

# No Place to Go

An Audit of the Public Toilet Crisis in Skid Row



**A Special Project of the Los Angeles Central Providers Collaborative,  
Skid Row Community Residents and Partners**

**June 2017**

**Community Organizer Advocate & Former Downtown Women’s Action Coalition Co-Chair/Secretary, Louise Mbella “Sinai” (Frenchy) states the following...**

“How would you like to have to ask a stranger for permission every time you use a toilet? By the time the staff person you are asking allows you to use the toilet, your body might already have decided it is too late. Homeless individuals suffering from incontinence or compromising physical ailments may have to urinate or defecate on themselves. This can be humiliating and inconsistent with a person’s right to dignity. Without the possibility to take a shower in a clean and safe shower facility, it becomes a health and hygiene hazard for the individual, but also a public health and sanitation issue.”



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## Executive Summary

**The lack of affordable housing in Los Angeles has resulted in thousands of Skid Row residents being forced to live on its sidewalks. Without adequate public toilets to meet basic needs, Skid Row’s homeless residents suffer in the midst of a public health crisis.**

The 2017 Audit of Public Toilets on Skid Row is conducted by Skid Row residents and service providers in an effort to document the current availability of public toilets in Skid Row. In addition, we seek to see how the current availability compares to broadly-accepted standards for how many public toilets should be available to homeless residents. As there are no local standards applicable to homeless residents, we have used the most relevant standard we could find: The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) standards for sanitation in long-term refugee camps. The UNHCR sanitation standards are used for operating long-term refugee camps. These UNHCR standards for toilets state that there should be at least one toilet for every twenty persons, and that no person should be dwelling further than fifty meters from a toilet.

One would think that Los Angeles, one of the greatest cities in the world, would exceed these minimal standards. However, this Audit finds that in Skid Row, Los Angeles fails to meet even the standards for a refugee camp.

- **During overnight hours** (9:00 pm to 6:00 a.m.), there are only nine public toilets available for 1,777 unsheltered homeless people on Skid Row, and these toilets are largely inaccessible. Even counting these nine public toilets, **Skid Row is short of the United Nations sanitation standard by 80 toilets.**
- **During daytime hours** (6:00 am to 9:00 pm), when shelters release many of their overnight occupants onto the street, the unsheltered population swells. During these hours, **Skid Row is short of the United Nations sanitation standard by 164 public toilets.**

**But the problem goes much further than the number of toilets. This Audit finds that even those toilets that exist are frequently inoperable, poorly maintained and inaccessible. Here are some lowlights:**

- 38% of audited toilets were not operating during supposedly “open hours.”
- During overnight hours, the City’s Automated Public Toilets in Skid Row are powered-down and inaccessible. When they are powered up, they are often obstructed or unsafe to enter. When accessible, the self-cleaning feature does not always work.
- Many public toilets lack stalls, doors or doors that lock. Most public toilets are infrequently maintained; many are soiled with fecal matter and debris. Many public toilets require the user to request individual sheets of toilet paper from a security guard. Most lack sinks for washing hands, soap, paper towels, toilet paper, seat covers and menstrual products. Almost all lack baby changing tables despite increasing street presence of families.
- Toilets without attendants or some monitoring have lowest use levels. Toilets that were well-monitored (physical presence of an attendant but not screening people out) had the highest use levels. Male security guards outside women’s restrooms deter women from using the restrooms.
- When operating, most toilets were ADA accessible. The exception is portable toilets. Of the portable toilets in each Skid Row park, only two were ADA-accessible, one in each park. However, even for ADA accessible-toilets, because they are often poorly maintained, people must roll their wheelchairs through fecal matter and then have to touch the soiled wheels.

**When people do not have access to public toilets, there are personal and public health consequences.**

- People suffer the humiliation of having to urinate and defecate in the street, sidewalk, bucket, or on themselves.
- People do not have a place to wash their hands before eating food.
- People avoid taking medication with side effects that cause frequent urination or diarrhea.
- People find it more difficult to get out of homelessness because lack of toilet access degrades appearance feelings of self-worth, physical and mental health. It is harder to apply for and get a job, housing or services.

**It doesn't have to be this way. Los Angeles could lead by demonstrating ingenuity, compassion and devotion to public health and human dignity by providing the right amount and right kind of public toilets in Skid Row. Los Angeles could do this by partnering with this auditing team, the Los Angeles Central Providers Collaborative (LACPC) and other Skid Row neighborhood stakeholders on the following immediate reforms (for details, see "Proposed Solutions (page 47)"):**

Establish high quality standards for accessible public toilets that address functionality, maintenance, public accessibility, safety, privacy and ADA accessibility.

