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Locked out of the loo

Busting for traders to answer the call

Health | Liam Ryan

ARMADALE'S Deb Carmody is one of many Crohn's sufferers still denied urgent toilet access in local shops.

Chronic bowel conditions like Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis can be debilitating, with severe diarrhoea.

But a Crohn's and Colitis Australia (CCA) survey has found 41 per cent of respondents who needed urgent toilet access were refused, even in areas without public toilets, half after presenting a medical assistance card.

In the recent survey, petrol stations, cafes and retail shopping strips were the worst offenders.

Ms Carmody said many

Stonnington toilets were locked and getting the key was a long process.

"They look at you with this blank expression, when really they are dealing with someone who is in a great deal of pain and high level of anxiety," Ms Carmody said.

Ms Carmody, 51, said the lack of toilet access now stopped her from spontaneous activities, such as shopping and dining out. "I try to stick to the same shops where I know there are toilets," she said. "But sometimes you get caught out and you don't have time to worry about explaining what Crohn's is and whether there are workplace rules about people using their toilet."

CCA chief executive Francesca Manglaviti said retailers needed to be better educated about the needs of people living with Crohn's and colitis. The organisation issues members with a Can't Wait card that can be shown to retailers, identifying them as someone with Crohn's or colitis: go to crohnsandcolitis.com.au or phone 1800 138 029.

The online National Toilet Map shows where more than 14,000 public and private public toilets are across the country, online at toiletmap.gov.au, or phone the helpline, weekdays 9am-5pm, on 1800 990 646.