

## Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Toilet provision for men and women: call for evidence.

### Submission of Evidence

January 2021

#### Background

Crohn's and Colitis – the two main forms of Inflammatory Bowel Disease – are lifelong diseases of the gut. They are painful, debilitating and there is no known cure. <sup>(1)</sup>

When you have Crohn's or Colitis, your immune system does not work properly. Your body starts attacking itself, causing ulcers and inflammation in the gut leading to pain and urgent diarrhoea.

Crohn's and Colitis do not just affect your gut. They can affect almost every part of your body and every aspect of your life: from your digestion and joints to your energy levels and mental health.

People living with the conditions often face a lifetime of medication and, in many cases, major surgery. If left untreated, they can be fatal.

A medically recognised symptom of Inflammatory Bowel Disease is the issue of urgent diarrhoea, often containing blood, mucus and pus.



This urgent need to poo and hence a need to know where an accessible toilet may be located, is something which affects every aspect of that person's life – their work; education; social life; family relationships; etc.

As well as diarrhoea, inflammatory Bowel Disease can also lead to extensive surgery, on some occasions leading to the person needing to wear an ostomy bag for the rest of their lives.

In addition to the availability and physical structure of toilet facilities, accessibility also depends on societal acceptance. Due to the 'hidden' nature of Inflammatory Bowel Disease and some other conditions, many people who appear not to have a disability, face overt antagonism and criticism from members of the public when observed using accessible facilities. Therefore, in terms of statutory direction to people or organisations involved in the construction of accessible facilities, it is important that overt recognition is given to the fact that not every disability is visible in signage on the toilets.

## Evidence Summary




- 1) Emerging research indicates that there are around 500,000 people in the UK who have Inflammatory Bowel Disease <sup>(2)</sup>
- 2) 2% of people who have Inflammatory Bowel Disease have [stomas](#). <sup>(3)</sup>
- 3) 1 in 2 people with Crohn's and Colitis reported in a 2019 survey having had a negative response from a member of the public for having used an accessible toilet. <sup>(3)</sup> 
- 4) 61% of those negative experiences reported included verbal and/or physical abuse. <sup>(4)</sup>
- 5) 81% of respondents believe that the public have little understanding of the conditions and are quick to judge those living with invisible conditions. <sup>(4)</sup>
- 6) 50% of people said they have felt prevented from going to restaurants (49%) and pubs (43%) because they fear discrimination. <sup>(4)</sup> 
- 7) Over 80% said that they feel more comfortable visiting places with [Not Every Disability is Visible](#) signs installed. <sup>(4)</sup>
- 8) 75% make choices about which restaurants, pubs or cafes to visit based on the accessibility of their toilets. <sup>(4)</sup>
- 9) Crohn's & Colitis UK would support the words of the Chief Executive of the Royal Society of Public Health in their 2018 Report: [Taking the P\\*\\*\\*](#) <sup>(5)</sup>



**“Public toilets are no luxury: it’s high time we begin to see them as basic and essential parts of the community – just like pavements and streetlights – that enable people to benefit from and engage with their surroundings.”**

---

---

When designing accessible toilet provision, it must be a **key principle that the facilities are equally available** to all. As the consultation suggests, numbers and gender balance will play an important role in this. However, **inclusive design and signage** will address some of the attitudinal barriers faced by people with hidden disabilities and allow them to benefit fully from access to the full range of opportunities including employment, education, health services, leisure, etc. 

## Summary and Recommendations

- Accessibility of toilets is a key pillar underpinning social inclusion, health and equality for around **14 million disabled** people in the UK <sup>(6)</sup>
  - 8% of children are disabled.
  - 19% of working aged adults are disabled.
  - 44% of pension aged adults are disabled.
- Accessibility of toilets is not solely about either the physical structure or number of such facilities, there are **attitudinal barriers** that can and need to be addressed at the design stage. 
- The provision of accessible toilets should not disadvantage either women or men in terms of numbers or location. Crohn's & Colitis UK cooperate closely with the [British Toilet Association](#) and rely on their technical expertise in relation to recommended design, numbers and gender balance of toilet facilities.
- **Recommendation 1:** All accessible toilets should have [Not Every Disability Is Visible](#) signage so that people with hidden can access them without fear of criticism from other members of the public.
- **Recommendation 2:** All accessible toilets, whether wheelchair or ambulatory and whether in the municipal or private sector, should be fitted with equipment that allow people with [ostomies](#) to change and dispose of the bag with dignity and in a private and hygienic environment. 
- **Recommendation 3:** The above recommendations should apply to the design of **accessible toilet facilities** whether in the **built environment** or on public transport **rolling stock**.

Crohn's & Colitis UK would welcome further discussions with the Department on this matter.


# CROHN'S & COLITIS UK

Further information is available at:

[policy@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk](mailto:policy@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk)

<https://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/> 

## References

- 1) <https://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/about-crohns-and-colitis/what-are-the-symptoms>
- 2) Inflammatory Bowel Disease in Numbers: Understanding the Scale of Crohn's and Colitis in Wales. Feb 2020. Scanlon, Lewis, Wang, Rees, Berry. SAIL Databank. University of Swansea 
- 3) Immunology\_DoF\_25Jan2019\_MI\_PC\_001 (unpublished data from Toilet Consortium UK's 2017 Survey, July 2017)
- 4) Immunology\_DoF\_19MAR2019\_MI\_SG\_001 (unpublished data from Not Every Disability is Visible 2019 Patient Survey, March 2019). \_
- 5) Taking the P\*\*\*. The Decline of the Great British Public Toilet. Royal Society for Public Health. May 2019
- 6) <https://www.scope.org.uk/media/disability-facts-figures/>