- Immediately adding 100 portable toilets (assumes that at any one time more than 20% of toilets will be unusable while undergoing maintenance, cleaning or repair).
  - Toilets must be available 24 hours per day, seven days per week.
  - At least 25% of toilets must meet ADA standards for accessibility.
  - Require maintenance contractor to ensure that at any one time, 80% of portable toilets must be accessible and adequately maintained at all hours.
  - When locating toilets, use the UN standard that no person should be farther than 50 meters from a toilet.
  - Place toilets in existing parks and in vacant lots and parking lots.
- Ensure Automated Public Toilets stay powered up and are accessible overnight, every night. Require maintenance provider to increase and improve maintenance service to ensure that the average in service rate is 80% rather than the current 20%.
- Increase the number of service provider restrooms that are open overnight. Fund additional providers to open their toilets to the public during additional hours. Ensure that all contracted service provider restrooms satisfy standards.
- By January 1, 2018, through a combination of permanent, portable and service provider toilets, provide access to sufficient public toilets to serve the street population on Skid Row, with a goal of meeting the UNHCR standard of one public toilet per 20 people living on the street. During overnight hours, provide access to 89 public toilets. During daytime hours, provide access to 186 public toilets. Permanent and portable public toilets should be accompanied by stand-alone structures designated as "At Your Service" kiosks.
- Provide portable hand-washing hygiene stations and access to clean water on at least two corners of every block of Skid Row.





Handwritten markings on a rectangular panel, possibly graffiti or a message. The markings include several large, dark, circular shapes and some illegible characters or symbols.



## When There is No Place to Go:

Mary woke up with a start. It was 2am, and she needed to urinate. Waking up on the sidewalk at 5th and San Pedro in Skid Row left her with no good options. The only toilets she felt comfortable going to were at the Downtown Women's Center, but their restrooms did not open until 6:30am. Maybe she could hold it in and fall back asleep.

At 2:30am she was feeling that familiar burning sensation and acute pressure. She remembered last week what the ER doctor told her as he handed her another antibiotics prescription for her recurring urinary tract infections, "Drink lots of water and use the restroom often. You don't want to keep getting these infections." Mary preferred waiting until morning, but her worsening infection was telling her that waiting was no longer an option.

There were three automated toilets within two blocks; she knew two were out-of-order but, that the third had recently been fixed. She didn't know if it would be clean or safe. With no other option, she would try it. As Mary approached, she saw a man she didn't know standing three feet from the entrance. He was looking at his phone. She slowed down to read the scene. Would he move aside for her? As she was assessing him, the man looked up at her. He put away his phone, crossed his arms and leaned against the structure. He was not going anywhere.

Would he let her in?

If he did let her in, would he let her out?

Would he be waiting for her when she exited?

It was too risky. The automated toilet was not an option. Mary would find out later that all the automated toilets powered down after 9pm so even if it were safe, it wasn't an option.



Mary's pain increased. She couldn't wait any longer. There was a nearby shelter that had overnight toilets. As she walked the block to the shelter, Mary's head swiveled. She had been attacked at night twice before.

The shelter's overnight restrooms were in its exterior courtyard, separated by a locked gate, patrolled by a security guard. She asked the guard if she could enter so she could use the bathroom. He looked her up and down and then opened the gate. Upon entering, she saw that the ground of the courtyard was covered with sleeping people. She stepped around, and even over them, careful not to wake anyone. She approached a second security guard standing by the restroom.

"Can I have some toilet paper," embarrassed that she had to ask.

The security guard looked her up and down, retrieved a roll of toilet paper, unspooled a portion around his fingers and handed it to her. She wasn't sure if the amount of toilet paper he handed her would be enough, but she did not want to ask for more. He pointed her to the restrooms.

Upon entering the restrooms, she unintentionally walked in on two women using the toilets. The toilet stalls had no doors. Mortified, Mary knew that just as there was no privacy for them, there would be no privacy for her. With the pain from her infection, she had no choice but to go in plain view of anyone who entered the restroom.

Finished, Mary rushed out, tight-rope walked through the dwellers of the courtyard, past the guard and out on the street to make the harrowing walk back to her sleeping bag.

**This is not just Mary's story.**

Everyone living on the streets of Skid Row has traumatizing stories of trying to go to the bathroom. That's what happens when on any given night there are 1,777 unsheltered homeless people forced to share 9 toilets<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Source for number of homeless and unsheltered people: Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority's 2016 Homeless Count for "Skid Row" census tracts.











### Recent Efforts to Document Skid Row’s Lack of Toilets

For years, the Skid Row community has reported a lack of accessible public toilets. This has been well-documented in both County studies and community reports.

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health conducted a public health survey of the Skid Row area in 2012. In their list of findings, the survey teams reported:

- “[S]mall piles of feces and/or urine on the sidewalks and grass areas of the majority of the streets surveyed (i.e. 8 of the 10 blocks surveyed).”
- “[T]eams observed an accumulation of feces/urine in two storm drains.”
- “[N]o soap in one of the City maintained automatic public toilets, and trash and debris in another public toilet.”

The Department of Public Health cited these conditions, along with Skid Row’s extreme crowding and exposed living conditions, as creating a substantial increased risk of communicable disease transmission. The report specifically cited an increased risk for the following diseases, “Meningitis, respiratory infections, enteric pathogens such as Hepatitis A and Salmonella, Staphylococcus Aureus (Staph) skin infections, Tinea infections (fungal), Pediculosis infections (lice), diarrheal disease, Tuberculosis, HIV, Hepatitis B and C, and Typhus.”



