the decisions that parents are having to make, simply around toileting. Whereas if we had more inclusive bathrooms in that sense, or a parents space or the single-use, that would eliminate that as a problem.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I might start with toilets that the CWA manages, and if you're aware of any in New South Wales. I'm happy for you to take that on notice.

JUDY FINDLAY: No, I'm not aware of any that CWA themselves manage.

HEIDI MORTIMER: I think it would be only ones at any CWA rooms, but I don't have any information about how many there might be.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: If you could take that on notice. I'm particularly interested in how, if you receive any local, State or Federal funding in any way, to ensure that they're open for the general public to use if that is the case. You're familiar with the toilet map. I'm interested to know whether you think the information that's available on that is adequate and enough, or do we need to look at doing a State audit or assessment of what toilets are available here in New South Wales?

HEIDI MORTIMER: As far as I can tell, it's a very contemporary and up-to-date map, but it is managed by a Federal department and, as part of that, the continence program. On paper, it should be working really well and be very up to date, but I'm not sure on their level of audit. But I know they have several layers of tech support and community input, so I have learned to trust it as a resource. But, definitely, it could be a bit more friendly. They do have an app version but it is a bit clunky. It could do with, perhaps, an update, and if there is information that is lacking from that that anyone is bringing up. So far, I can see it covers the main perspectives and it tries to see what's accessible, but I don't know on the levels that they decide toilets are accessible. So there could be room for a State version of that, but then there comes with it the promotion of it and who is auditing it, who's keeping track of it and who's making sure it's accurate.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Do you know if the national toilet map also includes State-run or State-managed toilets, like at train stations? Are they also included in that map, or is that a separate thing altogether?

HEIDI MORTIMER: It may be separate, because they do have shopping centre car parks and things like that. I don't know how much is related to transport, and certainly I can't really see too many sticking out on there that are State run, but it could be just needing a closer look.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: And that's something that we can ask as to whether or not the States feed that information in. There's been a bit of discussion this morning about the local government role in managing, upgrading and then the funding. Do you think that, overall, ensuring that there are enough public toilets—or whether it's also in partnership with organisations or businesses—should be something that is managed at a local government level, supported by State, or something that should be managed at a State level or at a Federal level? That's the big question, because then it comes back to where the money rolls from.

JUDY FINDLAY: I think the management should come from local council, because they have local information and they're aware of the layout of towns and villages in their area. But, mostly, they're always

complaining they haven't got enough money, so I say the funding would have to come from either State or Federal. I do know that when they were updating our local toilets in our own village—we have about 300 people in our village, but it's a very central area for travellers. We get people along Burley Griffin Way all the time—transport drivers, B-doubles and that sort of thing.

During harvest we get farmers, as well, because our public park is very close to the GrainCorp organisation, so they're very well used. When they were about to update the toilets, they asked CWA in Barellan for their opinion. We wrote with what we considered were basic requirements, and then that was approved and we received a little diagram saying what they were going to build. Next thing we found, they must have been short of funds, so they tried to downsize the ladies toilets. We put in an objection, and our instructions were followed to the letter, then. We found that these toilets were much more satisfactory than what they could have been.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Don't take on the CWA! My final question comes back to reporting and complaints. What is the process now? Is it coordinated, or is it just if your local council happens to have a complaints hotline? Do you know anything about that at all?

JUDY FINDLAY: We do have a person that looks after that sort of thing, and we can phone him direct. We have done.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Do you know if that's a coordinated thing across the State with each local government area, or does it just depend on the council at the time?

JUDY FINDLAY: I'm just referring to our local council, but I would say there would be someone accessible to take complaints from each council.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What do you think regional councils can do to ensure better access to public toilets? We heard earlier they're usually not fit for purpose, so what do you think regional councils can do?

HEIDI MORTIMER: If they're interested in some resources or figuring out where to start, an organisation we've referred to in our policy is Changing Places. In terms of change rooms, in terms of making these accessible and the process of doing that, they've got some great guidelines on how to achieve that. There are resources out there that councils can use that have been very well thought out and had great input from the people that need to access these. I think it's just a matter of marrying the resource with the council. In terms of general access, I think we've got the main ideas of disabled parking spaces near the toilets are important, and then making sure that the toilets are accessible, because some councils lock them at all hours when people are wanting to travel, maybe earlier and later than typically some toilets are available.

That's where the park toilets really come in handy, rather than relying on toilets from shopping centres, so the council-run toilets are quite important for people travelling outside of typical business hours as well. In terms of the construction of toilets, we've referred to the National Construction Code throughout our policy as well, which has some great guidelines on how accessible toilets can be achieved. In terms of continence bins, I know it's not quite access, but it is part of our policy. There's the BINS4Blokes movement, which has a lot of detail on how councils can contact organisations and get bins put into men's toilets. So the resources are there. I think it's a matter of utilising the right ones.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Just with regard to changes that can be made to accommodate parents and carers who are accompanying their children to public toilets, I know my son when he's with his daughter uses the disabled toilet, but that's not really satisfactory. So, what changes do you think could be made there so that he's not taking someone else's resource but is still able to feel that his daughter is safe in going to the bathroom?

HEIDI MORTIMER: Unisex family toilets are what we've suggested in our policy, which is the use of family toilets separate to—whether or not there's a few different toilets in a public toilet block, whether there's the disabled toilet, a family toilet, two toilets or a room, and then some male and female toilets, or if that wants to be a unisex toilet block. But making facilities that are clearly signposted and made for purpose for families takes away that feeling of using a disabled toilet, which has been set up for disabled individuals, as opposed to families. I think that's where the family toilet becomes its own need, and that's why, I guess, we have a separate policy for family toilets, as opposed to accessible toilets for disabled people.

The CHAIR: We're actually over time. Thank you so much for sharing your time and your experiences with us today. I think there was a question taken on notice there, and there'll probably be some supplementary questions in writing as well, so the secretariat will be in contact with you about that.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Mrs ROCHELLE COURTENAY, Founder and Managing Director, Share the Dignity, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Miss BRITTINY EDWARDS, Advocacy and Communications Specialist, Share the Dignity, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Would you like to start by making a short opening statement?

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: Yes. I'm Rochelle, the founder of Share the Dignity, a national charity that I started in 2015, when I read an article that talked about the fact that women and girls were having to use socks and newspaper to deal with their period. I couldn't believe that this was happening in Australia, and I couldn't believe, actually, that no-one had done anything about it. The phrase "period poverty" had never been seen anywhere. I'm really proud of the work that Share the Dignity has done in the past 10 years to ensure that people who are doing it tough don't have to go without.

I know that, hearing stories firsthand about women, about girls, having to steal socks from a laundromat to deal with their period because they cannot afford the very basic essentials, it is as important for us to be able to declare that provision of period products should be as accessible as toilet paper. But even hearing stories about how a mum has dropped their kids off at school and picked up the wrong handbag and doesn't have access to period products in that handbag and has got her period unexpectedly is as important to ensuring that there is provision of period products in every bathroom in Australia, whether that be at school, at work, at university, participating in sport. That's why we're so passionate about ensuring that everybody has access to the basic of essentials. We're here to answer any questions that you may have.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you. I should note, because we're here at Parliament House, that we've recently had period products provided in some of the toilets here, which is a really fantastic initiative for a public building.

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: Well done.

The CHAIR: So we've made some progress here. In your written submission, you've given a list of locations where you believe that the Dignity Vending Machines are most needed, and it was schools, community centres, hospitals, public spaces. Could you speak a bit about what you've heard from the community, how you've gathered that evidence? How have you worked out that that's where these services are most needed?

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: We know, through our Bloody Big Survey—we conducted our Bloody Big Survey every three years; in 2021 we did the first survey, and in 2024 we did the next survey—that provision of period products has affected more than 62 per cent of Australian women. When I have spoken to sporting organisations, to give you one example, we're talking about how do we not have a barrier for girls participating in sport. One of the major reasons that they're not playing sport is a fear of leaking, and that there is no provision of period products in bathrooms in sport. And when I talk to somebody like Soccer Australia and they're saying, "Yes, that's great, we can put them in training bags and so forth", but there's no sanitary bins in council bathrooms wherever they're playing sport, as well as no provision of period products—sometimes not even toilet paper there. If that was happening in normal environments of boys playing sport, I don't think that that would be okay. When we've looked at the survey stats—do you want to talk to some of those?

BRITTINY EDWARDS: Yes. Just to add to that, when we conducted our survey in 2024, we had 153,000 respondents nationally who menstruate. And, in New South Wales specifically, we found that over 12 per cent of people who had been in hospital and needed period products had not been able to receive them. We've received some heartbreaking stories about that, of people having a miscarriage and being sent home with, you know, a Bluey or something like that, or gauze in their underwear, to try and stop the bleeding. If it was any other part of your body bleeding, you would receive the adequate support to be able to manage that. And then further to that, we also found that 55 per cent of people in New South Wales have missed work due to their period, 62 per cent have missed school due to their period, and 68 per cent have missed sport due to their period.

