

MALE INCONTINENCE

DISPOSE WITH DIGNITY

Research into male urinary incontinence
in the Republic of Ireland.

Commissioned by phs Ireland with support
from the Irish Cancer Society and Irish Men's
Sheds Association.



Group

Irish 
Cancer
Society



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This new report by phs Ireland, with support from the Irish Cancer Society and Irish Men's Sheds Association, highlights, for the first time, the barriers faced by men experiencing urinary incontinence as a result of cancer or cancer-related treatment – particularly after prostate cancer treatment – in the Republic of Ireland.

It forms part of extensive research by **phs** Group undertaken over the last two years to shine a light on the issue of male urinary incontinence (UI), its association with prostate cancer treatment and other cancers, and the profound impact on those who experience it.

Our latest research uncovers: a lack of awareness and understanding about the issue among both men and women across Ireland; inadequate provision of essential toilet facilities like sanitary bins and product vending machines; and how men's mental health and wellbeing is being compromised as a result.

The stark truth is that many men choose to stay at home. Quite simply, they cannot face the embarrassment and indignity of leaking in public or having to change incontinence pads with no access to toilet essentials.

As a result, men are isolated, anxious and depressed. Men experiencing UI as a result of cancer or cancer-related treatment need support – and they need it now.

Each time a man leaves home, he needs to know that wherever he goes, access to basic washroom facilities is a given. That the life he knew before becoming incontinent is not consigned to a distant memory.

We want to give men in Ireland, experiencing UI after a cancer diagnosis and treatment, a voice. We want to increase awareness and understanding across society about a condition that leaves so many men suffering in silence. We want to bring about legislative changes to ensure that all public washrooms across Ireland provide men with the dignity they deserve.

FOREWORD



Eoin Foley
Managing Director
phs Ireland

Our initiative with the Irish Cancer Society is a meaningful step that shows **phs** Ireland truly puts people at the heart of its products and services, and wants to make an impact. The initiative will promote better awareness around prostate cancer and incontinence, and will ensure men have the facilities they need in toilets, so they can live well and with dignity.

Around one in six men in Ireland will face prostate cancer at some point in their lifetime. What most people don't know is that almost all men who have life-saving prostate cancer treatment, will go on to experience bladder leaks, also known as urinary incontinence. These are real challenges faced by real people; and they deserve better.

In the UK, we've already made strides through our partnership with Prostate Cancer UK, launching the Dispose with Dignity and BOG STANDARD campaigns. These initiatives have helped bring difficult conversations to the forefront, challenged stigma, and ensured men have access to proper disposal facilities in public washrooms.

Now, it's Ireland's turn to lead the way.

I'm especially proud to have Marcus, one of our own **phs** drivers, supporting this campaign. Marcus works from our Ireland site and has been diagnosed with prostate cancer. He's lending his voice to represent all men affected by prostate cancer and incontinence — helping us break the silence and drive change.

You'll also read about Gerry, who we are working closely with via Men's Sheds Ireland. Gerry and the Men's Sheds network will be supporting the campaign alongside us, helping to amplify awareness and ensure this message reaches communities across the country.

This is a piece of work we are all so proud of, and I hope the people of Ireland will be proud of it too.

WORKING TOGETHER



Group



About phs Ireland

phs Ireland is the leading hygiene services provider with customers in every village, town and city across the island of Ireland. We are proud to shine a light on issues that matter but are not always talked about.

We aim to be innovative by developing the best services and products that make lives easier. We are also passionate about removing stigma, raising awareness, and breaking down barriers on subject matters that are often shied away from.

About Irish Cancer Society

The Irish Cancer Society is a community of patients, survivors, volunteers, supporters, health and social care professionals and researchers.

Together, we are working to save lives and improve the lives of people affected by cancer in Ireland.

We are transforming the experiences and outcomes of people affected by cancer through our advocacy, support services and research, and working towards a future where nobody in Ireland will die from cancer.

Consequently, we are proud to work in association with Irish Cancer Society and Irish Men's Sheds Association to highlight the challenges faced by men experiencing male incontinence, to provide a platform for their voices to be heard, and together, to be a catalyst for change.

About Irish Men's Sheds Association

The Irish Men's Sheds Association is an Umbrella grassroots organisation supporting over 465+ Sheds across the Island of Ireland.

Each Shed shares the key ingredients of People, Place and Purpose but are as individually unique as the Men who attend. Activities range from wood working to bee keeping and music to metalwork. Sheds are

inclusive, welcoming and open spaces where 'every Men can find his place' and get what he needs on his terms.

Connection is the common factor across every Shed. The Health & Well Being team at IMSA aim to engage and support Sheddors to explore and fulfill their Health & Well Being potential through cross-sector and interdisciplinary partnerships, projects and initiatives.

Their approach is cohort and gender specific recognising that of the generations of Men coming into Sheds (predominantly in the 60-90 age range) many have complex relationships with their Health and with formal Health structures. IMSA recognises that the cohort they work with have distinct social, cultural and historical backgrounds which provides the context for delivery of programmes and collaborations.

METHODOLOGY

This nationwide study was conducted by iReach between 21 – 30 August 2025. iReach follows industry best practices and is a member of ESOMAR, MRS (Market Research Society) and AQR (Association of Qualitative Research).

