



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## #EndThePadGap: NHS 'Rationing' of Incontinence Products Strips Patients of Dignity

**LONDON | 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2026** – Health experts and charities are calling for NHS trusts to #EndThePadGap: a hidden crisis that leaves many of the 14m people in the UK with incontinence struggling with leaks, skin infections, and social isolation <sup>1</sup>.

Groups including *Prostate Cancer UK*, *The Urology Foundation*, and *Dementia Carers Count*, warn that limiting the number and type of incontinence pads supplied to patients results in poorer health outcomes and undermines human dignity.

"The effective rationing of products means staff and patients both suffer," said **Professor Alison Leary, Deputy President of the Royal College of Nursing**. "Patients don't get dignified care, and nurses feel they are failing to meet fundamental human needs."

**Jamie Gane, the World #1 Adaptive Athlete for obstacle course racing**, who has lived with incontinence for half his life, said: "The cost of not having the right amount or right products for me is a lack of dignity, a lack of independence and a huge financial cost to myself to fund the appropriate products for the support that I need."

### THE HUMAN IMPACT OF UNMET NEED

Research commissioned by health and hygiene company Essity, which is backing the campaign, suggests that healthcare workers expect to fit 4.6 pads per day for patients unable to manage their incontinence, a number that can be considerably higher in many cases<sup>2</sup>.

However, Freedom of Information requests reveal that trusts often limit patients to between three and four pads a day.<sup>3</sup> **Millie Baker, Executive Director of Bladder Health UK**, said the gap meant people with incontinence were forced to use their pension or Personal Independence Payment to buy pads, leaving them struggling to cover other basic costs.

"People are living with the shame of persistent body odour, anxiety about visible leaks or smells when leaving the house or socialising, and skin damage caused by the acidity of urine in contact with delicate areas. Some avoid relationships, limit clothing choices, or withdraw from everyday life out of fear and embarrassment. Others experience disturbed sleep due to pad leakage, emotional distress, or even infection. These are indignities that strip away a person's confidence, autonomy and wellbeing."

**ENDING "ONE SIZE FITS ALL" APPROACH TO PAD PROVISION BENEFITS PATIENTS AND THE NHS**

Almost two thirds of healthcare professionals caring for patients with incontinence say they have fitted unsuitable pads, with one in twenty saying they do it routinely.<sup>2</sup> An independent pilot study at one NHS Trust found that switching to better-fitting incontinence products reduced the time staff spent on continence care by 47%; saved potentially £188,000 a year in costs; saw 42% of residents become more independent in managing their incontinence needs, and resulted in a 100% drop in leakages.<sup>4</sup>

An end to the current generic approach to incontinence pad provision would also lighten the burden on carers.

"Over half of people with dementia develop incontinence," said **Helen Pyper, Head of Policy and Campaigns at Dementia Carers Count**. "This adds hugely to the stress dementia carers already feel. Many carers tell us coping with incontinence issues was the straw that broke the camel's back. Access to the right protective products helps carers keep caring for longer, knowing the person they care for is comfortable and living with dignity."

### **A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY FOR REFORM**

The #EndThePadGap campaign comes ahead of the Government's June launch of Value Based Procurement (VBP) which mandates NHS procurement managers to look beyond price and consider products that improve patient outcomes and reduce total system costs.

"We support of the introduction of a Value Based Procurement system which would ensure patients' needs are at the centre of the decision-making process," said **Siân Wicks, Chief Executive Officer at ERIC, The Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity**.

"We're proud to have made progress in breaking the taboo around male incontinence with our Boys Need Bins campaign," said **Laura Kerby, chief executive of Prostate Cancer UK**.

"However, system-wide change is still needed so that no man is left without essential support, whatever his income or background. That's why we're backing the campaign to 'end the pad gap' and ensure every man has access to the right products to stay dry."

**Tracy Whitehouse, a specialist nurse with Bladder & Bowel UK**, said: "Continence pad provision is not a one-size-fits-all service. We receive countless calls on our helpline from desperate patients who are unable to obtain the products they need. At Bladder & bowel UK, we recognise the importance of VBP- it is long overdue."

### **#EndThePadGap**

For the full open letter, list of signatories, and research data, please visit: <https://www.essity.com/company/essity-in-the-world/uk-roi/latest-essity-news-in-the-uk-and-roi/>

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### **References:**

<sup>1</sup> [Bladder and bowel continence care - House of Commons Library](#)

<sup>2</sup> [ES Template Nov 2024 - Updated.pptx](#)

<sup>3</sup> [NHS Continence Provision FOI request](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Transforming-Continence-Care-in-Community-HealthcareA Value-Based Procurement - Essity](#)  
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