A lot of people expressed it's a fear of leaking. For fear of leaking—we see that as something that's fixable. A lot of people, one in five, said that they have had to use something else to manage their period, so whether you're at work and get your period unexpectedly and then are suddenly having to stuff toilet paper to deal with your period, and then it has the ongoing effects to that. So, yes, it's just something that we've seen as a widespread issue. Sixty-three per cent of people who live in New South Wales have said they've found it difficult to afford period products due to cost, so it's not something that's quite isolated. It's something that is affecting a large portion of the community. It also is something that's disproportionately affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We've found that 20 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have not been able to afford period products just in the last 12 months.

The CHAIR: Wow. Those are very compelling statistics. Just before I go to other committee members, could you just talk us through the Dignity Vending Machines and how they work? We've actually got some in my local community in Albury. I know you've partnered with the council. But, for people who haven't seen them, what do they look like and how do they work? Particularly, we often hear concerns about real or perceived risk around things like vandalism. How do you mitigate that and how do they work in practice?

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: Great question. The Dignity Vending Machines came about because I was standing in a homelessness service back in 2016 where a woman had come up to the counter and asked for some period products. I would never have been brave enough to have asked for period products, and I wondered why our donations were not in the bathroom. When I asked why they weren't in the bathroom—they cannot be opened, because they fall under the Therapeutic Goods Association Act and, unfortunately, the ladies that were there were trying to take the full packets back to Coles or Kmart and exchange them for food. So they were choosing their dignity over what they needed for other means to be able to survive.

The vending machine I created was a world first. At the press of a button, you would get a bespoke period pack, which you were never then able to—this is not available at any store, so you couldn't choose your dignity over anything else. This has got two pads and six tampons in it. At the press of a button, a period pack comes out of the machine. I also then put in a timing mechanism because I didn't want this machine to be emptied by people being silly, so the machine has got a timing mechanism that can be set between one minute and 10 minutes. That stops vandalism.

We now have 1,033 of these machines installed around Australia. They all have telemetry in them. I also wanted to ensure that those machines were never empty. I'd hate the thought that Ruby, who's 14, who would normally get period products from school during the week or on holidays, knew to go in and get period products from that machine in her local library, or wherever it is, and the machine is empty. Our telemetry will tell us when it's down to the last 10; if it's been emptied, how long it's been empty for; and what is the most used day of that machine. That is vitally important to ensuring that we're providing period products that cannot be returned, but also that maintenance of that machine is equally as important as putting it on the wall. Every vending machine has the 1800 RESPECT number on it, but also so does every period pack.

BRITTINY EDWARDS: They can also tell us which areas of community are highly using the machine, so we can make sure that it is in locations where they are being used, and that also supports what you were asking before about how do we know what areas need support. We know that hospitals are highly used and highly vended, showing us that there needs to be more adequate support there.

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: We've been doing this for eight years now. We know that libraries are quite utilised machines, as well as schools.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I'll go to questions from the rest of the Committee.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I've just got a couple around, firstly, how you're funded, if it's all philanthropic, and how you choose or identify priority areas.

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: Great question. At the beginning, when we were putting vending machines in, we funded them ourselves, to give you an understanding, so funded that ourselves through philanthropic funds. We have a partnership with Woolworths, so 5¢ from the sale of every period product sold in March and August comes to us, which helps us to increase the fleet of vending machines out there. Although in 2020 we were given a contract by Queensland Education to provide a vending machine in every primary and secondary school, so we have more than 700 of those machines in primary and secondary schools. Our money is diversified. It does come from some government, some philanthropic and fundraising.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I note that you're from Queensland. Is Queensland the only State Government that has partnered with you or are others interested, or have you reached out to any of the other States?

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: Yes. We do have vending machines in South Australia and Tasmania that are funded. Every State is different and some States are just done portion by portion. In Victoria, we threw our hat in the ring, obviously, for the 1,400 vending machines to be distributed in public places and we were not successful in that grant—in that application.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: The other question was, when it's based on philanthropic support, how you prioritise where the vending machines should be placed.

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: We obviously have vending machines in homelessness services and domestic violence services. Then in community placements. We work with around 3½ thousand charities in Australia, so we work with the charities on the ground to help us to determine where those machines need to be.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Thanks for your evidence and your submission. It's really helpful. We've had some evidence earlier in the inquiry about the ideal design of public toilets, and particularly we've had quite a bit of discussion about, I guess, two different ways of designing them, one being a sort of private single-use cubicle that you access from public space as opposed to the old-style male/female cement block, if you like. Firstly, I was wondering what are your organisation's thoughts about the ideal design of a public toilet? I appreciate that your focus is on a particular issue, but it seems quite relevant to the overall design issues, I think.

BRITTINY EDWARDS: I guess one thing that I can think of is that when it comes to people with a period, not everybody identifies as a woman, so sometimes, particularly when we're talking about schools and stuff like that, we have actually suggested that they put the Dignity Vending Machine in the disability toilet or a unisex toilet so that people who need it can access it. I guess, when it comes to periods specifically, if it was individual cubicles, obviously it would just need to be in an area where everybody could access it, and if it was in a kind of split female/male, obviously you do what you have to, but sometimes going into the disability toilets can be a benefit just because everybody can access it.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: I was going to ask about almost that exact issue. If you had, say, a public toilet with multiple single-use cubicles, and sometimes you see them with two male, two female, one or two unisex and maybe a disability one, where would you put the dispenser? Would you put it in one of the cubicles or would you put it outside, or does it need to be in an enclosed space in terms of vandalism and so forth?

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: To give you an understanding, we've got 1,033 vending machines installed around Australia. We've had two incidences of vandalism in the last eight years, one in a public toilet in Tasmania, which is in a very high need area. We've actually even had to put a cage around it. But that is more because—and they will say that it's more because—the men are vandalising it, not the women who are utilising it. The only other one was they would take the skin off the machines, just to be vandalised. That was in a school in New South Wales where we used to put them in. We've upgraded our skins now so that they're anti-vandalism, but to give you that understanding of that amount of machines that have had such a low—there's no money in them, so there's no gain other than period products from them. The main thing that we have is the power. People will turn them off to be able to charge their phone, so making sure that the electricity now is a covered piece at the top has deterred that. The learnings that we've had over the years have helped with that.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Do you think, for example, in the case of a block like that where you might have six single use cubicles, could you put it in one of the cubicles and then maybe have some advertising in the others that, if you need this facility, it's there?

BRITTINY EDWARDS: Yes, you just use signage.

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: Yes.

BRITTINY EDWARDS: And we do have stickers and stuff like that, so even if you think about charities and stuff like that that often have a small number of toilets, it'll say where to go to access the vending machines so then people know.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Yes, so you might have to wait a while, but you'll get it eventually, if someone else is using that cubicle.

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: Yes.

BRITTINY EDWARDS: If you need it you're going to wait, to be honest. That is what we've found. Even if people need two packets, they'll still dispense one, wait the 10 minutes and get another one if they need it to get through the weekend.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: In terms of menstruation, is there any other design issues that we should be thinking about in terms of public toilets? Obviously, the provision of these machines is the key thing, but is there any other design issues? Is there a reason why, to accommodate that particular reality, we should be having single-use cubicles or single-use cubicles designed in a different way? Is there any other issue in that regard?

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: I can't think so. Access to the sanitary bins I think is most important. Just ensuring adequate number of sanitary bins for the toilets, but I wouldn't say there's any other design aspects that need to be considered.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: We've taken some evidence about handwashing, and a suggestion that water should be accessible external to the cubicle. I think I've seen some public toilets where the handwashing facilities are communal and they're external to the cubicles. We had a witness talk about how there should be

handwashing facilities inside cubicles, even if there's shared handwashing or water facilities outside. Would you agree with that?

BRITTINY EDWARDS: That's a great point. For re-usable period products, having handwashing facilities internal to the toilet is really beneficial because then people can wash their menstrual cup and stuff like that without having to go outside. For menstrual cups, specifically, and discs, having an internal basin can be really helpful so that people can clean it. I'm also thinking if you're experiencing homelessness. People actually use cups when they're experiencing homelessness is what we've heard. If you had the internal sinks, it would actually allow them to clean their menstrual cup without having to do that in a public space.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Is there any particular issue in regard to handwashing in terms of soap and so forth that you guys have turned your mind to? We've taken some evidence on that as well. I mean, it should be available, I assume.

BRITTINY EDWARDS: No, just that it should be available, but nothing specific.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Okay. Thank you for your evidence.

The CHAIR: I'm interested in understanding the costs associated with the DVMs. Obviously, there's an initial set-up cost of installing a machine, and then there'd be an ongoing cost to restock them. I imagine that would be a fairly big range based on where these are or who's managing them and how much they're used. Can you give us a sense of the range of costs?