**THE RESEARCH
INCLUDED 2 GROUPS
AGED 18 – 55+:**

1,000 **NATIONALLY
REPRESENTATIVE
CONSUMERS**
(489 MALE, 511 FEMALE)

702 **MEN WHO
EXPERIENCE UI**

UI AND CANCER

URINARY INCONTINENCE IN MEN CAN DEVELOP AS A RESULT OF CANCER ITSELF OR AS A SIDE EFFECT OF TREATMENT. IT IS A RELATIVELY COMMON COMPLICATION IN PATIENTS WITH PROSTATE, BLADDER, RECTAL OR COLORECTAL CANCER.



Treatments for prostate cancer, such as prostatectomy (surgical removal of the prostate) or radiotherapy, can result in increased urgency to go to the toilet and unwanted leaks.

However, despite its widespread prevalence among males, awareness about UI and its association with some cancers is lacking, leading to misconceptions, stereotypes and a stigma that's hard to shift.

Often UI is associated with men just getting older, or with women after childbirth, but men of all ages can experience it. While the general incidence of male UI* rises with age, it peaks in the 55-64 age group at 37% before falling, with 1 in 10 men aged 65 and older experiencing symptoms.

Prostate cancer is the most prevalent cancer among males in Ireland. Each year, approximately 4,000 men are diagnosed with the disease. This means that hundreds of thousands of men across Ireland – around 1 in 6 men** – faces a prostate cancer diagnosis at some point in their lifetime.

What many don't realise is that a significant proportion of men who receive a cancer diagnosis, and particularly those who undergo prostate cancer treatment, will experience some degree of urinary incontinence, such as loss of bladder control and involuntary leaks. In fact, as many as half of all men who undergo prostate removal may go on to experience UI***.

While some men experience only temporary symptoms, others can face longer term – and in some cases – lifelong challenges in managing the condition.

Our research highlights the devastating impact of UI on men of all ages in terms of their daily lives and mental health.

*National Library of Medicine – Male Urinary Incontinence: Prevalence, Risk Factors, and Preventive Interventions - PMC PubMed Central (nih.gov) <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2777062/>

**National Cancer Registry Ireland – Cancer in Ireland 1994-2022: Annual statistical report of the National Cancer Registry (2024) <https://www.ncri.ie/en/reports-publications/reports/cancer-in-ireland-1994-2022-annual-statistical-report-of-the-national>

European Association of Urology Guidelines on Male UI – ScienceDirect <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eururo.2022.05.012> * <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20541241/>

NO BINS, NO DIGNITY

OVER HALF OF MEN (54%) WHO EXPERIENCE UI HAVE STRUGGLED TO FIND A BIN IN PUBLIC RESTROOMS TO THROW AWAY THEIR INCONTINENCE PADS.

The majority (65%) say they have been negatively affected by their experience of inadequate disposal facilities in some way.

While almost 2 in 5 (38%) will take the risk of finding the facilities they need, almost 4 in 5 (79%) take steps to ensure they can manage their condition in public places. Sadly, 7% feel they have no other option but to stay at home.

Those who are willing to take the gamble of going out in the hope of coming across a sanitary bin – and then not finding one – are often forced to resort to embarrassing, humiliating and unhygienic methods to hide their secret.

Almost half (46%) have used a disabled toilet to get rid of used pads – even though they are not disabled – while almost a third (29%) have put them in a normal bin outside the cubicle.

Nearly 1 in 5 (18%) have flushed them down the toilet – potentially causing a blockage – while 15% have worn incontinence products longer than recommended, compromising their health. Meanwhile, 14% have faced the indignity of carrying soiled pads around with them in a rucksack or even asking a partner to put them in their handbag (8%).



THE MENTAL HEALTH TOLL

IT IS NO SURPRISE THAT MORE THAN HALF OF MEN (52%) TRYING TO MANAGE INCONTINENCE SYMPTOMS AFTER CANCER TREATMENT FEEL ANXIOUS ABOUT LACK OF ACCESS TO PROPER FACILITIES WHEN THEY ARE OUT IN PUBLIC.

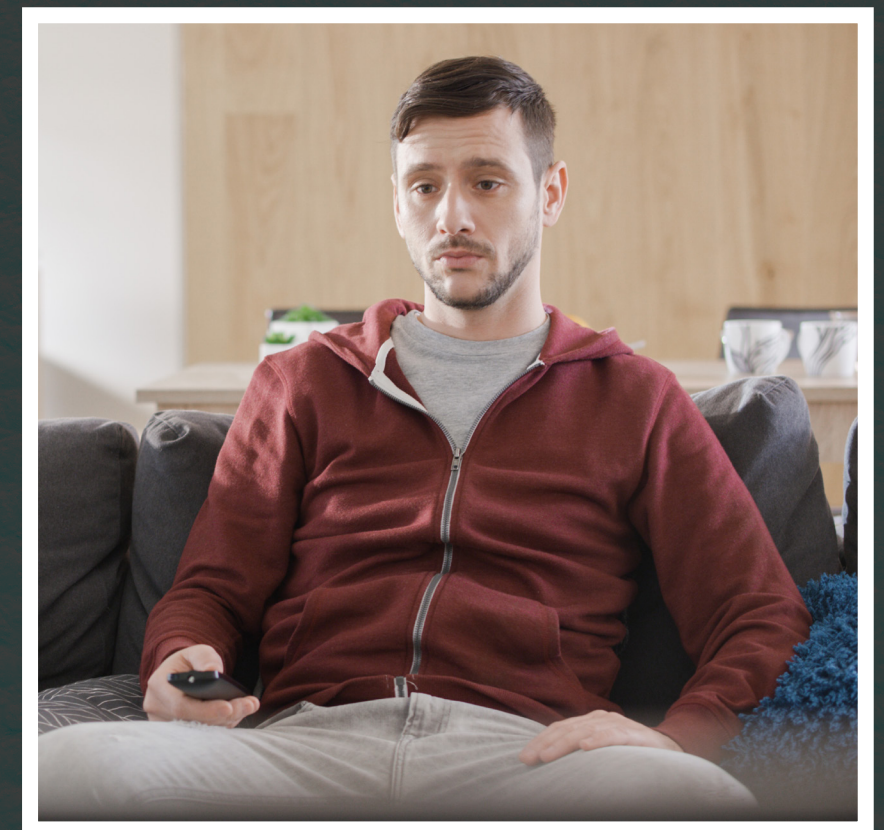
A third (33%) experience anxiety about finding a toilet and whether it will be suitable for their needs. Worry translates into 19% being more reluctant to meet up with friends away from home, 15% no longer going out on the spur of the moment, 13% leaving the house less often, and 7% working from home more than they – or their employer – would like.

