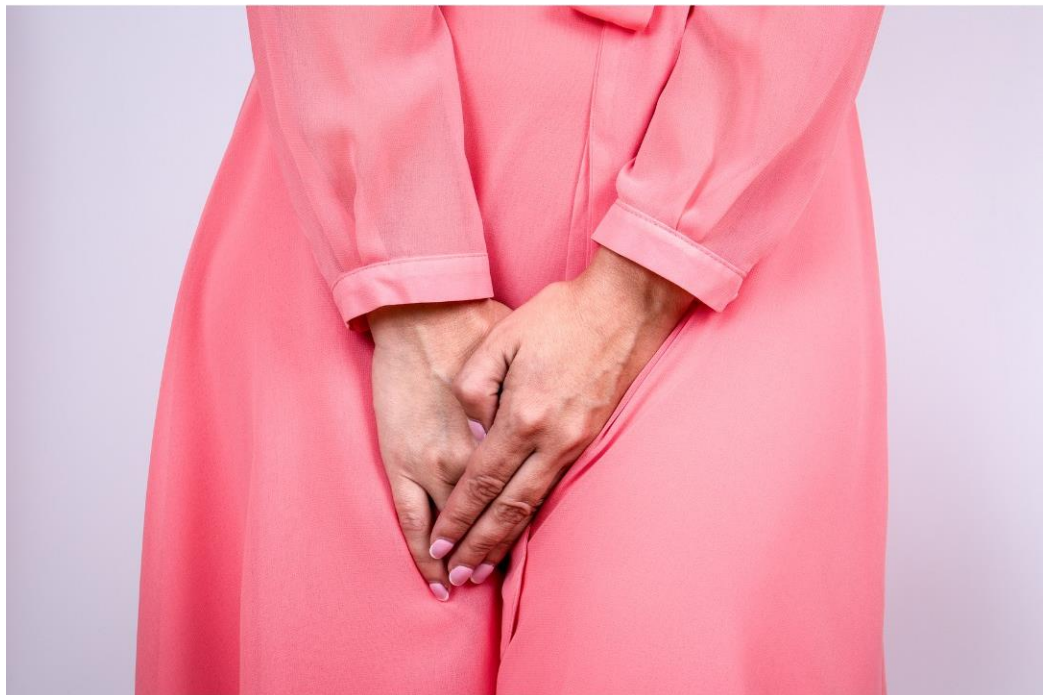




NFWI

Resolution Shortlist Briefing Notes

Let's Talk About Incontinence



Let's talk about Incontinence

It is estimated that 14 million people in the UK of all ages are suffering with bladder problems, and a further 6.5 million with bowel problems. However, it is still a subject that is misunderstood and very hard to talk about. We call upon the UK Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and Wales' Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to examine in detail all areas of health and wellbeing that are affected by incontinence issues. We call for the government to commit to an up-to-date audit to provide a national picture of incontinence care, offering a baseline from which to drive improved services. We call upon the members of the WI to raise public awareness, remove the stigma around incontinence, to help reduce the significant impact on people's lives.

Proposer's position

The proposer is concerned about the impact incontinence has on people, and the level of stigma around the issue. She would like to see the government commit to an up-to-date audit on the status of current incontinence care in order to improve services and examine all areas of health and well-being that are affected by incontinence. She would also like to see a public awareness-raising campaign adopted by WI members to help reduce the stigma and the negative impact on people's lives.

The scale of the problem

Incontinence is the involuntary loss of bladder and/or bowel control and can affect women, men, and children. Incontinence is a sensitive and distressing issue, and many people delay treatment due to embarrassment or shame. Studies have shown that it can have a huge impact on people's quality of life, impacting their family life, well-being, and personal relationships. It can restrict people's employment, educational, or leisure opportunities, increase the risk of social isolation, hospitalisation, and admission to nursing homes.

Research has found that an estimated 14 million people are living with bladder problems and 6.5 million adults suffer from bowel problems in the UK. The NHS estimates that between 3 million and 6 million people suffer from some form of urinary incontinence and that 1 in 10 people will be affected by bowel incontinence at some point in their lives.

Urinary incontinence affects women more often than men by a 2-to-1 ratio. Past pregnancy and childbirth, as well as menopause, may make leakage more likely due to added stress on the bladder, urethra, and muscles surrounding these organs.