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: Absolutely. It is $10,000 for the first year, which is the installation of the machine and the stock. Then, normally, $5,000 per year after that. To give you an understanding, that can't be the case in hospitals because, in hospitals, we go through three times the amount of stock that we do in a library or a community centre and so forth. Hence why we've got all of the data of the machines and where they are and what the usage is. We're more comfortable just to say that's the average, that's the norm. Hospitals, however, are very different. There is such a high usage in hospitals. In saying that, I think that there should be pads on every floor in every hospital, and that would be something—

BRITTINY EDWARDS: Alleviate.

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: Alleviate the issue, right?

The CHAIR: The machines, are they all the same size, or is there actually a range? In terms of the usage, would you install a bigger machine that holds more stock somewhere like a hospital?

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: No, we have a one size machine, what we call the smart machine. We do have other forms of dispensers, but they don't have the—they just come out. You just pull the period packs out, so there's no reason why somebody can't just empty them all. We also have a portable one that St John Ambulance use when they go to the race days, or they use to go off to events and stuff like that. We have different versions, but the one that we know has a better return on the data that you need, and the safety that we need of not having them empty, is the vending machine.

BRITTINY EDWARDS: The best for public spaces.

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: Yes.

The CHAIR: Who typically does the restocking?

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: To give you an example of the schools in Queensland, where we've got 700, the school restocks the machine. They just use the QR code to order more stock. It depends on whether it's the cleaner, or whether it's part of the staff, because that's the—that is not, though, what we quoted when we had to do the Victorian tender because we would have to pay externally for somebody to come in. That's the big piece.

The CHAIR: Have you got examples of your machines in rural and regional areas?

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: Albury-Wodonga area. Yes, we have them even in remote Indigenous communities.

BRITTINY EDWARDS: Actually, in remote communities, more people were likely to use a DVM we found in rural and remote areas in our survey.

The CHAIR: How does it work in a remote community in terms of these questions of ongoing maintenance and stocking? Are there places where you've partnered with a council, or do you actually come and restock them? Who's doing it?

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: The council will restock them. Where we have them in libraries, the staff will restock them. It makes it a much more affordable way to be able to do it. If we have to—we certainly, as a charity, when we put our hat in for the Victorian tender, that is the cost we've never had to bear because that's not the scope of work that we've done. It's a community-led organisation where the machine is always full.

The CHAIR: Those packs that you showed us, one of those boxes, I assume that's the size of box that's dispensed by your DVMs.

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you then sell the refill packs to those councils, schools, et cetera?

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: Yes. To give you an example, the Albury council paid $25,000 for the four years of the vending machine. That's all of the stock paid for that. That's set and forget. They then just order every time. It's regardless of how much they use.

The CHAIR: Thank you. That's helpful. We just have a couple of minutes left. If there are no more questions, I might ask is there anything else that you really wanted to share with the Committee today that we haven't specifically asked about?

BRITTINY EDWARDS: I don't think anything in particular.

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: I don't think so.

BRITTINY EDWARDS: One thing that might be just nice to know is that, when we did our survey and were looking at the access to free period products, we asked people how it would improve their thoughts of whether it was a workplace, a school, the public space, the council. Overwhelmingly, people said that it would improve their appreciation of the organisation or corporate who is providing it, so it is something that people find as a really great way to feel supported, I'd say.

The CHAIR: That's a really positive note to end on. Thanks so much for all the work that you've done and for taking the time to share your experiences with us today. If there are any questions on notice, the secretariat will be in touch with you.

ROCHELLE COURTENAY: Excellent. Thank you so much.

BRITTINY EDWARDS: Thank you.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

Ms ALANNAH DALY, Policy Officer, Justice and Equity Centre, affirmed and examined

Mr DAVID STREATFIELD, Member, StreetCare, Justice and Equity Centre, affirmed and examined

Mr ANTHONY PIERCE, Member, StreetCare, Justice and Equity Centre, affirmed and examined

Ms ROXANNA KALNINS, Member, StreetCare, Justice and Equity Centre, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the inquiry into public toilets. For the benefit of anyone watching online, we've slightly rearranged things. We'll hear from the witnesses from the Justice and Equity Centre and the StreetCare members all together. Thank you so much for coming today and for taking the time to share your experience with us. It's going to be really valuable. Would you like to start by making a short opening statement?

ALANNAH DALY: Thank you for the invitation to appear before the Committee today. I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. Sovereignty was never ceded, and I pay my respects to Elders, past and present. I'm appearing on behalf of the Justice and Equity Centre, formerly the Public Interest Advocacy Centre. We are a social justice, law and policy organisation that works with people and communities who are marginalised and facing disadvantage. Our Homeless Persons Legal Service, or HPLS, provides free legal advice to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. We also address the causes of homelessness and broader housing issues through policy work. This is informed by casework and by StreetCare, some of whom are here today, who are an advisory group of people with lived experience of homelessness.

The current lack of safe and accessible public toilets in New South Wales disproportionately impacts people experiencing homelessness. It further impacts on people who may need to access facilities more often; for example, people who menstruate, people with health conditions, parents and carers, as well. Public toilets serve many purposes beyond personal hygiene, including being a place to get changed or access drinking water. People experiencing homelessness have as much a right as anyone else to be in public spaces, as per the New South Wales Protocol for Homeless People in Public Spaces. Improving access to this basic service is an important way to support people experiencing homelessness to participate in community life. As stated in our submission, we recommend an increase in the number of safe, clean and accessible public toilets in New South Wales. Thank you.

ANTHONY PIERCE: To speak on behalf of the StreetCare team, we are appearing today as representatives of StreetCare, which is an advisory group of people with lived experience of homelessness. We advocate for improved supports for those experiencing homelessness and provide professional advice to stakeholders in the housing and homelessness sector, including specialist homeless services and government. In particular, a lot of you might be familiar with the new protocol that's been introduced, the Protocol for Homeless People in Public Spaces. The StreetCare team worked on that for 18 months with—previously DCJ, now Homes NSW, to produce a new document. It was hard work. There was 100 per cent commitment from the whole team, and we're really proud of the final product that came out of that. We'd like to point out that engaging the voice of lived experience results in a greater integrity and better outcomes for laws, policies and practices, so we thank you for the invitation to appear before the Committee. Thank you.

ROXANNA KALNINS: I'm a grateful member of StreetCare, and I have 16 years of lived experience as a rough sleeper, a female rough sleeper. Obviously, social limitations and isolation are realities if access to clean, fit-for-use public toilets is inadequate. Lack of sanitation for people without safe, adequate housing can only reinforce the discrimination experienced on account of lack of hygiene. The stigmatisation, vilification and criminalisation is increased. These factors impact on health and wellbeing. Many vulnerable members of our society may be refused access to toilets in shops, restaurants, shopping centres et cetera. Without stable housing, these people must rely on social infrastructures to gain access to water and sanitation and hygiene facilities. This process takes significant effort and time, travelling to churches, shelters and other specialist homelessness services on specific days to fill a water bottle, take a shower, clean a wound, change a tampon.

One of the most pervasive forms of gender discrimination experienced daily by girls and women is inadequate access to safe, private public toilets. Women use public toilets with more frequency than men, and spend longer in them. Menstruating women and girls require the ability to change their menstrual materials up to four times a day. Women have increased and fluctuating sanitation needs due to pregnancy, postpartum bleeding, miscarriage, incontinence, fibroids and endometriosis. The inability to safely, adequately address these physical needs leads to physical, psychosocial, and emotional consequences: reduced interactions, social isolation, breakdown of relationships, depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance. Women assume greater caregiving roles within families and society as a whole, often requiring them to bring children, elderly family members or people living with disability into toilets. Women are vulnerable to sexual violence or harassment when accessing isolated, unsafe public toilets.

The elements that need to be in place for women to freely access public toilets are cleanliness; preserved privacy; design of partition walls and doors; consider audio privacy; safe to use; adequate lighting inside and out, including pathways leading to; consider location; ensure approach is safe regarding foliage—any place where people may hide and ambush someone approaching or leaving; consider partition walls, security of; space for two or more people to move around; carers; children; wheelchair space; non-slip flooring; handrails; changing table; culturally appropriate sanitary disposal options; sanitary products available; continence-wear products available; handwashing facilities; mirrors for checking clothes for blood, for example, reducing shame, stress and taboo; duress button.

I also would like to propose that public toilets have a free dispensing machine that dispenses clean syringes, and also naloxone nasal spray, which can be administered to treat opioid overdose. Naloxone is an opiate antagonist; it blocks opiate receptors and can reduce opioids in the system. It won't have any effect on anybody that doesn't have opiates in their system. Vulnerable members of our communities are dying in public toilets of overdoses. This is a fact. Incontinence aids and sanitary disposal bins need to be in male toilets, also. The engineering field is largely dominated by men, so it's vital that women be consulted during the design process, and particularly women who lack safe, secure housing and are therefore more reliant on these essential services. Thank you for your time and for listening.