Half (50%) have turned down at least one opportunity to meet up with others due to the likely lack of appropriate public sanitary bins, from socialising (20%), sporting events (18%) and attending important family events (16%), to going to the pub (17%), work (15%) or the gym (11%).

As a result of missing moments like these, more than 3 in 5 men (64%) feel that their mental health has been impacted negatively, with 14%, 1 in 7, feeling depressed about how their life has changed for the worse.

Men's struggles are made harder by widespread gaps in knowledge and understanding. Nearly a third (30%) are disappointed by lack of awareness about UI issues and 29% wish people knew more about the challenges they face, with 21% feeling sad and 13% angry. Nearly three-quarters (72%) report being at least somewhat affected by poor levels of awareness.

Over half (55%) agree that being able to access male incontinence bins and vending machine products in public toilets would make their lives easier and better.



Research conducted by iReach comprising 702 men in Ireland experiencing UI* between 21 – 30 August 2025

*At least 50% of whom have experienced incontinence as a result of cancer or cancer-related treatment, such as prostate, bladder, rectal, colorectal, penile, brain and spinal cord cancers; radiotherapy, chemotherapy, androgen deprivation therapy (ADT), also known as hormonal therapy.

KEY FIGURES:

WHEN YOU USE TOILETS IN A PUBLIC SETTING, HOW HARD HAS IT BEEN TO **FIND A BIN TO DISPOSE OF YOUR INCONTINENCE PRODUCTS?**

Very hard: **20%**
Quite hard: **34%**
Not particularly hard: **29%**
Not hard at all: **17%**

DIFFICULTY BY **REGION:**

Dublin

Very hard: **27%**
Quite hard: **31%**
Not particularly hard: **29%**
Not hard at all: **13%**

Rest of Leinster

Very hard: **27%**
Quite hard: **31%**
Not particularly hard: **29%**
Not hard at all: **13%**

Munster

Very hard: **15%**
Quite hard: **44%**
Not particularly hard: **26%**
Not hard at all: **15%**

Connacht + Ulster

Very hard: **10%**
Quite hard: **29%**
Not particularly hard: **43%**
Not hard at all: **19%**



KEY FIGURES:

IF YOU HAVE EVER EXPERIENCED POOR DISPOSAL FACILITIES TO SUPPORT YOU WITH YOUR UI CONDITION, HOW HAS THIS IMPACTED YOU?

It hasn't impacted me in any way: **35%**
I am anxious about where toilets are and if there are facilities that I can use: **33%**
I am less keen to make plans with friends if I don't know what facilities will be available, which makes me anxious: **19%**
I am no longer spontaneous: **15%**
I feel depressed as I don't have the life that I used to: **14%**
I leave the house less often: **13%**
I work from home more often than I or my employer would like: **7%**
Other: **1%**

WHEN LEAVING YOUR HOME TO VISIT PUBLIC PLACES, HOW DO YOU ENSURE YOU HAVE ACCESS TO THE FACILITIES YOU NEED?

I take the risk and hope to find facilities: **38%**
I only visit places I have been to before: **23%**
I search for disabled toilets with facilities: **21%**
I don't ensure in any way that I have access to the facilities that I need: **21%**
I take a bag with me to temporarily dispose of my sanitary products until I get home: **13%**
I try not to leave the house: **7%**
Other: **3%**

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT NOT HAVING THE APPROPRIATE FACILITIES IN PUBLIC TOILETS WHEN YOU ARE OUT IN PUBLIC?

Very Anxious: **15%**
Anxious: **37%**
Neither anxious nor relaxed: **39%**
Relaxed: **6%**
Very relaxed: **3%**

IF YOU ARE OUT IN PUBLIC AND THERE HAVE BEEN NO FACILITIES AVAILABLE, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH YOUR INCONTINENCE PRODUCTS?

Disposed of them in a bin outside the cubicle: **29%**
Asked my partner to keep the products in their bag/handbag: **8%**
Carried them around with me, e.g. in a rucksack: **14%**
I've worn products for longer than advised: **15%**
Flushed them: **18%**
I haven't done anything with my incontinence products: **33%**
Other: **5%**

KEY FIGURES:

IF YOU ARE NOT DISABLED, HAVE YOU EVER USED DISABLED TOILETS TO DISPOSE OF YOUR INCONTINENCE PRODUCTS?

Yes, often: **14%**
Yes, sometimes: **32%**
No, never: **54%**

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE LACK OF PUBLIC AWARENESS OF URINARY INCONTINENCES ISSUES?