## Existing Conditions

To address these conditions, the Department of Public Health recommended “additional automatic public toilets particularly on San Julian, San Pedro and Crocker Streets” and increased “access to soap, water, and hand sinks to facilitate hand washing and minimize disease transmission.”<sup>2</sup> Skid Row is still waiting for more toilets, soap, water and hand sinks.

Subsequently, the Los Angeles Community Action Network issued a report, “The Dirty Divide in Downtown Los Angeles: A Call for Public Health Equity” in 2013, highlighting the lack of toilet and hygiene access in Skid Row, citing the failure “to provid[e] accessible and clean public restrooms... It is an obvious fact that human beings simply must relieve themselves regularly. All residents face the need for public restrooms, it’s just that homeless residents are entirely reliant on public options.” The report highlighted the even greater scarcity of adequate restrooms for women<sup>3</sup>.

**The lack of basic amenities like public toilets has gone on for so long that in Skid Row, the absurd has become the normal.**

<sup>2</sup> “Subject: Report of findings-Request from City of Los Angeles to address public health issues in the skid row area of downtown Los Angeles.” 05/21/2012. Jacqueline Taylor, Bureau Director, Region 1. County of Los Angeles Public Health.

<sup>3</sup> “The Dirty Divide in Downtown Los Angeles: A Call for Public Health Equity.” Los Angeles Community Action Network. March 2013

The 2017 Audit of Public Toilets on Skid Row sets out to document the current conditions in Skid Row. Specifically, this Audit seeks to assess how Skid Row’s access to public toilets compares to broadly-accepted standards for how many public toilets should be available to homeless residents. As there are no local standards applicable to homeless residents, we have used the most relevant standard we could find: The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) standards for sanitation in operating its long-term refugee camps. The UNHCR uses these standards in setting up its long-term refugee camps such as those in Kenya for Somalian refugees, in Jordan for Syrian refugees and in Haiti for hurricane refugees. **The UNHCR standards state that there should be at least one toilet for every twenty persons, and that no person should be dwelling further than fifty meters from a toilet.**

This Audit evaluated the following public toilets in Skid Row to determine which were accessible to the public and at what hours: five Automated Public Toilets, eight portable toilets in Skid Row’s two public parks, and fifty-six toilets and eighteen urinals at various service provider locations.

Finally, based on the findings, the Audit seeks to propose solutions to better provide public toilet access.

# Humanity, Dignity, Fragility, Transparency for All To See..... Time for Empowering the Life of A Skid Row Refugee

You want me to pull myself up by my bootstraps?!  
Well, how can I when my boots are tied to my back?!  
How can I when the concrete is where I nap?!  
How can I when the streets is where I crap.....

A woman is stripped of her dignity,  
Her identity equated to that of someone committing burglary, larceny worthy of  
sentencing left to a lifetime label as a petty thief.  
Mere treason for no other reason. Simply because she needed to use a facility.  
Where is the humanity....

Humanity, dignity, fragility, transparency.  
Life as a Skid Row refugee....

In Skid Row folks living like they are in a third world nation,  
Lack of public sanitation; criminalized.  
The penalty when you are seen as having no identity.  
Where is the accountability?  
Where is the systems humility....

How is one expected to pull themselves up by their boot straps when they lack  
the basics of a place to crap?! Hypocrisy! Damning someone because they lack  
affordability. This is how YOU choose to treat me?! The very country so full of pride  
and dignity...what a travesty.

Where am I to go and bathe, shave or rest so I can prepare for the next day? Just  
like you, I need peace to think. Just like you I need to refuel. For if I were your mule  
even you would understand the very basics of tranquil. Each day I weep for a place  
to sleep. For a place to bathe, shave so I can get through the next day.....

Yet, you expect me to behave...be brave.....like I lay where YOU lay.  
For even I can see....when you hurt me, you hurt thee....for our ties are interweaved.  
Ingenuity, accessibility, affordability, responsibility, equals.....HUMANITY.

Truly you will see....if we work together as a community,  
Thus, allowing residents to help you see,  
That people are no longer a commodity.  
Blasphemy!  
I tell you...this is the 21st century,  
Where all men are free to just be...thee.

Simply Suzette  
Suzette Shaw; poet / advocate / activist  
Skid Row resident / formerly homeless  
#nowhoused







## Audit of Public Toilets on Skid Row

During January and February of 2017, a coalition of Skid Row nonprofits, advocates, and residents conducted an audit of the public toilets in the 50 square blocks of Skid Row. For purposes of this audit, a “public toilet” is any toilet known to be open to any homeless person living on the street. This included Automated Public Toilets, portable toilets in public places like parks, and toilets made available by Skid Row service providers within their own facilities.

**Methodology:** Nine audit teams conducted 86 public toilet site visits, staggering visits so as to audit toilets in the morning, afternoon and evening hours.