The CHAIR: My first question is about the design of public toilets. Roxanna, you just started giving some examples at the end of your statement of things that are needed. For people experiencing homelessness, could you share with us what you're using the toilet for? It obviously goes beyond just using the actual toilet. When we're thinking about regulating the design of toilets and what leads to the long list of things you're asking for, can you explain to us the ways that you use public toilets?

ANTHONY PIERCE: Sometimes it can be escaping the environment. It could be raining. It could be storming. It could be really hot. It might be your only refuge that you have to escape those sort of things. But Rocky's mentioned, just simple things like filling water bottles, washing your hands and face, taking your dirty shirt off and putting a clean shirt on if you've got one—things like that—rinsing out your smalls in the basin. Beyond the obvious use of a toilet that we're all familiar with, a toilet becomes something that I think we all take for granted, but for a person experiencing homelessness, a toilet becomes a luxury, and it becomes a luxury for those varying reasons.

The CHAIR: Have you got particular examples that you're aware of, either from your own experience or the other people you work with, through StreetCare, of particularly good public toilets in Sydney that we should look to as an example or particularly bad ones that need to get fixed?

ANTHONY PIERCE: The new one in Ward Park that the City of Sydney Council has just installed. There was one there previously, and they took it down, it was gone for two years. During that two-year period, the lack of a public toilet in Ward Park was noticeably—the effect that it had for the community, not just the people experiencing homelessness but the community in general, people knew there was a toilet there and they'd go there. Luckily, they could access either the community centre at Northcott or, if someone asks me, I'd say go to the pub across the road. It's in a park. It's got vertical gardens and it's got a rooftop garden, and it's one of those self-cleaning toilets. When you approach the toilet, it'll say "closed", "open", "cleaning", "unavailable". It'll let you know, so you're not sort of waiting.

They're designed to accommodate just one person, and if someone's in there for too long a period or if there's two or three or more people in there, I think there is some sort of alarm system in place. The good design is that it's in a part of the park which is well-lit. The entrance to the toilet is open to the whole park, so you don't have to climb behind a bush or whatever. It's right near the tram stop at Surry Hills, so that's another good thing for it. That's a really good design. When I said it was from the City of Sydney Council, I think they have contracted the provision of those toilets and the cleaning of those toilets out to a different company, but they are an initiative of the council. That's a really good design. I don't think they're cheap, though. I think they were pretty pricey. But, again, they self-clean. They've rarely offline.

The CHAIR: That's helpful. Before I ask another question, did anyone else have other examples?

DAVID STREATFIELD: Tony was saying with those public toilets, self-cleaning, I've noticed myself over the years that they are safer than some of the older ones, where you've got three or four cubicles. You've got to share the same part of the toilet. That is how a lot of problems did happen, with other people using the same toilet at the same time—the same block. I've found those ones, the single ones, are a lot safer than using the other older style ones.

ALANNAH DALY: I think David also mentioned previously that some public toilets, you have to pay for them, or if they're in a train station, they might be behind a ticket barrier. That is essentially something you'd have to pay for to access them. So, yes, designs that allow people to access them for free are ideal.

The CHAIR: My question for you, Ms Daly, and I appreciate you may need to take it on notice, but I'm interested in the sort of legal aspect of this. From the perspective of the Justice and Equity Centre, is there a human rights issue or a discrimination issue with public toilets not adequately being provided?

ALANNAH DALY: In terms of whether it qualifies as discrimination under the legislation, I'm not sure. I'd probably have to take that on notice. In a sort of social sense, I suppose it is disproportionately impacting one group of people more than others, so I would call that structural discrimination. I'm not sure exactly about the strict legal test for discrimination, though. Other legal aspects that might be worth considering is how it is part of a broader issue with the criminalisation of homelessness. So things that people who have a home to stay in would do within their private space, if you don't have a private space to do that, they become criminalised, because you're doing it in public. Things like public urination or exposure, things like that, they can entrench disadvantage and the difficulties experienced by people who don't have a home. But I'm happy to take on notice that broader question around discrimination.

The CHAIR: Thank you, that's helpful. In your written submission there's a particular comment in terms of design. It states:

> The committee could also examine toilet designs which allow users to view what's happening outside the bathroom while they're inside. This helps people feel safer by allowing them to check the environment outside before they exit.

This makes a lot of sense, in principle. I have never personally experienced a toilet with that kind of design, so I'm interested if there are examples of that that you can give us or how that actually would work.

DAVID STREATFIELD: I've never actually seen one, but there's a place up in Lismore, where the bus is pulling up there, there's always a bloke at the front gate. They were charging people to use the toilets there, until too many of the local residents were getting charged for urinating in public because they couldn't afford the ticket to get in to use the toilets. But there was always somebody at the front door to make sure who was coming in and who was leaving. That was a job from seven till five, say. After that, there was no-one there; they closed the place up. So there wasn't really much of a public toilet system up there from people they were keeping out.

ALANNAH DALY: I don't think we're aware of any particular model. It came up in discussions around how to ensure that women feel safe exiting bathrooms. Going into the bathroom is one thing, but then coming out and not knowing if there's anyone outside or what you're facing as you leave the bathroom, we thought it came up as a good idea, something that could be considered by the committee.

The CHAIR: I think David mentioned that sort of single-cubicle design, where you come out and you're straight back into the public space, rather than into that funny shared area where you've got sinks and cubicles. You're all nodding. For the sake of Hansard, I'll comment that you're nodding. Does that improve your sense of safety as well?

ANTHONY PIERCE: So that toilet I mentioned at Ward Park, you open the door and you go in, you're it. It's your little domain for the next five minutes or whatever. You don't have to worry about what's happening in the cubicle next door. You don't have to worry about somebody having an issue three cubicles down. You don't have to worry about coming out of doing what you've done and face to face with someone who could be not happy for lots of different reasons. The other good thing is, when you finish, you leave, the doors close, and it temporarily closes the toilet for the two- to three-minute cleaning period. Apparently it's like a car wash. There's jets and wipes and it all happens automatically. But, yes, having it all to myself, and just having my own little toilet, I'm grateful that it's just me and it's just my space. I think using public toilets sometimes can be a bit confronting. You're here, and there's someone literally where David is. There's just this particle board thing separating you, and it can be a bit—it's just not private. I think we all appreciate that at those moments we are pretty vulnerable, and privacy is really important to us.

DAVID STREATFIELD: Even when you use the public toilets now, there are three or four cubicles in a row. You don't go to the one in the middle where there are others occupied. If you do feel really vulnerable, you've got two either side of you. You say, "No, I'll go somewhere else. I'll wait." Because you don't want to sit there—be in there.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I was wondering if you could share with us what having access to a safe and clean public toilet means for you and others experiencing homelessness.

ROXANNA KALNINS: It provides dignity for people because they can maintain their appearance. They can maintain their hygiene, so they're able to have some dignity. It makes them feel safe, makes them feel

included—part of the community, you know—when they're catered for, when their needs are seen to be as important as everybody else's.

ANTHONY PIERCE: When you're living a life that revolves around deprivation, like you don't have the niceties in life, I think having that brief experience of being acknowledged, you feel that you're being acknowledged as a person who's worthwhile and worthy of having that sort of thing. Even if it's just five minutes in a clean public toilet, I think that is really affirming. You get a certain amount of value from that, you know, "I'm worthy of having access to a toilet like this. I don't need to do it behind that pole down the road or under the tree in the park," sort of thing. Again, beyond what a toilet is for, it can bring a lot of positive things that are outside that scope of just the building and the porcelain.

ROXANNA KALNINS: Also, when you're homeless, depending on the level of homelessness you're experiencing, you're living in survival mode a lot of the time. You've got to constantly monitor your safety. So to have spaces where you can go and feel safe is a bit of a reprieve from that constant monitoring.

ANTHONY PIERCE: Also, more than likely you're going to be carrying everything that you own at the time and you can't take that all into a narrow cubicle with you. If you're in a space that you're just in, you know that you can leave your bag where it is whilst you go and do what you have to do. That's not available to you in a standard sort of four cubicles, you know. You can't take everything that you own into the cubicle with you. So to have that sort of peace of mind is a good thing as well.

DAVID STREATFIELD: Another thing I was noticing too was not having hooks on the back of the door. Because when you do go into the bathroom and, you know, put your stuff on the floor, many a time they'll just grab it, you know, and they're gone. So if you've got hooks on the back of the door, somewhere to hang your jacket or your bag, you know they can't get to it and you know it's going to be safe while you're in that cubicle, if you've got to go to use those ones with multiple cubicles.

ANTHONY PIERCE: I also think, moving forward, if those standard sort of cubicle toilets are going to be kept going, then the locking mechanism needs to be improved and tamper resistant to some degree. Nothing worse than you needing to go to the toilet and you go into the toilet, and you go to lock it and it doesn't lock. I remember a couple of times, when I was going to uni, I used to sit there with my foot on the door, sitting on the toilet, trying to—you know? So, again, if it needs to be that sort of model for a toilet, it's important that you have the security of that cubicle.