Disappointed: **30%**
Wished people knew more about incontinence and the struggles that I experience on a daily basis: **29%**
Sad: **21%**
Angry: **13%**
Relieved: **9%**
This doesn't affect me: **28%**

HAVE YOU TURNED DOWN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING OPPORTUNITIES BECAUSE OF A LACK OF BINS TO DISPOSE OF YOUR INCONTINENCE PRODUCTS IN PUBLIC?

Socialising: **20%**
Going to sporting events: **18%**
Going to the pub: **17%**
Family gatherings such as weddings, birthdays or funerals: **16%**
Work event: **15%**
Going to the gym: **11%**
None of the above: **50%**

DO YOU FEEL AS IF MISSING OUT ON MOMENTS LIKE THESE HAS AFFECTED YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?

Yes definitely: **29%**
Yes, to a degree: **35%**
Neutral: **27%**
No: **7%**
Not sure: **2%**

WOULD THE INSTALLATION OF MALE INCONTINENCE BINS AND VENDING MACHINES WITH INCONTINENCE PRODUCTS IN WASHROOMS IMPROVE YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE?

Yes, definitely: **27%**
Yes, to a degree: **28%**
Neutral: **22%**
No: **10%**
Not sure: **13%**

UI AND YOUNGER MEN

OUR RESEARCH PUTS PAID TO THE MISCONCEPTION THAT UI ONLY AFFECTS OLDER MEN.

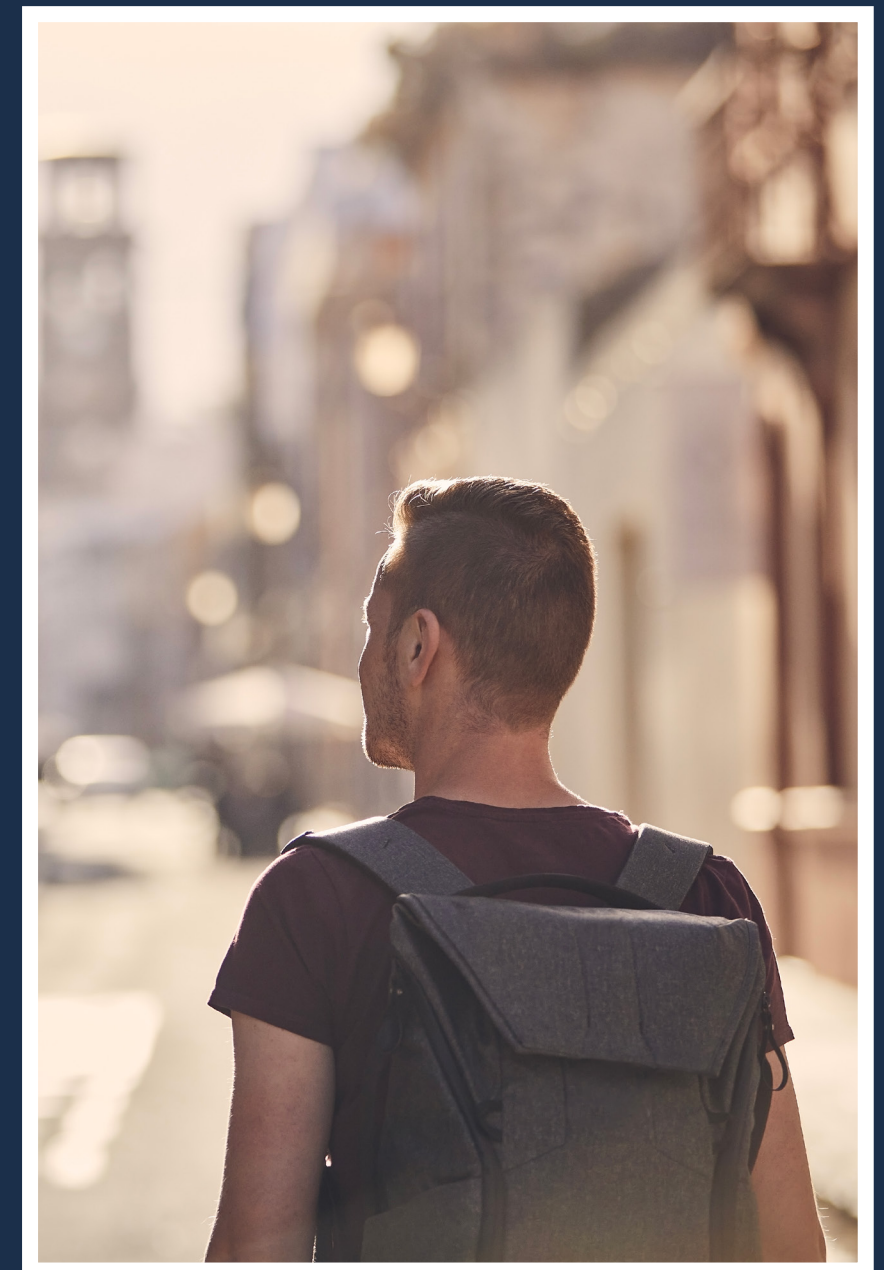
ALMOST HALF (45%) OF THE 702 MEN POLLED, WHO EXPERIENCE UI, WERE UNDER 55 YEARS OF AGE: 6% (18-34), 8% (35-44) AND 31% (45-54).

Men aged 18-34 have encountered the most difficulty finding a bin when out and about, with three quarters (76%) saying it was hard to locate a suitable public toilet for their needs.

