

Copy for **Policy Update** (June 2007)

Pamela Holmes Healthy Ageing Programme, Help the Aged

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.

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>

Bladder and Bowel Weakness: managing incontinence is a free Help the Aged advice leaflet available from 020 7278 1114 or

www.helptheaged.org.uk

A useful fact sheet, *Talking Incontinence: understanding urinary incontinence*, is available free of charge from www.ageing.org.