ALANNAH DALY: To add one more thing, in addition to those points, I guess on a practical level, having an easy-to-find toilet means you can focus on other things—you know, finding shelter and food—so that's time saved in that sense.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: What do you think the challenges are when trying to find a public toilet that is open, clean and safe?

DAVID STREATFIELD: They're very hard to find after, say, nine o'clock at night. That's why I slept at Central station, because the toilets were open all day. If I've got to go, I've got to go; I can't wait around until nine o'clock in the morning for them to open. That's why you sort of slept out where the public toilets are, because you didn't want to get a charge for doing your business in public. You sort of slept near where toilets were so you didn't have to walk far when you did wake up.

ANTHONY PIERCE: I also think there needs to be some sort of effort made, if public toilets are going to be something that are going to be built around certain areas—I think the accessibility of that toilet to people who are rough sleeping or experiencing homelessness needs to be taken into account. I mean the areas where people are rough sleeping in Sydney at the moment are easily identified. The councils know where they are. They know roughly how many people are there. They might even have their names. With that information, looking at a map, where do we need a public toilet? Okay, there's 50 rough sleepers within 500 metres of that park. That's a great place, I think, for a public toilet to be considered.

I think, obviously just mindful again of where they go, I can see the benefit in having a public toilet like that near a children's playground, but I'm just worried. I know from experience that presenting as a homeless person using a facility that might be used by people who are not experiencing homelessness—the pushback from them. They assume that you're in there for the wrong reason—you're there lurking around and you're a pest. The fact that you're there to do what you want to do is maybe not considered. People see somebody, they look like a certain type, they must be that certain type. They're hanging around a public toilet. That's just part of the discrimination and the sort of marginalisation that people get, experiencing homelessness.

ROXANNA KALNINS: Also, say, along Oxford Street, I don't believe there's a public toilet along Oxford Street and it's supposedly, you know, nightclub capital. What you've got is a whole horde of people coming

out when the nightclubs close or the clubs close. They've been drinking for hours. They're going to need to urinate. And homeless people get pissed on. That happens. So not only providing for the homeless, but providing for the whole community so that things like that don't happen.

ANTHONY PIERCE: I think it was on maybe one of the big racing days at Randwick, the tram left Randwick racecourse and then it got to Moore Park, and by the time it got to Surry Hills the doors opened and, without a word of a lie, 30 young guys just bolted off that train and headed for the bushes at Ward Park. If I had my phone with me, I would've taken a photo—from behind, of course. But it was just like, you know, they'd probably finished their last schooner and, "Oh yeah, we'll wait till we get to Central," but they get to Surry Hills and they can't do it. That was the point where sometimes when you've got to go, you've got to go, but again it's not really good. But even if there had been a toilet in Ward Park, there were 30 guys. I don't think they would have waited their turn.

ALANNAH DALY: One other thing is that rough sleepers can also be subject to move-on orders from police. They may be located close to an amenity and then they are moved on and can't come back to that location for a certain amount of time. We've heard from colleagues at other specialist homelessness services that people have just ended up moving bush because they kept getting moved on and being relocated from locations where they could access services.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: When you've been able to access, say, a good public toilet, what made it work well? What features or what about it made you feel safe and that it was usable?

DAVID STREATFIELD: If you get up in the morning and you go and use that public toilet, you can change your clothes. If you've got a clean set of clothes, you feel better when you change your clothes. If you've got the same clothes on for a week, you know you don't feel so crash hot. Actually going in and changing them, and having somewhere to change into them safely, of course you're going to feel better. I think we all need that, everyone that's been sleeping out, something to make them feel good, you know what I mean? Just having a safe place to change your clothing and whatever.

ANTHONY PIERCE: I think it's hard to answer that question in terms of a positive experience, because it rarely happens. Hopefully what this Committee is talking about here is an aspirational sort of thing to increase those better experiences—to reduce the bad experiences and increase the better experiences—and then, if you ask that question in five years time to a different group of people experiencing homelessness, they might have smiling faces and good news stories for you. I can't speak for everyone, but in general I can't remember ever hearing them saying, "Oh, I went to a great public toilet today and, jeez, it was good. It was this, this and this." It just doesn't happen. Again, don't underestimate how important a positive experience is, no matter what it is, for a person experiencing homelessness. Wins are seldom. One small thing can go right in a day and that just makes your day. It makes the next day that much more achievable. And that could be as simple as going to a toilet that's clean, and you're not hassled and it was there when you needed it.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: On the flip side, then, you've said there aren't enough public toilets that you could have an experience where you said, "Yes, that's a safe, usable toilet, and I can go there and know that I'm going to be able to change or clean." If you could design a public toilet that meets the needs of people who don't have a home, what would be some of the features that you'd like included in that facility?

DAVID STREATFIELD: Having a shower in them.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: A shower, yes.

DAVID STREATFIELD: If you've got the one cubicle, there's enough room there to put a shower in. Like you said, even 10 minutes, that's enough of a time to have a shower and do whatever you've got to do to get dressed and all that. But I tell you what, something like that—it'd probably make a big difference to a lot of people's lives. You don't have to wander around waiting for something to open that has a shower; you can just go in there, have your shower and you're out of there. So, yes, I reckon having a shower in a lot of them would be a great idea.

ANTHONY PIERCE: Or maybe an investment could be made into an organisation like Orange Sky, who have the mobile vans. I don't think they have toilets on them. I know they have showers. If they can put a toilet in a caravan, they can put a toilet and a shower into an Orange Sky van. The good thing about that sort of thing would be that they know where the people that are rough sleeping are. They go and park there, and people can get their washing done and also have a shower and everything. So maybe part of the solution is not standalone toilets in a park. Maybe organisations such as Orange Sky should be encouraged.

Again, it just provides another outreach for people who experience homelessness. So it mightn't be about having a shower. It might be having a chat to someone—"I'm having a bad time because I haven't had my depot

injection for the last three months, and I'm feeling really bad." They're having that conversation because—they've gone there to have a shower, but it's always a good referral service, and touching base with people. Sometimes it's a lot about, again, that positive experience: "Orange Sky thinks that I'm worthy enough for them to drive to where I stay and provide this service to me." Maybe that's something that should be considered. Maybe we don't need to build a toilet here, but maybe if Orange Sky had three more vans, they might be able to come here two nights a week and that could solve that—fill that gap for that period of time.

ALANNAH DALY: In Portland they have something called a hygiene hub, where they have toilets available, but also they provide medical supplies, showers, clothing exchange and also mental health first aid. I guess that's adding to what a public toilet could offer and providing those additional, extra things, which do make such a huge difference.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Rocky, you said just before that at night-time there weren't any public toilets on Oxford Street. What changes would make public toilets more accessible and welcoming, especially at night?

ROXANNA KALNINS: Adequate lighting, so you can see. Them not being in isolated spaces. Hopefully not too much foliage around. A clear, open space. Adequate lighting on approach and inside the toilet. Adequate safety while you're inside the toilet.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: How can governments and councils involve people with lived experience in planning and maintaining public toilets so they actually meet the real needs?

ANTHONY PIERCE: Just ask us.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Just ask you.

ANTHONY PIERCE: I've been involved with StreetCare for almost three years now, and I can't think of a time where government or council hasn't reached out to us and asked for our opinion, because we're more than happy to give our opinion. Again, it's always important to keep in mind that opinion is informed; it's based on our lived experience. I think that it would be not productive, if you are sort of seeking to do something like this, that you don't reach out to someone with lived experience because, first, we're cheap—it's not going to cost you anything—and, second, we have that lived experience. We are passionate about achieving better outcomes for people that are experiencing homelessness, so we're genuine. We don't have an agenda; we just want good results. We want people to feel better. We want homelessness to end, full stop. But in that interim period, there are heaps of things that we could be doing together to achieve those things. Yes.

ALANNAH DALY: You could consider developing some kind of best practice guidelines with lived experience that could then be used by councils or governments.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Thanks to you all for coming along and giving evidence. We really appreciate it. It's been really helpful. Alannah, you said something earlier about move-on powers. What was that in relation to? I just didn't quite catch it.

ALANNAH DALY: I think it's under the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act, the police have the power to move on people in public spaces for a number of reasons.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Like obstruction, for example?

ALANNAH DALY: Yes, or being disorderly. But often it's used in circumstances where it's probably a bit disproportionate.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Yes, and that's if the officer believes on reasonable grounds that it's warranted on one of those bases. Is one of your concerns that that's effectively a sort of unreviewable power? Because if the person complies and the person moves on, then no-one ever considers the matter again.

ANTHONY PIERCE: The police can make arbitrary decisions, or not arbitrary decisions, but they can make decisions based upon their judgement that Joe Blow—"Come here, Joe. What are you doing? What are you hanging around here for? Mate, you're up to no good. We don't want to see you for 48 hours."—and that's it. If they see Joe Blow the next day, hopefully they wouldn't arrest him, but I think they possibly could for disobeying an order.