The auditors evaluated the toilets based on their accessibility. To be accessible, publicly-available toilets needed to meet minimal requirements that anyone would need to be met in order to use a public toilet:

- **Functioning** — Toilets are working properly.
- **Maintained** — Regularly cleaned and resupplied with toilet paper, soap and paper towels.
- **Public** — There are no entry conditions. People can access toilets regardless of their appearance, sobriety, or participation in particular programs.
- **Safe** — Using it should not jeopardize one’s physical safety. In addition, conditions of the toilets must adhere to public health standards so as not to endanger health of users.
- **Private** — Toilets must provide enough privacy to meet needs for human dignity. Where there are multiple toilets in one restroom, toilets should be separated by stalls with doors.

In addition to these five factors, the auditors evaluated:

- Public signage to see if the public was adequately informed about the public toilets, including locations and hours.
- Approximate wait times.
- Whether menstrual products were available.
- Whether changing tables for families with young children were available.
- Whether toilets were ADA accessible.

## Summary of Audit Findings

*Public toilet access in Skid Row is a public health crisis. Los Angeles is critically underserving its Skid Row residents.*

At any given time, Skid Row meets 10% to 23% of the toilet needs of residents, as per the United Nations operational sanitation standard for public toilets in long-term refugee camps:

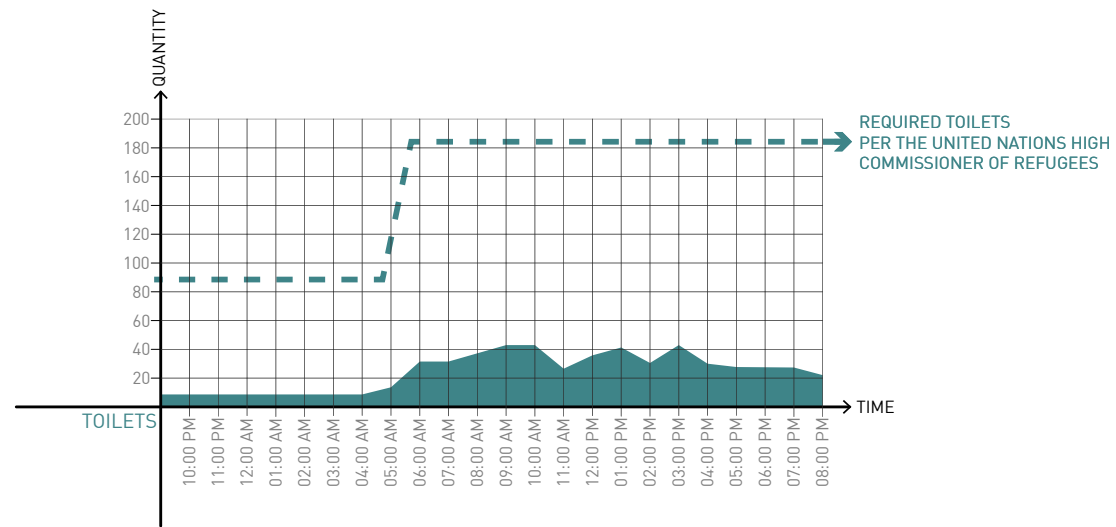
- During overnight hours (9:00 pm to 6:00 a.m.), Automated Public Toilets are powered down and inaccessible.
- During overnight hours, only **one** provider offers nine public toilets for 1,777 unsheltered homeless people on Skid Row and these toilets are largely inaccessible — users have to step over people sleeping in a crowded courtyard to get to the toilets, and once inside, users discover that stalls have no doors.
- During overnight hours, Skid Row is **80 public toilets short** of the United Nations sanitation standard.
- During daytime hours (6:00 am to 9:00 pm), when shelters empty and the street population increases to over 3,600, Skid Row is as many as **164 public toilets short** of the United Nations sanitation standard.





