Tip Sheet 3: Gender responsive toilet and change room facilities

Conducting Gender Impact Assessments in the Transport Sector

The purpose of this tip sheet is to support you to identify key gender issues within the transport sector and ways to address these. This tip sheet focuses on gender responsive toilet and change room facilities.

Safety is not only about fear of violence, it is also about feeling welcome and accommodated for. Amenities designed for and with people of all genders can improve feelings of acceptance and perceptions of safety. **Toilets and change rooms should be designed to give everyone easy access, privacy, dignity, safety and convenience.**

These resources include a focus on women who identify as Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTIQ+ and/or as a person with a disability.

This focus acknowledges that women across these groups face multiple, intersecting inequalities.

# What are the different gendered needs in accessing toilets and change room/ shower facilities?

## Cultural Safety

Using public bathroom facilities can be a major source of distress for those who identify outside of a gender binary. This can result in ‘bathroom anxiety’ or avoiding going to the toilet outside the home as much as possible. It can also escalate to violence or abuse in some situations.

On the other hand, some cultures and religious groups have beliefs about the use of private changing places and gender segregation which has cultural safety implications if toilets are not segregated by gender.

Diverse language needs: ensure pictorials are used to remain inclusive for speakers of languages other than English.




## Safety and security

It is also important to consider the lighting and location of all toilets in public places to ensure that all toilet users feel safe, comfortable and at ease when using the facility. Cleaning and maintenance regimes can also affect people’s feelings of safety and security.

**Toilets and change rooms should be designed to give everyone easy access, privacy, dignity, safety and convenience.**

## Meeting carers needs

Change tables should be available for parents of all genders, rather than just provided in women’s toilets. Parents are also often navigating facilities with a pram which requires space and accessibility.

Difficulties can also be presented for parents and carers looking after a person/ child of a different gender if only single sex facilities are available. Providing gender- inclusive facilities such as breastfeeding facilities is also best practice.

## Accessibility

Design must meet the specific user needs, including minimal standards for physical accessibility. This also includes handles and height of fixtures. Sanitary disposal bins should also be easily accessible in all toilets. Initiatives such as [Changing Places, Transforming Lives](https://changingplaces.org.au/) provide suitable facilities for people with higher needs who cannot use standard accessible toilets.

## Availability

Toilets need to be provided in the appropriate number to respond to the number of users. This includes considering if they are conveniently located and how far people need to travel to access them. Women also often experience longer wait times than men due to the differences in toilet use. This should be factored into the number of toilets provided or designing for more all-gender toilets that are more inclusive.

Data snapshot

68% of transgender respondents in Washington D.C. had experienced some form of verbal harassment or physical assault when accessing gender- segregated public toilets.1

In the USA, 59% of transgender people surveyed reported refraining from using a bathroom outside of their home in the previous year. The main rationale was fear of confrontation. 2

According to a recent study, women wait an average of 2 minutes and 18 seconds to use the bathroom. By contrast, men wait only 40 seconds.3

As part of **Step 1 of your gender impact assessment** it is important to consider these gendered needs for facilities. How will the policy, program or service you are assessing meet these needs? These proposed [National Public Toilet Principles](https://policy-futures.centre.uq.edu.au/files/7702/PolicyFutures2021_Webber.pdf) provide a useful checklist to consider (page 6).

# Key questions: Gender responsive toilet facilities

## How does the provision of toilet facilities relate to your specific policy, program or service?

Think about who might need to access toilet facilities. Are there already facilities available which meet their needs, or do these need to be provided?

## Does your policy, program or service respond to the needs of these different users?

Think about these different needs: cultural and physical safety, accessibility and availability of toilets for all genders and carer needs. Are there enough toilets?

Are they safe and easily located? Are the facilities inclusive and accessible? Do they meet everyone’s needs or do you need to make changes?

## How can you provide users with choices that meet their needs?

All Gender toilets, along with other types of toilets such as single gender, all gender accessible, and accessible adult change facilities provide the opportunity for people to make choices about which toilet they may need or prefer to use based on their individual requirements.

If you are installing new toilets, think about how you can provide users with this choice.

If you have a limited budget or if space is restricted, think about how you might modify existing facilities to provide a space which is inclusive for all users.

All Gender Toilets

People of all gender identities and expressions can use All Gender toilets. They provide a space for people who may not feel comfortable or safe using the binary gendered female or male toilets, and can also benefit parents and guardians accompanying children, and people requiring the assistance of a carer, regardless of their gender.

* There is debate around the appropriate [use of signage](https://www.australiandesignreview.com/architecture/more-than-just-a-bathroom-sign-how-design-can-become-more-inclusive/), but one way to remove gender from a toilet sign is not to mention it. Signage can simply state ‘Toilet’ or ‘Ambulant Toilet.’4 [Other suggestions](https://www.transhub.org.au/allies/bathrooms) include ‘All Gender bathroom.’
* Ideally All Gender bathrooms will be wider, closed stalls with private wash basins.
* Have sanitary bins in all cubicles. If this is not possible, consider labelling which cubicles have these facilities.
* It is also helpful to label what facilities are available behind the bathroom door, such as whether the bathroom contains toilets, urinals, or change tables. [See some examples.](https://www.transhub.org.au/allies/bathrooms)
* Renaming a wheelchair accessible toilet as a general all-gender provision is not ideal because it may mean disabled users have to wait longer. However, this can provide an interim measure.

Do you have enough information to answer these questions? **As part of Step 2 of your gender impact assessment** you may need to collect further evidence to understand your specific context.

