



[3rd April 2026]

OPEN LETTER: ENDING THE PAD GAP IN NHS CONTINENCE CARE

Dear NHS procurement leaders,

We believe that staying dry is integral to human dignity.

Currently, many NHS trusts limit people with incontinence to a set number of pads a day – usually three or four – which is often less than they require. And, frequently, these pads are unsuitable for their needs. As a result of this ‘pad gap’, people are paying for pads out of their own pocket - a luxury that not everyone can afford.

The government will soon introduce Value-Based Procurement (VBP) to the NHS which means that, when it comes to choosing health and hygiene products, trusts must look beyond price and consider which offer the best outcome for the patient.

This is a once-in-a generation opportunity to improve health outcomes for all, an approach that will benefit not only the 14m people in the UK who suffer from incontinence but ease the burden on the NHS and carers, measures that will ultimately save taxpayers money.

Today we call on NHS procurement managers to make VBP central to their decision making. This will be a major step towards ending the pad gap and ensuring everyone is afforded the dignity of staying dry.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Alison Leary, Deputy President of the Royal College of Nursing
Millie Baker, Executive Director of Bladder Health UK
Helen Pyper, Head of Policy and Campaigns, Dementia Carers Count
Siân Wicks, Chief Executive Officer, ERIC, the Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity
Laura Kerby, Chief Executive, Prostate Cancer UK
Tracy Whitehouse, Specialist Nurse and Service Manager, Bladder & Bowel UK
Jacqueline Emkes, Patient Advocate and Author of Totally Bladdered
Rebecca Porta, Chief Executive, The Urology Foundation
Jamie Gane, Adaptive Athlete
Richard Maddison, Strategic Healthcare Manager, Essity