UN Standards vs. Skid Row

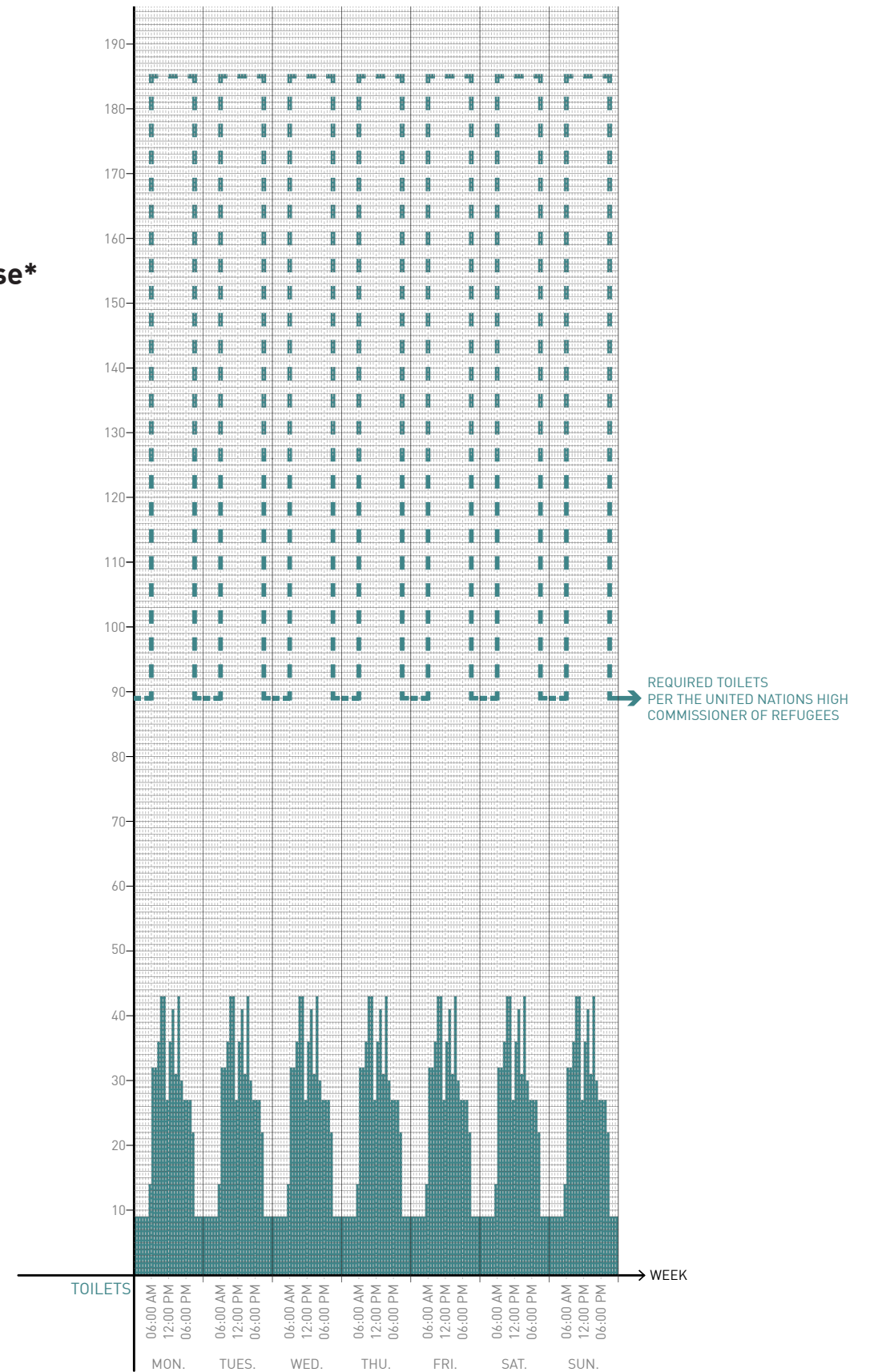
Daily Use\*



The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) sets sanitation standards for the operation of long-term refugee camps to ensure safe access to quality sanitation. **For toilets, the UNHCR requires at least one toilet per twenty persons.** The UNHCR also recommends that no dwelling be more than fifty meters from a toilet.

\*See Appendix 1 for table of data.

Weekly Use\*



## Specific Audit Findings

### Functioning

- At any time during the day, usually four of five Automated Public Toilets were out of service.
- Overnight, all five Automated Public Toilets were powered down and inaccessible.
- 38% of audited toilets were not operating during supposedly “open hours.”
- There are not enough sinks for washing hands.

### Maintained (Regularly cleaned and stocked with supplies)

- Most toilets lacked soap, paper towels, toilet paper and seat covers.
- Toilets lack menstrual products. Only one service provider gives them away, and they are rationed out only three menstrual products at a time.
- Automated, portable and indoor provider toilets are too infrequently maintained in proportion to frequency of use.
- The Automated Public Toilets’ self-cleaning feature does not always work; during some audits, it has left paper towels and other debris on the floor.
- Some toilets were so soiled with fecal matter and debris that auditors reported that they did not feel safe using them.

### Public

- Insufficient signage means people cannot easily find a public toilet.
- Access differs based on race and class. Auditors who identify as white and appeared not be homeless reported that they were offered access to locked toilets that they observed to not be accessible to homeless people or people of color.



Automated Public Toilets

### **Public, Continued**

- No baby changing tables at Automated Public Toilets or portable toilets despite increasing street presence of families.
- The one Automated Public Toilet that was most frequently functioning was the one furthest from Skid Row, on the corner of 5th Street and Los Angeles Street.

### **Private**

- Many toilets lack stalls, doors or doors that lock. This means that people have to experience the humiliation of urinating or defecating in front of multiple people at one time in order to use the public toilet.

### **Safe**

- Toilets without attendants or some monitoring have lowest use levels.
- Toilets that were well-monitored (physical presence of an attendant but not screening people out) had the highest use levels.
- Several Skid Row residents and audit team members felt that entry or exit from the Automated Public Toilets was too unsafe to use even when functioning due to people standing around or near the toilet.

### **ADA Accessibility**

- When operating, most toilets were ADA accessible. The exception is portable toilets. Of the portable toilets in each Skid Row park, only two were ADA-accessible, one in each park.
- People who use wheelchairs are at times forced to roll their wheelchairs through fecal matter and/or urine on the street or on poorly maintained toilet floors, and they then have to touch their soiled wheels in order to continue to move their wheelchair forward. In addition, lack of sinks for hand washing means they are unable to wash fecal matter and urine off their hands after exposure. This poses a severe health risk.

