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Page: 4

Crohn's sufferers can't wait

PEOPLE with serious illnesses requiring urgent toilet access are being denied access to retailers' toilets, a new survey has found.

The national survey, conducted by Crohn's & Colitis Australia (CCA), found 41 per cent of respondents who required urgent access to a toilet were told to go elsewhere, even when the nearest public toilets were a long distance away and often locked.

This is a major concern for sufferers of Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, two debilitating conditions that can cause severe diarrhoea.

Port Lincoln Crohn's disease sufferer Renee Patterson-Jesser said the lack of access to toilets and the need to explain her condition to shop assistants now prevented her from undertaking many activities, including shopping and travelling.

"There is a definite lack of awareness," she said.

"People just don't understand what the disease is and what it means.

"I just don't have a minute to hold on, and you can tell by the expression on my face."

She said it was worst at major events that required lining up for the toilet.

"I just avoid those sorts of things now, which is sad, because I don't want this disease to dictate how I live my life."

She is seeking to raise awareness about the issue during National Crohn's and Colitis Awareness Month.

More than 61,000 Australians have Crohn's disease or colitis, collectively known as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), with an economic cost of \$2.7 billion every year.

Cases of the disease are expected to rise by 23 per cent by 2020, and is more prevalent than epilepsy, multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis.

The survey also found 70 per cent of sufferers won't leave the house due to concerns about accessing toilets when they are experiencing a disease flare up; 54 per cent suffered an embarrassing toilet accident in public; and 77 per cent had stopped certain activities for fear of having an accident, including going shopping, catching public transport, going on holiday and playing sport.

For more information phone 1800 138 029 or go to crohnsandcolitis.com.au



CAN'T WAIT: Crohn's disease sufferer Renee Patterson Jesser with her "Can't Wait" card.