

# Call for Improved Access to Public Restrooms

Health Equity Council

## Executive statement

The Public Toilet Index details the average number of restrooms in major cities to help outline the increasing need for public restrooms. The average number of restrooms for the City of Albuquerque is 2 per 100,000 people, significantly lower than national and state averages. With homelessness rates at all-time highs in Albuquerque (refer to the Serving Albuquerque's Unhoused policy brief for more information) and an impact from social determinants of health, there is an urgency to address the need for public restrooms to improve sanitation issues and disparities in the City of Albuquerque.

## Background

The lack of public restrooms in Albuquerque has caused outdoor human waste to become an issue for the City of Albuquerque. The City has addressed the issue by establishing a fund to clean up human waste in both public and private property, but access to public restrooms remains a critical environmental determinant of health, especially to women, individuals of a lower socioeconomic status, and the unhoused community. Every person deserves to relieve themselves in private and the lack of public restrooms demonstrates an inhumane issue towards those that suffer from disparities. Women are more likely to suffer from health disparities due to a higher susceptibility to UTIs. Menstrual inequity is also a risk for women since they would lack basic needs for menstrual hygiene (refer to the Eliminating Me, which can be a cause for stress. Individuals of a lower socioeconomic status lack the ability to be paying customers when they need to relieve themselves. Additionally, the unhoused community lacks the necessary structures to relieve themselves in private. Ultimately, the lack of access to public restrooms creates an inhumane environment for many neighbors and creates health risks for everyone in Albuquerque. Human waste is unsightly and dangerous to the public since it carries harmful bacteria and diseases, like Hepatitis A which is present around homeless populations due to the lack of hygiene. The lack of public restrooms demonstrates a need for action to help remove health inequities and create a humane environment for individuals that need to relieve themselves in public places.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** Determine areas in need of public restrooms and key locations that would most benefit from public restrooms.

**Recommendation 2:** Determine the social determinants of health and key indicators that influence low access to public restrooms. Create policies to address social determinants of health, such as employment, income inequality, homelessness and other determinants to ensure equity for those who are more susceptible to reduced access to restrooms.

**Recommendation 3:** Conduct a formal assessment of the current status and condition of public restrooms.

**Recommendation 4:** Create a map of the public restrooms along with businesses that provide restrooms to the public within the City of Albuquerque.

**Recommendation 5:** Maximize the potential of current city infrastructure and provide options for more availability of restrooms within the City.