The mental health impact on younger men appears to be greatest – with almost a quarter (24%) of 18-34 year-olds feeling depressed because their lives are no longer the same. This age group is also the most worried about not being able to find a suitable public toilet with 2 in 5 (41%) saying they feel 'very anxious'.

Men aged 34-45 are more likely to turn down opportunities to go out and meet up with others because of inadequate disposal facilities, with nearly more than three quarters (77%) choosing to stay at home on some occasions.

As a result, the mental impact of missing these moments is most devastating among the youngest men, with 9 in 10 (91%) aged 18-34 saying they have been negatively affected.



KEY FIGURES:

DIFFICULTY FINDING A PUBLIC TOILET BIN TO DISPOSE OF INCONTINENCE PRODUCTS

18-34 years: **76%**

35-44: **54%**

45-54: **45%**

55+: **57%**

MEN ANXIOUS ABOUT BEING UNABLE TO ACCESS APPROPRIATE PUBLIC FACILITIES

18-34: **65%** (very anxious 41%, anxious 24%)

35-44: **69%** (very anxious 14%, anxious 55%)

45-54: **54%** (very anxious 19%, anxious 35%)

55+: **47%** (very anxious 10%, anxious 37%)

MEN WHO FEEL DEPRESSED AS THEIR LIFE HAS CHANGED

18-34: **24%**

35-44: **18%**

45-54: **15%**

55+: **12%**

NEGATIVE MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT ON MEN WHO FEEL THEY ARE MISSING OUT

18-34: **91%**

35-44: **53%**

45-54: **67%**

55+: **61%**

SUMMARY

OUR FINDINGS PAINT A POWERFUL PICTURE OF THE HIDDEN STRUGGLES MANY MEN FACE AFTER A CANCER DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT. SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS LACK OF ACCESS TO PROPER SANITARY BINS AND MALE INCONTINENCE PRODUCTS IS HAVING A PROFOUND RIPPLE EFFECT ON DAILY LIFE.

It's making men feel anxious about leaving home, causing them to turn down social occasions and opportunities to talk with their peers, like a friendly catch-up down the pub. It's forcing them to watch their favourite team alone on the sofa instead of with fellow fans in the stands. Major moments in life with family are being missed, ones that can never be recaptured. Is it no wonder that

men are feeling sad, anxious and depressed; frustrated, disappointed and isolated?

Furthermore, our study reveals that UI significantly affects younger men, challenging the stereotype that it is primarily an issue for older age groups. Nearly half of men with UI are under 55, and for the youngest age group (18–34), the condition profoundly disrupts daily life, causing high levels of anxiety, depression and social withdrawal.

Difficulty accessing public toilets amplifies the mental health impact, with the youngest men polled overwhelmingly reporting negative effects on wellbeing. These findings indicate that UI in younger men represents a substantial public health concern, highlighting the urgent need for targeted support, increased public awareness, and improved access to facilities to safeguard quality of life and social participation.

This isn't just about inconvenience. It's about giving back men – young, middle-aged and old – their dignity, confidence and the ability to live life fully.

Encouragingly, over half of men believe that introducing male incontinence bins and vending machine products could make a real difference to their lives.

By tackling this issue, we can help knock down unnecessary barriers, encourage men to talk, support their mental health and wellbeing, and ensure that nobody has to withdraw from life because of a lack of basic facilities that should be the bog standard everywhere.



A COMMON STRUGGLE FEW UNDERSTAND

OUR RESEARCH SHOWS THAT MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MALE URINARY INCONTINENCE RUN RIFE, AND THE PROBLEM IS UNDER-ESTIMATED AND MISUNDERSTOOD.



UI is most commonly associated with women who have given birth (62%) and men who have experienced cancers such as prostate cancer (60%). Just over half (51%) link it with women going through menopause, while more than a third (36%) associate it with men aged 45 or older.

Around 2 in 5 (41%) people are surprised by how many men experience UI. Although 1 in 3 (32%) say they have a good understanding of why men may suffer symptoms, over a quarter (28%) admit their understanding of the condition is poor.

UI in men is most often associated with an enlarged prostate (60%), urinary tract infections (56%), getting older (56%), and the effects of prostate cancer treatment (54%) – meaning almost half of men and women (46%) did not associate it with prostate cancer treatment.

Nearly half of those surveyed (46%) say they themselves have experienced at least one symptom of UI, with leaking urine during daily activities affecting around 1 in 5 (21%).

Looking ahead, almost 1 in 2 (47%) say their biggest worry about experiencing UI would be visiting public places without proper facilities. Over 8 in 10 (82%) would have at least one concern.

Only 1 in 10 people (11%), including 15% of men, have ever seen a sanitary bin in a male washroom – 63% of those polled have never spotted one.

Research conducted by iReach comprising 1,000 nationally representative consumers (489 male, 511 female)

KEY FIGURES:

WHAT GROUPS WOULD YOU SAY COMMONLY EXPERIENCE URINARY INCONTINENCE?

Women who have experienced childbirth: **62%**
Men who have experienced cancers, for example prostate cancer: **60%**
Menopausal women: **51%**
Men 45 years and older: **36%**
Children past the typical bed-wetting age: **18%**
There aren't any groups that commonly experience urinary incontinence: **13%**
Other: **1%**

HOW SURPRISED ARE YOU TO LEARN THAT SO MANY MEN EXPERIENCE URINARY INCONTINENCE IN THEIR LIVES?

Very surprised: **14%**
Surprised: **27%**
Neither surprised nor unsurprised: **30%**
Unsurprised: **20%**
Very unsurprised: **9%**

HOW GOOD OR POOR DO YOU THINK YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHY MEN MAY EXPERIENCE URINARY INCONTINENCE IS?