DAVID STREATFIELD: Yes, they will arrest them.

ANTHONY PIERCE: I think with these move-on orders, they need to be done not because they don't like the look of that guy who's sitting outside that shop and the shopkeeper's rung and said, "Oh, look, there's this guy outside my shop and he's causing people not to come in." He's got every right to be there, and that's what we established under the protocol. If he's carrying on like an idiot, of course idiots need to be told to move. But I can

see the benefit in the police having this thing. I live in a big public housing estate, and there are times that the police come and, you know, "You don't live here. You're not supposed to be here. You're causing trouble. We don't want to see you for seven days." And that's effective. It's achieved something. But, yes, in more public places, like in Martin Place or at Oxford Square, I think sometimes it's more about being seen to do the right thing rather than actually the right thing being done for that person.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: We obviously live in a time when there's the housing crisis and the cost-of-living crisis. Where I live, in Dubbo, there's a lot more people experiencing homelessness. By the river you see people living in little tent communities, and a general increase in this problem. To the people with lived experience, what do you think is the line between measures that we might recommend that will improve the experience of people experiencing homelessness—for example, the provision of showers in public toilets and things like that—and doing something that is almost throwing up your hands and surrendering to homelessness and saying, "Well, we're just going to make it easier; rather than tackling the problem, we're just going to make being homeless easier"? Is there a bit of a tension there for us to think about, do you think?

ROXANNA KALNINS: I don't think homelessness is ever a choice. Yes, I don't think people are going to choose it because you're going to avail them of showers. To me that doesn't make any sense. It's not actually a lifestyle choice. There are degrees and layers of things that lead to people being marginalised, and they're complex, and it's not as simple as making a choice. Personally, I don't believe any of the measures of making public toilets safer and more hospitable to people living precariously would lead to a rise in homelessness.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: I wasn't trying to suggest that it would lead to a rise; it was more in response to a more prevalent social problem. Is there a tendency sometimes on behalf of the Government to minimise the effect of it in some way as it's becoming more common, rather than deal with the problem? I think that's how I meant it.

ANTHONY PIERCE: Yes, I think there is, because quite often, whether it be DCJ or Homes NSW, the pathways that they're offering to people transitioning out of homelessness are not simple. It's a paperwork nightmare. To get some sort of priority response you need doctors' reports, psychiatrists' reports, blah, blah, blah. If you want to get seven nights of temporary accommodation, that's really difficult as well. People still need to get temporary accommodation. They still need to provide proof to Homes NSW that they have been looking for somewhere to live, that they went to Joe Blow's real estate agent and applied for that $5 million flat down the road that they can't obviously afford to get. I think the pathways of transitioning out of homelessness need to be made a lot more user-friendly.

Again, homeless people, they don't have post office boxes, they don't have mobile phones, they don't have internet accounts. It's okay to say, "We sent you a letter six months ago and you didn't respond to it, so we didn't think you were interested anymore", but that sort of response is just not going to address the problem that I think you're talking about. It'd be wrong of me to suggest that sometimes I think the pathways are made more difficult deliberately. Obviously I just suggested it, and that's anecdotally. We speak to people all the time. It's not just the three of us speaking. We obviously talk to a lot of people experiencing homelessness.

There is a gentleman who's a part of our group, but a different part of it, and he's an elderly man. He was telling us of his experience getting into a public housing place, and it was traumatising. Telling us that story he was shaking, he was visibly upset, and the whole process was traumatising. It was, "You haven't given us that form." "Yes, I have." "Now we need another psych report." "Okay." "We need this, we need that." Or he'd go back to the office and say, "Can I see Joe Blow?" "No, Joe Blow is gone. What is it about? Can you fill in another application for us?" Those sorts of things just really are not helpful. I think they're avoidable and I just don't think they should be happening.

Hopefully under Homes NSW with Rebecca, those sorts of things will improve over time. The talk sounds good. I suppose it's just going to be a matter of time to see if things actually do improve. But I think that's the bigger picture response. I know we're here to talk about public toilets, and let's not diminish the importance of that. If that little problem can be solved, then that's one step along the journey. But in terms of a macro image, the pathways transitioning out of homelessness need to be made a lot easier, a lot more accessible and a lot quicker.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Is there a pattern where the availability of public toilets influences where people choose to sleep rough? Is there a pattern like that that's important to understand?

ANTHONY PIERCE: I think there would be. I think it would be a pull factor. People would say, "That's a good place to rough sleep because a decent public toilet is just five minutes down the road." That would be a yes.

DAVID STREATFIELD: People who are rough sleeping will tend to sleep where the services are, so they don't have as far to walk. If you've got all your gear on, you don't want to carry it everywhere, so you try to

stay as near to the service you're accessing the next morning, be it the soup kitchen or whatever to go for a feed. That's why a lot of people camp out around the city because the services are in the city. They can get a feed and don't have to walk far. They don't have to pay for buses or trains or anything.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Something that we probably all experience is the auto flush, which maybe when you use a loo for the first time might catch you by surprise At airports, for example, it seems to be quite common. They want to get people in and out really quickly. Are there any issues there in respect to people experiencing homelessness, and also auto wash, because that seems like—

ANTHONY PIERCE: It only happens when you leave, and it detects that there's no-one in there.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Does it?

DAVID STREATFIELD: Yes, it won't do it while you're in there.

ANTHONY PIERCE: It detects no motion.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Is that the same with auto flush?

ANTHONY PIERCE: No. Like I said, it's like a car wash. These jets come out and they sanitise everything. The surfaces are designed to—once you sanitise, there's no wet stuff or anything like that.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Whereas auto flush can occur when you're still sitting on it?

ANTHONY PIERCE: If you're sitting on it, yes.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Are there many loos in places where people experiencing homelessness are that have those sorts of functions? Are there any issues in respect of them that we should be aware of?

DAVID STREATFIELD: I know there's one down in Summer Hill. They've got one of those outdoor toilets that Tony was talking about with the auto flush and all that. They've only got one there. I think we probably need at least two because there's always a line-up out front of it trying to get into it. That's the only toilet there in the whole of Summer Hill. A lot of people are getting off there and a lot of people are sleeping out around there and there's only one toilet, or they go to Ashfield, which is not handy for them.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Are any of you aware of people being charged with criminal offences for going to the toilet in public?

DAVID STREATFIELD: Yes.

ANTHONY PIERCE: Yes, in public because it really—

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: How common is that?

DAVID STREATFIELD: Very common.

ANTHONY PIERCE: Pretty common, yes.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: What sorts of circumstances are we talking about in terms of people experiencing homelessness?

DAVID STREATFIELD: Somebody sleeping out might wake up in the middle of the night, go to the toilet, two police walk past and they see him—

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: And they'll charge him?

DAVID STREATFIELD: Yes, they'll charge him with it.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Is that charged as offensive manner, or is there a specific criminal offence for that?

DAVID STREATFIELD: It depends on—

ANTHONY PIERCE: It used to be called public urination.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: There's a specific offence, is there?

ANTHONY PIERCE: Yes, well—

ALANNAH DALY: I think it's offensive conduct, technically.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Offensive conduct, is it? I thought it might be.

ALANNAH DALY: So it's either a fine or imprisonment.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Do you think that's flowing from the lack of availability of public toilets?

ROXANNA KALNINS: Absolutely.

ANTHONY PIERCE: Urinating in public again is not a choice that—if you've got a choice between urinating in public and going to a clean toilet, where you can do other things as well, you'll take that option every single time because (a) you're not going to be charged for doing it, (b) you've got privacy, and (c) you've got the dignity of being worthy of having—doing a wee behind the Holden, you don't feel really good about yourself. Going to a public toilet that's clean and bright, then you feel a bit better about yourself. Again, those small things really, really make a big difference.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: We've taken a heap of evidence this morning about some of the design features of toilets, like they should have hooks on the backs of doors, they should have shelves, they should have soap, they should have toilet paper, they should be designed to be able to be more easily cleaned. We haven't had any evidence about the availability of mirrors. Is that a particular issue for people experiencing homelessness?

DAVID STREATFIELD: Mirrors? Well, usually they have them. Some of the toilets I've seen they've got that metal. It looks like a mirror—it's reflective—but it's not breakable. You can't break it, if you know what I mean. They're not really good mirrors, but you can still see what's going on.

ANTHONY PIERCE: I think access to a power point would be a good thing.

ROXANNA KALNINS: To charge your phone.

ANTHONY PIERCE: Wi-fi access with that thing there so that if you—

ROXANNA KALNINS: You get arrested for trespassing. You go somewhere. I've been arrested for trespassing, for going somewhere to charge my phone, to a car park or something.

DAVID STREATFIELD: I think the other one was an emergency button.

ROXANNA KALNINS: Yes, a duress button.

