

United Ostomy Associations of America (UOAA) Supports Accessible Public Restrooms for Individuals Living with an Ostomy or Continent Diversion

Position

Individuals living with an ostomy or continent diversion must have equitable access to public restrooms that accommodate their unique medical needs. Public restroom facilities should incorporate reasonable accommodations that enable people with ostomies to safely, privately, and hygienically manage their medical condition while participating fully in daily life, work, travel, education, and community activities. United Ostomy Associations of America, Inc. (UOAA) strongly supports accessible public restrooms that are ostomy and continent diversion friendly.

Background

UOAA is a national 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that supports, empowers, and advocates for the 725,000 to 1,000,000 people living with an ostomy or continent diversion in the United States as well as the approximate 100,000 new patients facing ostomy surgery annually¹.

Ostomy surgery is a life-saving procedure that allows bodily waste to pass through a surgically created stoma on the abdomen into a 'pouching prosthetic² system' worn on the outside of the body. This is continuously worn over the stoma to collect the waste, sometimes for the rest of a person's life. Individuals with ostomies may need to empty or change their pouch unexpectedly and often have little warning before doing so.

It is crucial for those living with this invisible disability to have access to restrooms that provide accommodations that will allow care of their vital needs including self-catheterization, and emptying/changing/disposing of an ostomy pouch and other medical supplies in a safe and clean environment.

From the perspective of someone living with an ostomy:

"As a traveling ostomate, I routinely encounter public restrooms—especially in airports—that lack even the most basic accommodations needed to safely manage an ostomy. Without a shelf or hook, I'm often forced to improvise by placing my supplies on a diaper-changing table or the floor, which is neither sanitary nor dignified. These simple, low-cost fixtures would immediately close a long-standing accessibility gap for millions of people like me." Wm. Coulson

The Current Accessibility Gap

Although most accessible restrooms have accessible accommodations for people with physical disabilities, they often lack accessibility for people living with other qualifying disabilities and medical conditions.

Many ADA compliant public restrooms are not designed to accommodate the practical challenges associated with ostomy care. Standard restroom layouts may lack adequate shelf space, hooks, sanitary receptacle, mirror, privacy, or room for managing ostomy equipment and supplies. These barriers can create significant challenges, increase the risk of leakage, social isolation, and discourage participation in work, school, travel, recreation, and public life. By way of example - the lack of a clean, sanitary place to set or hang an ostomy travel supply bag forces users to place

essential sterile medical items on the floor, trash cans, or other unsanitary surfaces. This undermines safety, dignity, and independence.

Principles

Public restroom access should promote:

- ★ Dignity, privacy, and independence for individuals living with an ostomy.
- ★ Safe and hygienic management of medical devices and supplies.
- ★ Equal access to public spaces and services.
- ★ Inclusion of people with visible and invisible disabilities.
- ★ Universal design practices that benefit a broad range of users.
- ★ Consistent accessibility standards across public facilities.

Recommended Accommodations³

UOAA supports the inclusion of the following features in public restrooms whenever feasible:

- A clean, stable shelf or countertop for ostomy supplies and medical equipment within reach of the toilet.
- Wall-mounted hooks near the toilet area to hold clothing, and ostomy supply kits.
- Adequate space for individuals who may require assistance from a caregiver.
- Accessible sinks and handwashing facilities.
- Privacy features that allow individuals to manage their ostomy discreetly.
- Proper waste receptacles within restroom stalls.
- Family or single-user restrooms where available.
- Ostomy accessibility signage
- Consideration of ostomy-friendly design standards in new construction and major renovations.

Public Policy Recommendations

Government agencies, businesses, transportation facilities, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, parks, and places of public accommodation should recognize the needs of individuals living with ostomies and incorporate accessible restroom accommodations into facility design, renovation, and maintenance practices.

UOAA supports the development and adoption of building code provisions, accessibility standards, and design guidance that specifically address the needs of individuals living with an ostomy. Such standards should include practical accommodations such as shelves, hooks, waste receptacles, and adequate maneuvering space within restroom facilities.

UOAA also supports broader accessibility initiatives, including the expansion of family restrooms and/or adult changing and universal restroom facilities modeled after programs such as Changing Places and the Changing Spaces campaign in the United States. While these facilities primarily serve individuals with significant mobility and caregiving needs, they also provide valuable accommodations for many people living with ostomies who require additional space, privacy, or assistance, but they need ostomy-friendly accommodations as well.

Federal agencies responsible for accessibility guidance, including the U.S. Access Board, should evaluate opportunities to incorporate ostomy-friendly restroom design features into future

accessibility recommendations and best practices. State and local governments should likewise consider these accommodations when updating building codes and public facility requirements.

UOAA also supports and calls for the adoption of an "Ostomy Accessible Restroom" designation similar to family restroom signage, so individuals can easily identify facilities equipped with shelves, hooks, waste receptacles, and adequate space to care for their ostomy.

Conclusion

Access to an appropriate restroom is not a convenience—it is a necessity for individuals living with an ostomy. Simple, low-cost accommodations can significantly improve health, dignity, independence, and quality of life. By incorporating ostomy-friendly design features into public restrooms and accessibility standards, communities can remove unnecessary barriers and create more inclusive environments for millions of Americans living with chronic medical conditions and disabilities.

UOAA supports policies and practices that ensure all individuals living with an ostomy can confidently access public spaces knowing their essential restroom needs have been considered.

References

¹Ostomy 101 - Provided by United Ostomy Associations of America. (2017). Retrieved June 18, 2026, from https://www.ostomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ostomy_infographic_20170812.pdf

²Title XVIII, §1861 (s)(8) of the Social Security Act defines prosthetics as those, which replace all or part of an internal body organ, including colostomy bags and supplies directly related to colostomy care, and replacement of such devices.

³UOAA Guidelines for Ostomy Friendly Restrooms in the United States . Retrieved June 18, 2026, from <https://www.ostomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/UOAA-Guidelines-for-Bathroom-Updated-04132022-1.pdf>

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