Public toilets



### **Additional Significant Findings**

#### **The auditors found...**

- Scarcity of sinks for hand washing.
- No visible access to drinking water.
- Scarcity of showers.
- No baby changing tables at any toilets despite increasing street presence of families.



### Service Provider Toilets Made Available to the Public

The toilets made available to the public by service providers presented unique access barriers:

- Providers limit access during meal and shower times.
- Male security guards outside women’s restrooms deter women from using the restrooms.
- Some providers do not have any stalls around toilets making them unusable for most people. Others have stalls but no doors, also limiting access. Auditors found it dehumanizing to use toilets without stalls or doors.
- For most service provider toilets, people have to ask for toilet paper from a security guard. When at the front of the line, you ask for toilet paper and the security guard takes a toilet roll and wraps the paper around their hand like yarn from a ball. Auditors found it dehumanizing to access toilet paper in this way.
- Skid Row residents report that their ability to access service providers’ toilets varies depending upon the staff on duty and their willingness to let them in.
- Where certain providers’ staff told them they were not welcome.
- Skid Row residents report that lack of familiarity with staff makes them feel humiliated to ask “gatekeepers” for permission to go to the toilet.
- Because of prior experiences, some Skid Row residents do not feel they can access that providers’ toilets.
- Some service providers require their residents to clean their public toilets as part of “chores” or else risk receiving reduced services.
- One service provider required users to go through a metal detector in order to access the toilet. This created a barrier to toilet access.



Public toilets





Portapotties

## Implications of Audit

*The existence of a toilet does not mean it will be used. It needs to work, be clean, have sufficient supplies, be safe and be accessible to be used.*

- The lack of accessible public toilets creates a public health hazard:
  - People have to urinate and defecate in the street, sidewalk or in a bucket.
  - People do not have a place to wash their hands before eating donated food.
  - People avoid taking necessary medication when the medication causes frequent urination or diarrhea because they have no acceptable place to go to the toilet.
  - Occasional street cleanings do not adequately address the public health hazards created by lack of accessible public toilets.
- The lack of accessible public toilets makes it harder for people to get out of homelessness.
  - When people cannot use an accessible toilet, it degrades their appearance, their feelings of self-worth, their physical and mental health.
  - It is harder to apply for and get a job, housing or the services they need.
  - It is hard to have hope for the future when sleeping next to piles of feces.
  - People do not seek or excel in job interviews when their clothing is soiled.

### Implications of Audit, Continued

- Public (non-provider) toilets must be offered because many Skid Row residents have had negative experiences with staff at some providers. Skid Row residents cannot rely exclusively on provider toilets.
- Where there is community expectation of safety and responsibility for an area, as with the portable toilets in Gladys Park, people feel safer using the toilets.
- Privacy when going to the toilet is so fundamental to what it is to be human in America that public toilets must provide privacy<sup>4</sup>. This is consistent with United Nations' Article 12 of the Human Rights Declaration which states, "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his (or her) privacy." According to the United Nation Regional Information Center "...provision of facilities and services for the safe disposal of human urine and feces...as well as maintaining healthy hygienic conditions, are essentials."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." United Nations. <<http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>>

<sup>5</sup> "Sanitation as a Human Right." United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe. <<http://www.unric.org/en/sanitation/27281-sanitation-as-a-human-right>>





## Stephany's Story: A Dehumanizing Experience

Having worked in the homelessness arena for a while, I am familiar with Skid Row. On the audit, I expected broken sinks and stalls, missing paper towels and hand dryers but figured there would be no major surprises. When I entered one of the service providers that changed. The conditions were dehumanizing. I was stopped before entering the restroom by a security guard and handed an allotted amount of toilet paper. I made my way inside and turned the corner, almost running into a woman using the toilet.

There were no stalls. No doors. No privacy. It was worse than what one would find in prison restrooms. And there I was, standing like a deer in the headlights as this woman and I locked eyes. Another woman standing nearby acknowledged, "Ahhh, this is the first time you're in here," as I tried not to make further eye contact with the woman, still sitting, clearly embarrassed with a shamed look in her eye. And in that moment, I wanted to disappear. I wished I had not forced this uncomfortable encounter on her. I took a quick glance at the sinks, noted that there was nothing to dry hands and quietly walked out.



## Proposed Solutions

*It doesn't have to be this way.* Los Angeles could lead by demonstrating ingenuity, compassion and devotion to public health and human dignity. It is perhaps the most basic human right that each of us be able to complete the most basic of human functions in a clean and safe space. To achieve this goal, we invite the City and County to partner with this auditing team, the Los Angeles Central Providers Collaborative (LACPC) and other Skid Row neighborhood stakeholders.

We must act quickly to meet the current crisis and then to develop a strategy that incorporates best practices, builds on existing community resources and relationships, employs current residents, creates more safe spaces and strengthens community.

This collaboration must dedicate additional public resources to provide sufficient state of the art toilets that are functional and architecturally pleasing to the eye. The community will be better able to thrive when its members feel safe and comfortable and the community is cleaner, safer, more environmentally friendly and attractive.