DAVID STREATFIELD: If somebody's having trouble in the toilet and they don't want to leave they can press that button and they feel safe. There are probably going to be less problems if that's—for easy access for somebody who just has something going wrong.

ANTHONY PIERCE: Not dissimilar to what they have in train stations or in trains these days. If you're experiencing trouble, you press the button. You get connected and you actually get to speak to someone, rather than just pressing a button and a red light flashes somewhere.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: In terms of access to water, not just for handwashing but for drinking, we've taken some evidence that it would be good to have water sources external to the loo as well as in the loo, so that you can just walk up there—you don't have to go into the loo—and you can access water. There has been evidence about how some of the handbasins are too shallow, so you can't fill a receptacle in them.

ANTHONY PIERCE: I think that's the design. They're designed for that reason.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Yes, you would assume so.

ANTHONY PIERCE: Yes.

DAVID STREATFIELD: I think over in Manly they've got big basins, so you can just fill your water bottle up anyway. They've got about three or four of them there, so I don't know why they can't do that everywhere, not just in one suburb. That's the only place I've seen them.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Are there any issues, particularly in the CBD, about loos being locked in the evening?

DAVID STREATFIELD: I can't find no public toilets in Sydney unless they're at a station. You know, you walk down the street to find any, but wherever you walk down the street, there are none.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: There are not many.

ALANNAH DALY: If you have a look on the Public Toilet Map, a lot of the toilets in parks will say "closed after sundown" or something like that. I think it is quite widespread.

ANTHONY PIERCE: The public toilet that are attached to, say, the change rooms—maybe at the rugby league field—are always locked after the fixture's over. The reason I've been told is because of antisocial behaviour that happens in public toilets after dark. Yes, it happens. Is it a reason to close the public toilet? I don't know. I'm not sure. It's not a good enough reason for the people who it affects in more adverse ways from not having a toilet to access than someone who might be using it for other reasons.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Are you aware of any public toilets that have showers at the moment?

DAVID STREATFIELD: There's only one I know of, and that's in Lismore.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: That's in Lismore, is it?

DAVID STREATFIELD: Yes, it's where the buses pull into—all the interstate. That's the only one I know of.

ANTHONY PIERCE: There are various things like Streetlevel on Albion Street. I know it's not a public toilet, but they have limited spaces available on a daily basis for someone to come and wash their clothes, have a shower and do all that sort of stuff. They're sort of standalone little cubicle units. It's all there—a washing machine and shower as well there. That's run by the Salvation Army. Again, they can only sort of cope with a certain amount of people every day, and that's why they ask people to let them know they're coming. But again, it's not a public toilet. Going forward with this discussion, I think there are existing facilities that can be greater utilised.

I mentioned before I've lived in Northcott. I'm an active member within the Northcott Community Centre. That centre is adjacent to Ward Park and it's closed 95 per cent of the time. That would be an option for people who are in that area if that community centre was opened. Again, it's run by Homelessness NSW. They just need to make a commitment, whether that's by staffing it or seeking tenant volunteers, which there are plenty of, just for people to know that Northcott Community Centre is open from 10.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m., Monday to Friday, and they have a toilet there and you can have a cup of tea. But it's just not there. It's closed most of the time.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Would you say that most people experiencing homelessness would have relatively easy access to a public toilet?

ANTHONY PIERCE: Well, they can't. I've seen people refused permission to use a toilet in a pub because of their appearance or the way they present themselves.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: I meant by that not one in commercial premises, where you might have limited permission. But in terms a true public toilet—so one on the street or in a park et cetera—would you say that most homeless people in the Sydney CBD would have fairly easy access or not?

ANTHONY PIERCE: They don't exist.

DAVID STREATFIELD: They don't exist.

ANTHONY PIERCE: To find a public toilet, if we were to go for a walk around, if we leave here now and all of us walk around, I don't know, two or three blocks, I think we would struggle to find a public toilet in the city. There might be one at Martin Place railway station.

DAVID STREATFIELD: Yes, there is one there.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: In a railway station. I suppose they're always open.

DAVID STREATFIELD: You need a ticket to get in to use it. It's not on the outside of the station. You've actually got to have a ticket. You've got to swipe to use it.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thank you all for your appearance today. We've had a lot of discussion about public toilets controlled by councils. I wanted to ask about publicly accessible toilets that might be in commercial premises like shopping centres. I suppose I wanted to ask about your experience of being discriminated against, if that's a phenomenon, in terms of trying to access toilets in those kinds of facilities that are ostensibly open to the public but where, perhaps, the controllers of the facilities want to discourage people who are experiencing homelessness from accessing those facilities. Is that a phenomenon?

DAVID STREATFIELD: I've never experienced it myself, and I've slept on the street for over 20 years all around Australia. No shopping centre that I've ever been to has ever said anything to me about it when I went in there to use their toilets. I've never experienced it myself.

ANTHONY PIERCE: I've seen a guy being escorted off the Westfield shopping complex on Pitt Street. He went in to use the toilet and he was stopped probably within two minutes of entering into the main doors. He asked the security person where the toilet was and the security guy escorted him off the premises. "You're not

here to shop, so you're not here to go to the toilet, so you'll have to leave." That was three weeks before Christmas last year. So it does happen. It's up to the discretion of the property owner.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Roxy, did you have something?

ROXANNA KALNINS: I don't have direct experience of that, necessarily. But I know of people who that's been their experience—especially people who have got significant mental health challenges and can present a certain way and absolutely be told to leave communal spaces and that they're not welcome.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I think perhaps, Tony, you have touched on how councils are restricting the hours of access on the premise of discouraging antisocial behaviour. Has there been an experience of councils appearing to restrict the hours of access with an apparent intent to discourage people who are experiencing homelessness from congregating near a facility?

ANTHONY PIERCE: The minute you restrict access to a toilet—it doesn't matter why you restrict it and who you are trying to restrict—you restrict everybody. They might have the best of reasons to restrict access to that public toilet. I just mentioned the antisocial behaviour that goes on. But in restricting access for a very, very small percentage of people who use public toilets for that reason, you're then restricting the access for everybody, whether it is you, me or anyone else who needs to use the bathroom. They can't use it because it's being locked because something happens in the night-time, perhaps. Again, I am not saying that they are wrong or right in doing it, but a closed toilet is a closed toilet to everybody. It doesn't matter who you are, whether you are rich or poor, black or white or male or female—whatever—you are restricted from that toilet and you're denied access to that toilet. That's where it becomes problematic. The reason for closing that toilet might have some merit, but the merit is not significant to what it means to other people.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: We heard some evidence earlier about a phenomenon in Europe where, effectively, you have to pay for public toilets. What kind of impact would something like that have on people experiencing homelessness?

DAVID STREATFIELD: They tried doing that in Lismore. They were charging people 50¢ to go in to use the toilets. But a lot of the homeless up there didn't have the 50¢, so they would go behind the public toilets and use them there. The thing was, police were there waiting for them. They were charging them for urinating in public because they got refused service in the bus station. After a couple of years of that they stopped doing it and stopped charging people 50¢ to use it. It's a bit rich to use a toilet for 50¢.

ANTHONY PIERCE: I think most of the people in this room are too young to remember that when you used to go to a public toilet, you had to put a 2¢ coin into the lock thing. You'd turn the lock and the toilet would open for you. You probably don't remember 2¢ coins. Why do you want to charge someone to use the bathroom? If it's very new—there must be better ways. You're only left with it being a deterrent. You don't want people who don't have 50¢, for whatever reason, to use that toilet. The user pays. Going to the toilet is one of the most basic bodily functions of a human being. If you think that you have to put your hand in your pocket and get 50¢ out to go and do it, I would like to think that we're a better country than that. I know that sounds a bit over the top, but I just don't see what the rationale is for charging someone to use a bathroom.

ROXANNA KALNINS: Also, there's an assumption there that people even have access to a bank account, and they have ID. They need ID to get a bank account. There are all these processes that need to be in place for somebody to even be able to access money. It's probably going to be by card. They need to have a card. When we're talking about people who those things don't necessarily fall into place like they do for other members of society, it's stressful. It can be difficult to achieve those simple things of having enough points of ID to get a bank account. Just on that alone, it seems a bit—

ANTHONY PIERCE: Punitive.

ROXANNA KALNINS: Yes, punitive.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: If we're saying that access to a toilet is a human right, is this practice something that we should be looking to legislate to prevent so that it just has no place in our society? Is it something that you would support?

ANTHONY PIERCE: If it's a public toilet owned by the Government, I don't think you need legislation. You make the rules, don't you? If it's a privately run toilet, I'm not sure how you can get around that.

DAVID STREATFIELD: I think Sydney had private toilets. There were toilets here they were charging people to use at one stage. That was before COVID hit. Near St James station they had one. Yes, you were always looking around for coins so you could get in and use it. If you didn't have the coin, you had to go and get change

and by the time you got the change you had to go and find the toilet, anyway. I don't know the sense in why they were charging people to use that toilet when there was other ones around that cost you nothing.