Very good: **7%**
Good: **25%**
Neither good nor poor: **36%**
Poor: **19%**
Very poor: **9%**
Don't know: **4%**

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU BELIEVE CAN CAUSE URINARY INCONTINENCE IN MEN?

An enlarged prostate: **60%**
A urinary tract infection: **56%**
Old age: **56%**
Prostate cancer treatment: **54%**
Drinking too much alcohol: **44%**
Removal of the prostate: **39%**
Neurological diseases such as Parkinson's: **37%**
Treatment for other cancers: **35%**
Being overweight: **31%**
Other dietary reasons – like drinking too much caffeine or eating too many citrus fruits: **23%**
Drinking too much water: **18%**
Constipation: **12%**
Don't know: **11%**
Lack of sleep: **8%**
Being underweight: **6%**

KEY FIGURES:

DO YOU FREQUENTLY EXPERIENCE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING?

Leaking urine during everyday activities, such as lifting, bending, coughing, sneezing or exercising: **21% (Male 11%, Female 32%)**

The feeling that your bladder is never fully empty and you cannot empty it even when you try: **18% (Male 20%, Female 16%)**

Being unable to hold in urine after feeling a sudden, strong urge to urinate, often triggered by sudden change of position or the sound of water: **15% (Male 14%, Female 17%)**

Leaking urine without any warning or urge: **10% (Male 7%, Female 12%)**

None of the above: **54% (Male 60, Female 48%)**

IF YOU DO EXPERIENCE UI IN THE FUTURE, WHAT DO YOU FEEL YOUR MAIN CONCERNS WILL BE?

Visiting public places where facilities may not be available: **47% (Male 40%, Female 53%)**

Worrying about my physical health: **34% (Male 33%, Female 35%)**

Asking my GP or a medical professional for support: **30% (Male 29%, Female 31%)**

I don't feel there will be any main concerns: **18% (Male 17%, Female 20%)**

Telling my family and friends about my condition: **16% (Male 21%, Female 12%)**

Learning how to use sanitary products: **15% (Male 20%, Female 9%)**

Disposing of sanitary products: **14% (Male 12%, Female 15%)**

Working for an employer who did not provide adequate facilities: **12% (Male 10%, Female 14%)**

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN A SANITARY BIN IN A MALE WASHROOM?

Yes: **11% (Male 15%, Female 6%)**

No: **63% (Male 67%, Female 60%)**

Don't know: **26% (Male 18%, Female 34%)**

NO SANITARY BINS SPOTTED IN A MALE WASHROOM BY REGION

Connacht + Ulster: **78%**

Dublin: **59%**

Rest of Leinster: **67%**

Munster: **58%**

SUMMARY

OUR STUDY HIGHLIGHTS THAT UI IS AN ISSUE THAT'S OFTEN OVERLOOKED IN MEN.

IT'S CLEAR THAT PUBLIC AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF MALE URINARY INCONTINENCE ARE LIMITED, BOTH IN TERMS OF ITS CAUSES AND THE DAILY CHALLENGES IT POSES FOR THOSE AFFECTED. MANY STILL MISTAKENLY BELIEVE IT IS PRIMARILY A WOMEN'S ISSUE OR THAT IT ONLY IMPACTS OLDER MEN.

This common misconception is no doubt compounded by the silence surrounding urinary incontinence. Feelings of self-consciousness and unfairly, shame, mean that men especially avoid talking about it, making it a deeply taboo subject and keeping the true experiences of sufferers largely hidden.

While there appears to be some awareness of UI prevalence among males who have experienced cancer, many are surprised by how many men are affected by symptoms and admit to their understanding of it being poor. A significant number of men and women face the issue themselves and have concerns about visiting public places without suitable facilities in the future.

What we do know is this: as things currently stand, the chance of any man being able to find a male public toilet with a sanitary bin or vending machine to help manage UI symptoms is extremely remote.

Without greater awareness and understanding through sharing information and talking about the barriers, without accessible facilities

and products installed, and without more emotional and practical support provided for men to get their lives back on track, many will continue to take the easier option of staying at home.

Not because they don't want to go out. Not because they don't want to enjoy life. Simply because the thought of finding a toilet that meets their needs is too much.



MARCUS' STORY

“BINS ARE NEEDED FOR MEN'S DIGNITY”

Dublin man backs campaign for sanitary bins for men to live well after prostate cancer.



Marcus Humphries, 59, from Dublin is currently living with prostate cancer. Marcus is a delivery driver for **phs** Ireland and has worked with the company as a service driver for around 18 years installing and repairing washroom products for the hygiene provider.

Marcus was diagnosed with prostate cancer in September 2021, four years ago, at the age of 55.

I was having problems with the old waterworks when I was going to the loo, and I thought it was a bladder infection, you know, a one-off thing. I went to the doctor, and he sent me straight to the hospital.

My PSA, which is the blood test taken to assess likelihood of prostate cancer was very, very high and my prostate was very enlarged.

The doctor suggested the best option was chemotherapy and I started treatment the following January.

The cancer had gone from my prostate, and had spread into my lymph nodes, my femur, one hip and one rib.

One rib? How does it spread to one rib?

I've now read that prostate cancer is a strange sort of cancer in terms of how it spreads, I've been told it could go anywhere, to your brain; your foot, anything.

I was on chemo for six months and in every two weeks. It wasn't too bad.