It is long past time that we work together to develop and implement positive solutions that address the decades-long reality of people living on the streets of Skid Row. While providing support for their needs, and thereby the larger needs of the community, we should not be distracted by unfounded and misguided fears that it will attract additional homeless people. Skid Row is full to the brim with homeless Angelenos. It's time we address their most basic needs.



### What do Skid Row's Un-housed People Want?\*

#### 88% of respondents want...

- More 24-hour toilets
- Clean toilets with adequate hygiene supplies
- Trained staff

#### 81% of respondents want...

- Public toilets at every intersection

#### 94% of respondents want...

- Toilets with emergency 911 buttons

#### 100% of respondents want...

- Additional toilets to have sinks

*\*Survey conducted in February 2017 by C3 in partnership with Louise Mbella "Sinai" (Frenchy).*

### Immediate Implementation of Public Toilets and "At Your Service" Kiosks

» Establish the following standards for accessible public toilets to meet minimal requirements that anyone would need to be met in order to use a public toilet:

- **Functioning** — It is operational for at least 80% of its published hours.
- **Maintained** — Regularly cleaned and resupplied with toilet paper, soap and paper towels to ensure it is fully supplied. Menstrual products and diapers should be free and easy to access at locations throughout Skid Row. Set up hand-washing stations outside of the toilets so even residents who do not use the toilets are able to have access to hygiene-promoting devices.
- **Public** — There are no entry conditions to screen people in or out, such as based on program participation, cleanliness or sobriety.
- **Safe** — Individuals should feel safe to enter and exit a public toilet. Interior door latches and stall doors address safety needs by providing a physical barrier and visual barrier to potential interruptions or intrusions. Unarmed attendants can support a feeling of safety in a given space. Safety is important for everyone but particularly relevant for transgender woman who often face hostility when using a bathroom.
- **Private** — Toilets must provide enough privacy to meet needs for human dignity. Individual toilets need to be able to lock or latch on the inside. Multiple-toilet restrooms must have stalls with doors that are open from floor to knee height to balance privacy with ability to check a stall without intruding on the occupant.
- **ADA Accessible** — At least 25% of toilets must meet ADA standards for accessibility.

### » Immediately adding 100 portable toilets

- Toilets must be available 24 hours per day, seven days per week.
- At least 25% of toilets must meet ADA standards for accessibility.
- In determining number of toilets, assume that at any one time more than 20% of toilets will be unusable while undergoing maintenance, cleaning or repair.
- Ensure maintenance contractor has clear metrics including that at any one time, 80% of portable toilets must be accessible and adequately maintained at all hours. City must set outcomes and hold accountable maintenance contractor.
- When locating toilets, use the UN standard that no person should be farther than 50 meters from a toilet.
  - Place toilets in existing parks and in vacant lots and parking lots that can be transformed into pocket parks or safe spaces.

### » Create, publish and post easy-to-read signage and handouts

- Signage and handouts must accurately set forth where and when people can access public toilets, including phone number to call if there are maintenance, janitorial, access or other concerns at specific toilets.
- “Public Toilet” signs that list hours for providers to post in windows, on doors or other places as appropriate.

### » For Automated Public Toilets

- Ensure ATPs stay powered up and are accessible overnight, every night.
- Require maintenance provider to increase and improve maintenance service to ensure that the average in service rate is 80% rather than the current 20%.

### » Increase the number of service provider restrooms that are open and accessible

- Fund additional providers to open their toilets to the public during additional hours, especially overnight. Currently, most of the 56 provider toilets are inaccessible for most of the day.
- Ensure that all contracted service provider restrooms satisfy our proposed minimal requirements for public toilets. (See Page 29)

### » Provide portable hand-washing hygiene stations and access to clean water on at least two corners of every block of Skid Row.

### » Permanent and portable public toilets should be accompanied by stand-alone structures designated as “At Your Service” kiosks.



### **“At Your Service” Kiosks**

It is not sufficient to provide toilets. We must also transform the space around the public toilet to ensure it is accessible. To have public toilets meet all standards of accessibility, LACPC, Skid Row Residents and Partners propose to transform the space around public toilets into “Safe Spaces” via “At Your Service” kiosks.

“At Your Service” kiosks are mobile physical structures that would accompany placement of permanent and portable public toilets. Each kiosk would be staffed 24 hours/day, seven days/week by teams of two trained and paid current or former Skid Row residents who have an understanding of community needs, and invested in building community. Staff should be diverse by gender (one man and one woman at each kiosk), race and ethnicity to appropriately reflect the Skid Row community. Enough people would need to be hired to ensure round-the-clock staffing.

“At Your Service” workers would assist people who need help. This is similar to the successful San Francisco “Pit Stop” program that substantially increased use of public toilets (See Page 55).

Staff would be a witness to the comings and goings, deterring unwanted activity. They would provide referrals to people in need of basic services including food, shelter, showers, washers/dryers, healthcare, substance use treatment centers, mental health centers, etc. Upon request, they could provide basic public health materials to people in need, including feminine hygiene supplies, hand-washing gels, condoms or other public health needs.