The National Audit of Continence Care was last undertaken in 2010. The audit found that many services were not providing services in line with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance, with older patients over the age of 65, in whom the condition is most prevalent, suffering from the poorest quality of care. Of women suffering from 'moderate' or 'severe' urinary incontinence, fewer than one-third were receiving support from health or social services for their condition. The

previous government did not commit to commissioning an up-to-date audit to determine if there has been any progress towards effective continence healthcare in the UK.

The current situation

In 2018, NHS England published Excellence in Continence Care, a guide for commissioners, providers, and health and social care staff. In 2022, the UK Government's Women's Health Strategy included raising awareness and tackling stigmas around issues such as urinary incontinence. Likewise, incontinence is highlighted in the Welsh Government's quality statement for women and girls' health. In 2023, NHS England established the National Bladder and Bowel Health Project to improve continence care, research, and implement recommendations from the Excellence in Continence Care guidelines. The Project was tasked with developing bladder and bowel care pathways, but was paused due to the pandemic.

NHS England does not monitor the implementation of the Excellence in Continence Care guidelines and lacks the mandate to implement guidance recommendations. Some experts have highlighted the need to have mandated policies that give all professionals in the field standardised aims to work to, key performance indicators, and clinical outcome audits accessible to all services to allow service improvement.

NHS England is leading work through the pelvic floor health programme for stress urinary continence and pelvic organ prolapse. The NHS Long Term Plan included a commitment for women to have access to multidisciplinary pelvic health clinics and pathways across England by March 2024, however, this commitment is yet to have come to fruition. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists is therefore calling for improved information and education about pelvic floor health throughout women's lives.

In England, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) are responsible for delivering continence care in line with NICE guidelines. In Wales, continence care is delivered by health boards. The Welsh Government is funding pelvic health co-ordinators in each health board with the aim of improving service provision across Wales through engagement with patients and multi-disciplinary teams. This approach also incorporates the engagement of patients in their own continence care plans, training, and continence specialist nurses and champions in each health board.

In Wales, the All-Wales Continence Forum was formed in 2006 following the launch of the all-Wales bladder and bowel pathway. The forum has been responsible for developing a standardised approach to continence care through publishing and updating national guidance on the provision of care. Through working with the Continence Forum and its stakeholders, the Welsh government is currently considering options to raise public awareness of incontinence and remove the social stigma. In May 2023, the Welsh Health Minister noted that support was available but not enough people were coming forward who needed it.

Points to consider

- The WI has never shied away from difficult issues. A WI campaign about incontinence would bring the subject out into the open and help remove the stigma associated with incontinence. It could help educate women that urinary incontinence is a largely preventable condition.
- There is a significant number of people affected by incontinence and a campaign would help improve the quality of life of many sufferers and their families/carers.
- The Welsh government is more advanced on this agenda than England. Therefore, this would affect the campaigning opportunities available to members in Wales compared to England.

How could the WI work on this issue if it was passed?

A full campaign would be developed by the NFWI if the resolution is passed, taking into account developments since then. To help inform your discussions, here are some ways the WI could consider working on the issue.

At regional and local levels, WIs could engage in craftivism and letter writing to their local MPs and Care Commissions to highlight the issues around incontinence. Campaigning could enable the NFWI to highlight the gender disparity in urinary incontinence issues through spreading awareness. WIs could run meetings teaching members pelvic floor exercises to prevent suffering from incontinence.

Nationally, the NFWI could campaign for the government to commission an up-to-date National Audit of Continence Care, with a commitment to monitor progress over a set period. There could be opportunities to work with the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Bladder and Bowel Continence Care, charities, and academics.

Events at a national and local level could be structured around celebratory periods including World Continence Week which takes place in June every year, aiming to raise awareness of incontinence-related issues.

Further information

Age UK

[Urinary Incontinence: Causes, Symptoms & Treatment | Age UK](#)

Bladder & Bowel UK

[Bladder & Bowel UK home page - Bladder & Bowel UK \(bbuk.org.uk\)](#)

Bladder Health UK

[Continence Support- Bladder Health UK](#)

Video content

National Health Service

[NHS – Urinary Incontinence – 10 ways to stop leaks](#)