

NHS Continence Provision Freedom of Information Request Report



FOI Data Report

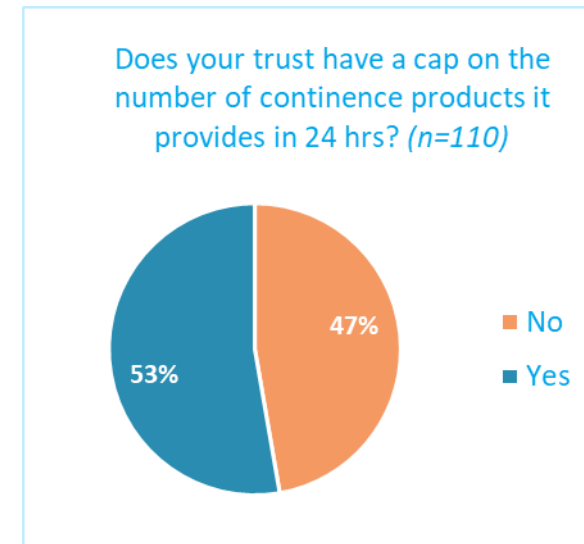
Findings

Introduction

- 14 million Britons struggle with incontinence, an issue that is stigmatised and often overlooked. With an ageing population, and public services under strain, tackling this issue will be vital for any government. A key facet of all medical care is access to the right technology and equipment, and continence is no different. In the words of an NHS patient we've spoken with, **“It's no exaggeration to say that without continence products I simply wouldn't be able to lead a 'normal life'”**.
- On behalf of global health and hygiene company Essity, Whitehouse Communications has made a series of Freedom of Information Requests to NHS trusts, to understand the full scale of continence product provision across England. This report will present a summary of the findings of these requests below.

Question 1: In each trust is there a “cap” on the number of absorbent continence pads provided in 24 hours, if so what number?

Of the 156 eligible trusts, 110 provided a response to this question. 53% confirmed that they do have a cap on continence products, although 27 of these had a caveat stating this may be exceeded based on clinical need. 34% of the 110 trusts have a cap of 3 products per patient, per day. The remaining 66% have a cap of 4 products per patient, per day. This is in spite of guidance from the Association for Continence Professionals, which states that: **“The number of absorbent products issued per 24 hours must meet assessed clinical need, although some localities apply restrictions. As part of the continence assessment process a validated scoring system might be used to objectively measure “clinical need” in continence care. Products must be provided to meet patients’ fundamental care needs, including maintaining independence (Murphy et al 2019)”**. This means that best practice continence care is provided on an inconsistent basis, with over half of trusts potentially limiting patients from accessing the necessary number of products.



Question 2: How much has each trust spent on Absorbent Continence Products during the last 5 financial years, and what is the annual Budget for Absorbent Continence Products during the last 5 financial years?

Of the 156 trusts, 50 provided both their continence spend and budget details. In total, these trusts showed an overall combined overspend of £4.1 million or an average trust overspend of £83,000 for their most recent financial year (2022/23). This data clearly demonstrates that current budgets are not meeting patient requirements.

- Continence spend has increased over a five-year period by 28.7% (2018* – 2023). This equates to an average increase per trust of £245,000.
- Continence budgets have increased over the five-year period by 16.7% (2018*-2023). This equates to an average increase per trust of £174,000.

*or later year if 2018 data not available

Question 3: What is the Total Annual number of patients in receipt of Absorbent Continence Products?

Of the 156 trusts, 58 provided information on their caseloads for continence. 67% of trusts experienced an increase in caseload and on average, patient numbers increased by 5.8% over the last 5 financial years. These results indicate that the need for continence products continues to grow, and NHS trusts will need to increase their budgets to accommodate. Several ICSs who provided information, indicated increased caseload, accompanied by either minimal increase in budget or a significant decrease in spending.



Expert Insights

“This data paints a concerning picture of the quality of NHS patients care being determined by a postcode lottery. A consistent policy must be applied across the NHS abolishing any cap on continence products, and aligning budgets with increasing caseload and patient need.”

Alison Wileman, Market Access Specialist, Essity

“Approximately 14 million people in the UK live with continence issues. High-quality, person-centred care is essential to prevent serious complications like urinary incontinence dermatitis and urinary tract infections. Without the correct continence products, many experience the shame and isolation of leakage, along with frustration and helplessness. Arbitrary caps on continence products should not leave individuals feeling neglected. We would like to call upon the NHS to ensure access to quality care so patients can live with dignity.”

Suzanne Evans, Business Director, Bladder Health UK

“The Association for Continence Professionals (ACP) suggests that training in bladder and bowel care education is fundamental for healthcare professionals to make safe and appropriate decisions. A confident clinician will carry out a continence assessment including diagnosis then follow a care pathway, ensuring care is appropriate. Driving excellence in bladder and bowel care is our primary focus, and we recommend adoption of Guidance for the provision of absorbent pads for adult incontinence, A consensus document which is endorsed by ACP and RCN.”

Polly Weston(Co Chair), Association of Continence Professionals



“Echoing the concerns and insights from within the NHS, the challenge of continence care and product provision and the impact on decision-makers highlights missed opportunities for improvement. By addressing these challenges through value-based procurement, we can achieve system-wide savings within the NHS and a more efficient healthcare system, rather than merely reducing local budgets.”

Karen McNamara, Business Director UK&I, Essity