* It is important for user groups to be included in the design and planning of public toilets to ensure that the facilities provided meet their needs. This may include providing a range of options.
* Consider any internal data, customer feedback information or existing reports which may provide the information you need.
* Talk to diverse women and gender diverse people about their experiences using facilities.

You could use the women’s safety audit methodology (see Tip Sheet 1) to gather different perspectives and ideas for solutions.

See the [TramLab toolkit on Gender Sensitive Data](https://www.monash.edu/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/2738753/211027_Toolkit_Data.pdf) and pages 22-28 of the [GIA toolkit](https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/gender-impact-assessments) for further ideas.

# Emerging good practice

When you are considering the range of options for your policy, program or service as part of **Step 3 of your gender impact assessment**, here are some innovative solutions being implemented around the world.

All Gender toilets

Across Australia there are a range of organisations that are taking a leadership role in recognising the importance of installing All Gender toilets. This includes universities (including University of Melbourne,Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, University of Technology Sydney, Curtin University in Western Australia, Sunshine Coast University in Queensland), the Rod Laver Arena, Marvel Stadium and Commonwealth public service buildings in Canberra.6

Converting toilets into all-user facilities

In Portland, USA, significant consultation was undertaken to develop a city-wide approach to all-user toilets. This approach centred on the needs of parents with children, people with personal attendants, and transgender individuals. Over 600 single-stall gender- specific toilets were converted to all-user facilities with signs indicating what is behind the door (a urinal or toilet), rather than who is allowed to use it.7

Partnership with local bars and restaurants

In London, to ensure access to toilets, cafes and bars have been paid a subsidy to allow non-customers to use their toilets.8

# Footnote

Women/woman includes cisgender women, transgender women, non-binary people and gender diverse people who may be perceived as women, female or feminine (regardless of their expression or identity), and therefore may share common barriers and challenges.

# Notes

1 J. Herman, 2013. Gendered Restrooms and Minority Stress: The public regulation of gender and its impact on transgender people’s lives, June 2013, [https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/](https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/gendered-restrooms-minority-stress/) [publications/gendered-restrooms-minority-stress/](https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/gendered-restrooms-minority-stress/)

2 James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L. and Anafi, M. (2016), ‘The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey’, National Center for Transgender Equality, Washington,

DC., [https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/behavioural-public-policy/article/genderneutral-bathroom-a-new-frame-and-some-nudges/C6CDCA42BAEBCE684B243EB9773A771C) [behavioural-public-policy/article/genderneutral-](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/behavioural-public-policy/article/genderneutral-bathroom-a-new-frame-and-some-nudges/C6CDCA42BAEBCE684B243EB9773A771C) [bathroom-a-new-frame-and-some-nudges/](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/behavioural-public-policy/article/genderneutral-bathroom-a-new-frame-and-some-nudges/C6CDCA42BAEBCE684B243EB9773A771C) [C6CDCA42BAEBCE684B243EB9773A771C](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/behavioural-public-policy/article/genderneutral-bathroom-a-new-frame-and-some-nudges/C6CDCA42BAEBCE684B243EB9773A771C)

3 K. Luckins. 2019. More than just a bathroom sign: how design can become more inclusive, Australian Design Review Blog, [https://www.](https://www.australiandesignreview.com/architecture/more-than-just-a-bathroom-sign-how-design-can-become-more-inclusive/) [australiandesignreview.com/architecture/more-than-just-a-bathroom-sign-how-design-can-become-more-inclusive/](https://www.australiandesignreview.com/architecture/more-than-just-a-bathroom-sign-how-design-can-become-more-inclusive/)

4 See for example, [https://www.](https://www.disabilityaccessconsultants.com.au/new-inclusive-gender-neutral-toilet-sign/) [disabilityaccessconsultants.com.au/new-](https://www.disabilityaccessconsultants.com.au/new-inclusive-gender-neutral-toilet-sign/) [inclusive-gender-neutral-toilet-sign/](https://www.disabilityaccessconsultants.com.au/new-inclusive-gender-neutral-toilet-sign/)

5 J. Manton. 2021. All Gender Toilets – We just want to go to the toilet!, Access Institute Blog, May 11, 2021, <https://accessinstitute.com.au/all-gender-toilets-we-just-want-to-go-to-the-toilet/>

6 J. Manton. 2021. All Gender Toilets – We just want to go to the toilet!, Access Institute Blowg, May 11, 2021, <https://accessinstitute.com.au/all-gender-toilets-we-just-want-to-go-to-the-toilet/>

7 K. Webber. 2021. We Need to Talk About Public Toilets Policy agendas for inclusive suburbs and cities. Policy Futures: A Reform Agenda,

[https://policy-futures.centre.uq.edu.au/files/7702/](https://policy-futures.centre.uq.edu.au/files/7702/PolicyFutures2021_Webber.pdf) [PolicyFutures2021\_Webber.pdf](https://policy-futures.centre.uq.edu.au/files/7702/PolicyFutures2021_Webber.pdf)

8 City of Sydney & C40 Cities, 2020. On The Go: How Women Travel Around Our City

A Case Study on Active Transport Across Sydney Through a Gender Lens, available at: [https://www.](https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/surveys-case-studies-reports/on-the-go-how-women-travel-around-our-city) [cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/surveys-case-studies-](https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/surveys-case-studies-reports/on-the-go-how-women-travel-around-our-city) [reports/on-the-go-how-women-travel-around-our-city](https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/surveys-case-studies-reports/on-the-go-how-women-travel-around-our-city)