I was able to drive myself there and back, with no problems, but I'd suffer the few days afterwards. I wouldn't leave the house for a day or two afterwards, because I'd be afraid I wouldn't make it to the bathroom in time.

In terms of the longer-term incontinence lots of men suffer with, I'm thankfully all right by now, I'm very lucky. Before I was diagnosed, I did have leakages, and I was hiding it very well.

When I started having problems, I blamed it a past spinal injury and put off going to the

MARCUS' STORY

**The Irish Cancer Society recommends catheter bags are changed in a clean, private and hygienic environment with facilities for thorough hand washing to minimise infection risk.*

doctor, but it eventually got so bad that I had to go to the doctor. And that's when I found out I had cancer. I should have gone sooner. If I had, I would probably be in a hell of a lot better state than I am now.

I was unaware of any support available after your treatment and diagnosis. And so few men talk about the issues that they have afterwards. There's even someone in my office who was having treatment at the same time as me, but we don't talk about the treatment or the issues that come along with it.

I had a catheter in for nine months during and after my treatment. I would be out and about and trying to get on with things, with life you know? I'd want to change the bag because it might be leaking slightly or there'd be a smell coming from it and you'd feel self-conscious about it, but there would be nowhere with a bin in the cubicle for you to change it. So, I used to come home, which, if you're out for a day out or something like that, could be frustrating.

My wife would notice the smell or that I was anxious, and then she'd ask, "Do you want to go back home?" And I'd have to fly home and get changed and change the bag. It made me a little more nervous of going out in general. I would often have had a spare

bag with me, which I would have been able to change it in the toilet, in privacy and it would have been grand, but there were never any bins in the toilets and I just didn't want to carry that out to a general bin out in public for someone else to deal with. So, I would head home and do it. Sometimes I would go back out. Often, I wouldn't want to. Once you're home, you're home, and you don't want to do that all over again.

Don't get me wrong, I didn't limit myself. I've done really everything. I couldn't really care less. When the doctors diagnosed me, and they told me how bad the cancer was, I was very much of the attitude that I was going to live my life no matter what, but it was still a pain. I wanted to go to those weddings, my granddaughters' birthdays, parties and whatever, but it was still a pain. But I think positive thoughts and go with the flow.

That's why I wanted to speak up about incontinence facilities for men, because I think it'll help some men in the long-term. It's needed for their dignity, you know? It's the same as with period products for women and bins, women need these things and men need them too, it's time we opened up about it.

I know this is an issue, because of my job, I know cisterns and toilets are blocked up because men are hiding their used pads in there. Because they don't have anywhere else to put them. Getting a bin is such a simple thing that could make lives easier. I hope people will step up.

And I hope the bins can go on and raise awareness. If they're there in toilets, people will talk about them and I hope this will help men talk about prostate cancer more, get tested earlier. Getting tested and diagnosed early will make all the difference.

I wish I'd have gone earlier. By now I'm on four tablets a day to control the cancer. It's affecting my bones, and I've ended up with osteoporosis, so I get an injection for that, as well as a hormone injection which reduces my testosterone and that comes with its own complications.

My message to men would be – go and talk to your doctor. Start the conversation about prostate cancer. It's as simple as that.

GERRY'S STORY

“I USED TO MAKE ANY EXCUSE NOT TO LEAVE THE HOUSE”

Donegal man joins campaign to raise awareness of the need for sanitary bins for men.



Semi-retired stationary salesman Gerry Connolly, 69, from Donegal was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2013.

“I went to the GP surgery for a cold that was lingering a little. My doctor said to me ‘We don’t see you too often, let’s get a PSA test done while you’re here.’

I had never heard of it. I didn’t know what a PSA test was or even if I’m honest what a prostate was either.

“The PSA test was just a simple blood test. My PSA was higher than ideal, so my doctor wanted to monitor it for several months. I went in every month to get checked.

“A year later I had another test and my PSA had gone up again. I was sent to the rapid access clinic in Galway. I had a biopsy which was all clear. The PSA was high, but given the clear biopsy, my medical team were satisfied at that point. I had to go back for a further check up six months later.

“I returned in six months for a second biopsy. I was told my PSA was 20 and I had a Gleason Score of 8, which indicates an aggressive and fast-growing form of prostate cancer. I had a talk with the doctor and he basically said very bluntly that I had cancer and these were my options. Our conversation lasted less than five minutes, and I was aware of the queue of 30 or 40 men behind me.

“A kind nurse then sat me down with an Irish Cancer Society booklet and made a general apology about the bedside manner of consultants. She told me to take my time and to go home, discuss with my family and decide what treatment I want to go for.

“The clinic is a four hour drive away which meant an early start or an overnight stay every time I went.

“I opted for the prostate surgery to remove the prostate completely. I was back and forth to Galway 13 times for blood tests and bone scans between December and April when I had the surgery, preparing for the operation.

GERRY'S STORY

"Nobody warns you about the incontinence side of things. It was quite a shock. I think it was mentioned but it felt like it was brushed under the carpet a little, like, as if they may be scared men may not go through with things if they knew. Or maybe even doctors are a bit embarrassed to talk about that side of things.

"It took around nine or 10 months after the op to get over the incontinence fully but I know for some men it can last a lifetime after cancer treatment. It took three months or so for it to stop being really difficult to deal with.

"Straight after the surgery and for the first few months it was crazy. On the first night, I wore the pads that were in stock locally but they weren't right for where I was at. I woke up at 4am completely soaked, and in shock about what had happened. Things didn't get better.