ANTHONY PIERCE: The toilets that are being rolled out by the City of Sydney council, it's being done by—they did a tender and they've tendered it to an organisation. So they've taken on the cost and all that, and obviously the council's paying them for that. If they turned around tomorrow and said to Clover Moore, "By the way, we've decided that we're going to make these toilets user-pay," I don't think that would really go over too well with the council, and they'd probably be in breach of their contract. But again, I just find it really frustrating that in 2025 we're talking about charging people to go to the toilet. It's really frustrating.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It's not unheard of, is it?

ANTHONY PIERCE: No, it's not unheard of, I know that, but it doesn't make it right, though.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The toilets at Town Hall station were once open access and then they restructured the station to make it only accessible to patrons of the service. It's not an unheard of phenomena where effectively a barrier or a fee is put in place to people accessing toilets that were once freely available.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Have you seen a decrease in the number of public toilets? I'll focus on the City of Sydney area over the last five to 10 years.

DAVID STREATFIELD: Yes.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: They've been closed for renovations, but they've never reopened, or they've just never replaced them?

DAVID STREATFIELD: They've just disappeared, really. There used to be one near St James that's just gone. I don't know what happened to it, but it was there for a long time and now it's not.

ANTHONY PIERCE: Or they're just not maintained properly enough, and they just reach the point where it becomes a public health safety issue. The easier thing is to close it rather than renovate it. It's more cost-effective to close it than renovate it. I think that's why the public toilet numbers have been diminishing. You can't expect a 1960s built structure to be fit for purpose for 2025. There need to be upgrades or it needs to be rethought. Doors come off, no seats, there's never toilet paper. When it gets to stages like that, then it becomes a graffiti vandal hangout place or whatever, and it no longer becomes a public toilet. It becomes an eyesore, or it becomes a nuisance, or it becomes a potential criminal threat. If that's the case, let's just close it.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: And then there's no requirement to replace it with anything else?

ANTHONY PIERCE: To replace it with anything else, yes.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Which then goes back, as my colleague was talking about, to some of the things that we could look at legislating.

ANTHONY PIERCE: Yes

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Something came up this morning about the need to ensure that there are a certain number of public toilets within a certain distance and things like that. You mentioned an audit. Certainly you could look at asking councils to do an assessment of the toilets that they are responsible for. Do you think it needs to go to a State Government level as well, looking at bus, train or transport areas and what is currently available—cleanliness and whether it's fit for purpose?

DAVID STREATFIELD: I think every train station should have a public toilet where you don't have to swipe your card to go and use it. You know what I mean? It should be on the outside of the actual station, because that's where a lot of people will congregate. If you are camping there, probably at a station or something like that. And, yes, that's why they should have it on the outside of the station, not the inside.

ALANNAH DALY: The City of Sydney had a public toilet strategy in 2014. I don't know if that's their most current one, but even in that one they said there were 117 public toilets in the City of Sydney area, but they only managed 57 of them. Others were the Royal Botanic Gardens authority or the Maritime Authority. I think there is quite a patchwork of different bodies that are responsible for maintaining. I guess an audit would allow a fuller picture of where are the toilets and what standard are they in? Do they need improving? Do we have gaps in areas, like you said, about having a certain amount in a particular distance?

ANTHONY PIERCE: I think Rose needs another portfolio. Maybe Minister for Public Toilets might be another one she can add to the 15 she's got already.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: It makes sense, particularly if the agencies aren't communicating. They wouldn't even know if the other ones had been closed.

ALANNAH DALY: Yes.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: The other thing is in relation to the complaints process. In your submission you did talk about cleanliness. How easily accessible is that complaints process, whether it's a State government agency or the local government?

ANTHONY PIERCE: I think the public toilet in Ward Park has got, from memory, a sign up, "If you have any feedback, scan the QR code." I'm not an idiot, but scanning QR codes just freaked me out. As soon as I see that, I sort of disengage. I'm a 55-year-old man who's been sleeping rough for the last 20 years, and a QR code is just—you're just asking people not to provide feedback. It's an invitation not to provide feedback. I think the best feedback that these people, the toilet operators can find is—do their own feedback. I think there just needs to be more proactive—someone doing the rounds and saying, "Okay, I went to the public toilet on Brown Street, and the third cubicle has got a broken"—those really proactive sort of things.

It shouldn't, you know—I'm just going to scan the QR code and say, "I don't like the quality of the toilet paper", sort of thing. I think if you're going to provide a public service, which is a public toilet, then you have the procedures in place that maintain it, make sure that it's fit for purpose. Any feedback about a public toilet is going to be negative. It's going to be about a problem; it's going to be about a bad experience. It's going to be about something that's gone wrong. If someone's going to act upon it, that's great. If it's just going to be another feedback to compile stats, you know, "Fifty-six per cent of the people who use the toilet thought they had a pleasant experience", what does that mean? It doesn't mean anything.

The CHAIR: You were talking about access to shopping centres and cafes and those sorts of toilets. One of the ideas or suggestions we had floated to us this morning was councils or State governments providing funding to businesses to account for needing it cleaned more frequently, or having to buy more soap or toilet paper or whatever, to then require them to make it available for people who weren't customers. I'm interested in your feedback on whether you think that would be a solution.

DAVID STREATFIELD: If you do, though, they've got to police it, because you've got people who will say, "Yes, I'll do it", but they'll take the funding, but they won't let—the store will treat you the way they did before, you know what I mean?

ANTHONY PIERCE: Just because you're providing that and doing that, it still gives them a hundred reasons why they can refuse someone access. Just because, "Oh, you know, the Government's paying for the toilet paper and soap"—yes, you can go and do it. You know, there'd be more reasons still to exclude somebody. If it was, "We'll do that for you on the basis that people have access, and you can't deny somebody access unless it's something really egregious"—I'm just a bit sceptical about it. I think it would work with, say, the Northcote Community Centre. If they said to Homelessness NSW, "Can you make sure that community centre is open between 10.00 and 4.00 on Monday to Friday, and we'll assist with"—I don't know, the things that you just said. because I think it's a Homelessness NSW establishment.

The contractors come in and clean it every day. It's got a male toilet, a female toilet. They don't have disability access, which is problematic. But I think you try to utilise those sort of government-owned facilities rather than going to Westfields and asking them to help people. I think it's probably better to approach people who are probably willing to help. I just don't think that Westfields are going to open up their nice, clean public toilets next to Prada on the sixth floor just because you're giving them some money for toilet paper and soap. Sorry, I'm being a bit sceptical, but I just don't—like I said, I witnessed that guy being escorted. He asked the security guard where the toilet was. The security guard said, "You're not a shopper here, mate. You'll have to leave." And he got escorted off the premises.

The CHAIR: There was also a discussion already about transit stations and train stations. It seems like an option for the State Government, where it's already State government property to provide toilets. So you're suggesting that, rather than thinking of them as toilets for patrons of the transit system, that's just low-hanging fruit to provide a good facility for the general community? I'm going to comment on the nodding for Hansard again, because the record doesn't show the nodding.

DAVID STREATFIELD: In Central station, they've got showers in there, in some of their offices, their rooms. Many years ago, you used to be able to go in there and store your luggage and have a shower. I don't know if they're still operating now or not.

ANTHONY PIERCE: The public toilets at the domestic terminal have showers. You walk into the men's and there's toilets that way and showers and change rooms that way. And that's provided. I mean, it's just a cost

involved. It's factored into your ticket. Those sort of facilities do exist. I mean, demand might be greater at a domestic terminal than Central station, perhaps. But, you know, it's something that could be possibly looked at.

DAVID STREATFIELD: You'd think they'd be automatically at train stations, especially a major one like Sydney, Sydney Central. You've got thousands of people coming in from all over the country every day. You'd think they'd have showers there for people to use. Especially coming back over from Perth. You've been on that train for three days, having to shower on that train and you don't want to do it, you know? But when you get here, you want a nice, clean shower.

The CHAIR: This has been a very valuable discussion. Thank you. Before we finish up, is there anything burning that you want the opportunity to add that we haven't asked about?

ANTHONY PIERCE: Can I be a bit off? No, not really. What else? This morning I was just thinking about things, and someone could correct me if I'm wrong, but I think Mark Twain talks about certainties in life, about death and taxes. I think we can add "wees and poos" to that without much too much debate. Sorry about that.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Sounds like a good opening line for the report.

ANTHONY PIERCE: There you go. It was just a check mark. I'm sure it was Mark Twain who said that. But, anyway, it doesn't matter.

ALANNAH DALY: One other thing just to touch on briefly is accessibility for people who might have disabilities. It's also a huge consideration but one, you know—probably refer to PWDA's recommendations on that one. But I think it's worth highlighting that it's also something that we would like to emphasise.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We do have future hearings scheduled with a number of representatives of people with disabilities. Thank you so much for your time, for sharing your experience with us. This has been hugely valuable for the Committee. We really appreciate it.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 14:50.