



Direct Access Family and All-Gender Toilet Rooms

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What do we mean by direct access?

Direct access toilet facilities are composed of individual toilet rooms with doors that open directly onto a public space. They may designate 'unisex', 'handicapped', 'family' and 'all-gender' toilets.

The majority of toilet rooms, or stalls, are designed for use by a single individual. Walls that extend to the floor mean privacy but small, constrained spaces encourage users not to linger. Facilities can be served by hand washing stations located in the surrounding common space.

Family toilets with larger rooms serve users with special needs. Rooms are large enough for a child in a stroller or an adult in a wheelchair and related attendants or family members. They have washing facilities within. More elaborate family toilets, such as those found in large airports, may be equipped with toilets bowls and urinals of different sizes and heights, ceiling-mounted lifts, both baby and adult changing tables, emergency call buttons and the like.

How do direct access facilities differ from traditional men's and women's?

Direct access is what differentiates these toilets from the traditional men's and women's or ladies' and gents' toilets. Traditional facilities have rows of partitioned stalls, rather than individual toilet rooms. Short walls and doors with gaps of 1 to 2.5 feet (30 to 75cm) at the

bottom seldom offer a comfortable level of privacy. Noises and odors carry from stall to stall and users are only partially out of sight. Men's rooms have several urinals on a single wall, with or without partitions between them.

Traditional gendered facilities have shared space between the public space and the toilet stalls in which strangers come into contact. Facilities in which strangers use common space out of public view can be considered "gang toilets". They are frequently sites of bullying, harassment, acting out, dangerous horseplay, and other inappropriate behavior.

The flow of users is inefficient in traditional facilities. Lines form at the women's room during intermission at theaters and breaks at conferences because it simply takes women longer to use the facilities. With direct access, anyone can use any stall. There's no need to insist that women's stalls outnumber men's at a ratio of 3:1 or 2:1. Potty parity - the equitable provision of toilet facilities for women and men within a public space - is inherent for direct access facilities.

Traditional facilities require more space than direct access. Main entrance doors into a men's or women's room must be ample enough to not impede flow. Many users at heavily trafficked facilities in airports or at the beach are pulling bags or pushing strollers. To best accommodate them, entrances are broad doorless S-curves that require space.

What are the benefits of direct access toilet rooms?

- Respect human rights laws because they inherently protect users from discrimination on the basis of gender identity or expression.
- Offer the privacy to which people are accustomed at home.
- Protect users, especially children, from inappropriate contact with strangers.
- Allow parents to observe their children entering and leaving a stall on their own.

- Accommodate opposite sex caregivers.
- Present a clear boundary between public and private spaces.
- Meet the expectations of international visitors.
- Serve the estimated 7% of the U.S. population who suffer from paruresis, a social anxiety disorder also known as “Shy Bladder Syndrome”. These individuals find it difficult or impossible to urinate in the presence of others who might observe or hear them. For them privacy is a medical necessity.
- The small size of single user stalls deters sleeping and collective activities.
- Ensures bad behavior is not broadcast but occurs out of sight.
- Can accommodate preference for urinals. Urinals can be put in stalls marked ‘Urinal.’
- Feature a balance between privacy and safety. Stall doors are designed so it’s possible to see if a user has fallen to the floor. Doors can have louvres that permit foot level views or extend all the way to a gap from the ground of 2-6 inches (5 to 15 cm) at the bottom.
- Have locks that can be opened from the outside in emergencies by passers-by, attendants, or emergency responders or law enforcement officials, as appropriate.

Engage the community by making a clear case for direct access facilities. People will raise concerns. Listen respectfully and address their concerns one by one. If you haven’t got an answer, promise to get back to them and contact us at PHLUSH.

Point out that most people have shared home bathrooms with minimal problems while growing up. They can learn to share public toilets as long as individual stalls are truly private.

As aging in place grows in popularity, there are more elderly people out and about in the company of opposite sex spouses and children. Family stalls that accommodate caregivers reduce the danger of unaccompanied elders falling or becoming disoriented. People with

disabilities are not only protected by law, their mental and physical well being depends on their ability to meet toilet needs in privacy, safety and comfort. Wheelchair users require space and adequate turning radiuses to gain access to toilets. It takes considerable extra effort for them to enter a traditional restroom and they enjoy less privacy when there. Young people disabled while serving in recent wars deserve the support of welcoming, direct access restrooms. Gently remind community members and local officials that we are all TABs - temporarily able-bodied.

Child safety is a growing concern. In fact, “stranger danger” often looms larger than evidence warrants. Direct access stalls enable parents to ensure the safety of their children, whether they are accompanied or use the toilet facility on their own. Moms can take their sons, and dads their daughters, into a family restroom when they are too young to use the toilet. When they are older, parents and caretakers can watch from a distance as their charges enter and exit direct access stalls.

Common facilities are likely to foster civility, hand washing, and overall cleanliness. People may note that behavior in a typical women’s room differs from that of the men’s room. Women make eye contact, chat or even joke while men do not. Over time these behaviors are likely to mitigate one another as all genders pass through in the shared public space or hand washing areas outside the private stalls. Fifty years ago men and women did not frequent the same gyms or hairdressers. Today no one thinks twice about the mixing. Public places call for a level of mutual respect.

Laws have changed to keep up with changing values and realities. Years of advocacy and action by gender non-conforming individuals have shown that all-gender stalls are workable. Their recently won legal guarantees show that direct access may be the only way to meet the needs of everyone.