"I would get up from sitting, and I'd wet myself. I would cough or laugh and the same. It was very frustrating and such unfamiliar territory. I just had to knuckle down and do the workouts and pelvic floor exercises and have a belief that things would get better.

"At the time, I used to make any excuse not to leave the house, and I honestly rarely left the house for four months.

"I didn't even go to visit family. After my operation I had people call to the house to see me and how I was doing, and they'd offer for me to have lunch at theirs and I'd say, 'I'm not going anywhere'.

"I felt embarrassed about it, even though I know I shouldn't have. I think the lack of awareness about it is part of that. That nobody knows this is a side-effect of prostate cancer surgery, and that's hard.

"I couldn't believe it was happening. After a month I began looking for an operation to stop the leak, but luckily all I really needed was time, patience and the exercises they gave me.

"I don't know if I would have felt different about going out and about if there were sanitary bins in public for me, maybe it would have. I couldn't even conceive of it at the time. Now I think about it, maybe it would have. I would have felt I have options to get rid of my pads and change them. At the least, having

sanitary bins for men in toilets will lead to more people being aware of prostate cancer and that incontinence can be a side-effect for some men.

"I still need to use a pad now, but just to cover myself, and don't need to change them too often. Having a sanitary bin in the toilet would be much more convenient for sure, so you don't have to worry about nipping out of the loo with it and someone seeing.

"Leaks are a very difficult thing for a man to come to terms with, but as I say to everyone, it's still worth it, because we are still here.

"My neighbour passed away very recently from prostate cancer, he was only 55, it's so sad.

"Whatever you have, you have to face it, and the earlier the better, so you can get on with tackling it. Hopefully getting sanitary bins for men in public will help men feel like they can get out and about more, but also remind men to get tested sooner too."



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

IT'S TIME TO TALK

We need to start a national conversation about male incontinence, a hidden issue that affects thousands of men across Ireland.

The public must recognise both its prevalence and the real impact it has on men's lives. This conversation could take many forms: celebrities sharing their experiences to break the stigma, government-backed television and social media campaigns, posters and accessible informational materials.

But this dialogue begins right now, with the launch of this campaign and the publication of our research. Our commitment is long-term: to shine a light on men's experiences, challenge societal barriers, and ensure these issues remain visible until meaningful and lasting change is achieved.



REAL ACTION

We offer several recommendations that you can present to your employer, local councillor or Teachta Dála (TD) to help raise awareness and encourage real action.

1. It is clear that legislation needs to be passed to legalise the minimum provision of incontinence bins in male toilets.
2. We need to accept that providing bins in disabled toilets is not a solution – separate provision needs to be made for men in male toilets.
3. The environmental impact of flushing products down toilets coupled with the cost of unblocking toilets/sewers needs to be considered.
4. It is important to recognise that younger men also experience UI and so offering support, guidance and provision for them when they go out is crucial.
5. The impact on mental health and that men are feeling anxious, depressed and isolated needs to be considered and, as a consequence, mental health support for men should be offered to recognise and address this.

HYGIENE LEADERS WHO CARE

phs Ireland's ethos is driven by a passion for recognising needs, innovation that continually puts people and planet first, and unwavering desire to deliver products and services that provide customers with a first-class experience each and every time.

As a leader, we take our role in society and the communities we serve very seriously. We champion causes that are close to our heart and for which we can be a force for change. We don't shy away from societal taboos – in fact, we embrace them, highlight the issues, start difficult conversations, and drive the call for meaningful action.

Our Dispose with Dignity initiative, supported by Irish Cancer Society and Irish Men's Shed Association demonstrates our commitment to championing men's needs. Together we are stronger.

It is a campaign that encapsulates everything **phs** stands for. We know we can make a real difference to the lives of men experiencing

urinary incontinence after prostate cancer treatment and as a result of other cancers.

Similarly, for girls and women, we have tackled period inequality by raising awareness about the barriers to education caused by a lack of access to sanitary products, and calling for changes to legislation to ensure schools and colleges have the support and measures in place to enable students to succeed.

As part of the **phs Group**, **phs Ireland** has the scale, experience and expertise to drive progress and transformation. With our innovative, discreet and sustainable solutions, we are in a position to help men across Ireland live the lives they had before becoming incontinent.

We have designed sanitary bins to suit every washroom and cubicle size. Our trained technicians deliver a professional, reliable collection service, ensuring hygiene and dignity at every step.

Our **phs Male Incontinence bin** is designed to accommodate larger men's products. Not only does this enable an organisation to demonstrate its support for men's needs, but it shows its commitment to sustainable solutions.

Through our **phs LifeCycle Strategy**, all collected hygiene waste is diverted from landfill and sent to energy-from-waste facilities, generating electricity to power homes, schools and industries.

Another **phs** initiative is the **Help Yourself Vend and bag dispenser**, providing discreet and convenient access to essential incontinence products.

In the UK, **phs Group's** two-year partnership with Prostate Cancer UK is already seeing notable success. Our campaign has led to the introduction of sanitary bins in men's toilets across many major UK organisations and businesses.

WE WANT TO ACHIEVE THE SAME FOR MEN IN IRELAND.

We're starting the conversations that need to be had. We know that increased awareness must go hand-in-hand with concrete action. Men deserve the right to dispose of incontinence products, conveniently, safely and hygienically wherever they go.

No man should ever feel anxious about leaving home. Embarrassment and shame need to be shown the door.

Dignity for men can wait no more.

For more information visit:
www.phswashrooms.ie/maleincontinence

