

Copy for **Continence UK** (June 2008)

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Research

Incontinence is an issue frequently brought to the attention of Help the Aged via helpline calls and letters from the public and at meetings with health professionals and older people.

Whether older people are facing difficulties in accessing their local continence service, the threatened closure of a local public toilet or restrictions on the number of incontinence pads given out by local healthcare providers, they report situations where their dignity is compromised and their quality of life diminished.

We wanted to find out more about how people cope with incontinence and what Help the Aged can do to make a difference. We undertook a number of research studies to find out more about the problems older people face.

*Nowhere to Go: public toilet provision in the UK* collates almost 1,000 people's comments and experiences of using public toilets. Many people say they are restricted in how often and for how long they are able to leave their homes because of a lack of public toilets.

*Incontinence and Older People: is there a link to social isolation?* Help the Aged) contains 20 interviews with people about the impact of incontinence on the quality of their life. What is revealed is that some people have an optimistic and courageous way of dealing with this difficult problem; others manage with the support of family and friends and through their involvement in outside interests, while a small number regard their shrinking social involvement as permanent.

Research into Ageing is a biomedical research programme within Help the Aged. Founded in 1976, it funds research into the most common illnesses affecting older people, such as incontinence. Current research projects include tackling infections caused by catheters, examining changes to cells in the bladder that trigger contractions and bladder-voiding, and the role of exercise in improving incontinence.

All this research suggests ways in which Help the Aged can make a difference to older people's lives.

### **What we want**

Our efforts are also focused on those who decide on priorities, whether in policy or in provision. We seek to raise awareness of the links between incontinence and isolation to policy makers and service providers. And we

support older people in lobbying for improvements in provision of high quality affordable incontinence services.

### **Working in partnership**

We achieve these aims by working closely with other voluntary organisations, clinicians and practitioners in a united bid to improve the continence care available for older people in the UK.

A recent example of partnership working is the multi-agency campaign led by the British Geriatric Society. The first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states: 'All human beings are born free, equal in dignity and human rights'. Yet in some places of care, the rights of older people are ignored in matters as basic as using the toilet.

This joint initiative aims to improve toileting on the ward. By giving people back control over this most private of functions will enhance their independence and rehabilitation, reduce lengths of stay in hospital and promote continence.

More information is available at [www.bgs.org.uk](http://www.bgs.org.uk)

### **Useful information**

Help the Aged Reports:

*Incontinence and Older People: is there a link to social isolation?*

*Taking control of incontinence*

*Nowhere to Go: public toilet provision in the UK*

All available to download at

<http://policy.helptheaged.org.uk/healthyageing>

A useful fact sheet, *Talking Incontinence: understanding urinary incontinence*, is available free of charge from [www.ageing.org](http://www.ageing.org)

*Bladder and Bowel Weakness: managing incontinence* is a free

Help the Aged advice leaflet available from 020 7278 1114 or

[www.helptheaged.org.uk](http://www.helptheaged.org.uk)

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