

## CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTAL BARRIERS TO CONTINENCE

### Hypothesis / aims of study

Whilst the aging population in the UK grows, Help The Aged found that the number of available public toilet facilities has dramatically declined(1). Due to toilet access difficulties, many older people limit the time and the distances that they are away from home, reducing their quality of life(2).

This paper will discuss Work Package 2 of a 3-year research project. This consists of inclusive design research work into the environmental barriers to continence management, namely access to publicly-accessible toilets.

Building on a previous study that looked at the design of the accessible public toilet cubicle, this research incorporates inclusive design methods such as interviews and participatory design games, to further explore how an inclusive public service may be offered.

### Study design, materials and methods

The researchers conducted phone interviews with nearly 100 users representing most ages from 0 to 100 including those with IBS, MS, mobility problems and continence concerns as an effect of medication, pregnancy or age (including children), about their experiences and concerns, gaining insights into how toileting needs develop as a person ages. Four personas were developed in order to communicate user concerns with providers.

The researchers also interviewed 20 professionals relating to public toilet provision. These included several local authorities as well as architects, transport providers, department stores and public toilet manufacturers, about the barriers experienced in providing public toilets.

### Results

By mapping the insights gathered from the user interviews, the researchers identified 9 different aspects of away-from-home toilet facilities of importance to users. These 9 aspects are: Journey (Information & Planning), User Experience, Security, Hygiene, Product Design, Provision, Location, Architecture and Privacy. As an initial response, the research team proposed a set of design concepts on the top three themes of Hygiene, Journey and Provision to present to a focus group of previous interviewees.

This included a concept where members of the public could rate toilets using a portal in the exit of the facility, as well as a series of designs on provision and segregation which addressed the gulf between standard and 'accessible' cubicles that affects many older users and those with continence concerns.

Interviews with public toilet providers and professionals revealed that the cost of vandalism and maintenance and cleaning contracts were the driving forces behind provision rather than taking a people-centred approach to service design.

Local authorities have no statutory duty to provide public toilets, and this combined with the fracturing of provision across several hundred local authorities prevents information about publicly-available toilets from being produced(3).

### Interpretation of results

The research has highlighted the need for consolidated, reliable and complete information about the UK's public toilets. This would facilitate better information for planning ahead and finding public toilets when out-and-about, giving older people and those experiencing continence concerns greater freedom in both business and leisure.

### Concluding message

The researchers are investigating how local authorities and other providers could provide data on public toilets in order to create a UK-wide public toilet map that would help users to find facilities that meet their individual needs when away from home. The design outcome of the research will be a pilot of a public participation website. The map would have a map of the UK showing where public toilet data exists in an accessible format. Where no data exists, the site will provide a means for the public to contact their councils to ask them to take part in the project.

### References

1. Help the Aged. Nowhere to Go. London; Help to Aged; 2007.
2. Hanson J, Bichard J, Greed C. The Accessible Toilet Design Resource. London; UCL/Vivacity; 2007. 22 p.
3. Greed, C. Inclusive Urban Design: Public Toilets, Oxford, Architectural Press, Elsevier; 2003.

	AHRC, administered by ESRC.
<i>Is this a clinical trial?</i>	No
<i>What were the subjects in the study?</i>	HUMAN
<i>Was this study approved by an ethics committee?</i>	Yes
<i>Specify Name of Ethics Committee</i>	Royal College of Art Ethics Committee
<i>Was the Declaration of Helsinki followed?</i>	No
<i>This study did not follow the Declaration of Helsinki in the sense that</i>	It was not a sociological ethnographical research project, not a medical research project.
<i>Was informed consent obtained from the patients?</i>	Yes