Staff would be provided with cell phones in the event of an emergency or safety concerns and in order to stay in communication with the other kiosks in Skid Row. They could alert maintenance crews when maintenance or additional supplies are needed. Staff could also accept comment and suggestions from residents in order to learn how to better address needs of Skid Row community.

Staff training would include CPR certification, knowledge about overdose prevention and identification, conflict resolution and de-escalation, and trauma-informed communication.

“At Your Service” staff will not be gatekeepers of the toilets. The toilets will be truly public as people will not have to ask to use them. Best practices show that toilet accessibility is better achieved through community participation and ownership rather than through armed security. Many residents of Skid Row do not equate armed guards with safety. Staffing kiosks adjacent to toilets with current and former community residents who provide assistance to residents would better build community ownership in the space around toilets.

Areas adjacent to the “At Your Service” kiosk will be positively transformed not only by the services provided, but also by the compassionate presence of bystander witnesses to deter unwanted or illicit conduct. Not only will the presence of an “At Your Service” kiosk with trained attendants assist with toilet usage and public health, they will also change norms of behaviors in the immediate areas surrounding them. These “At Your Service” kiosks can become places for pop-up safety zones. If there is an urgent situation arising in the Skid Row area, these “At Your Service” teams can rapidly communicate with other teams to address needs.

The kiosks will be designed to create a safe space. Polite signage would be posted around permanent and portable public toilets informing of hours, number to call for maintenance, and politely asking others to consider the privacy rights of their neighbors using the toilets.

### Case Study: Pit Stop Program

San Francisco’s Pit Stop Program successfully used paid attendants to grow the program by 800% over two and a half years. Beginning as a pilot program in August of 2014, the project now has sixteen locations throughout the city. Funded by the San Francisco Public Works Department, the program found that one factor alone increased cleanliness, reduced facility maintenance costs, reduced requests for street cleanings, and reduced illicit conduct: **Employed paid attendants are members of the communities that they are serving.**





**Target Date: January 1, 2018**

- » Through a combination of permanent, portable and service provider toilets, provide access to sufficient public toilets to serve the street population on Skid Row, with a goal of meeting the UNHCR standard of one public toilet per 20 people living on the street. During overnight hours, provide access to 89 public toilets. During daytime hours, provide access to 186 public toilets. Public toilets should be accompanied by stand-alone structures designated as “At Your Service” kiosks.
  - Accelerate public bathroom building at Gladys Park and San Julian Park.
  - Consider adding additional public bathrooms to the County’s Sobering Center, the soon-to-open day center, or the in-progress recuperative center. Supplement staffing to accommodate 24/7 public toilet access.
  - The BIN, a currently-operating facility for personal belongings storage located at 5th Street and Towne Avenue, could house additional hygiene facilities. The construction of the center inside the BIN would not displace current storage capacity. Negotiation of a lease extension of the space the BIN facility occupies should proceed immediately, as should a detailed design of the center with a stated target to commence operation in 2017.
  
- » With the construction and private development boom in Downtown Los Angeles, there is an opportunity for public works to design aesthetically pleasing facilities that have the potential to grow out of their initial purpose of public hygiene stations into thriving community centers. To be effective, any such public effort must partner with community residents.
  
- » Funding efforts that address infrastructure needs, such as LAHSA’s Mobile Showers Request of Information (RFI) dated January 6th, 2017, should be expedited for Skid Row.

- » Conduct construction and staffing cost estimate of implementing the various solutions:

- San Francisco’s Pit Stop Program provides the following cost estimates:
  - **\$13,050/month** including the cost of leasing the Automated Public Toilet unit from a vendor (**\$6,033/month per unit**), and the costs of staffing the unit, supervision, etc for 5 days/week, 8 hours/day (**\$7,017 per month**).
- The audit team’s preliminary (very rough) estimates are as follows:
  - Installation of toilet stall doors: **\$15,000 (one-time)**
  - Toilet signage: **\$8,000 (annual)**
  - 24-Hour “At Your Service” Kiosk Staff: **\$1,647,000/year** for 10 full-time employees for 24-hour coverage at **\$15/hour**
  - Increased open hours at existing provider toilets: **\$840,000/year**
  - Additional supplies (soap/paper/etc): **\$720,000/year**
  - Portapotties and hand washing stations: **\$999,000 for 111**
  - Increased toilet maintenance: **\$1,200,000/year**

- » Possible funding sources for more public toilets, hand-washing and drinking water access:

- The City of Los Angeles Fiscal Budget for Navigation / Open Door Centers.
- Operation Healthy Streets budget.
- Funding intending to implement Strategies 6A and 6E in the Comprehensive Homeless Strategy.







## Audit of Public Toilets on Skid Row

The “Audit of Public Toilets on Skid Row” is a project of the Los Angeles Central Providers Collaborative, Skid Row residents and partners. The Los Angeles Central Providers Collaborative is a group of Skid Row services, shelter and housing providers that include over 25 nonprofit, government, community organizations and residents.

The Skid Row Public Toilet Audit Team is...

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- Eric Dean, Skid Row resident/activist
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- Alexander Laurent; Artist / Photographer, Downtown Resident
- Louise Mbella “Sinai” (Frenchy), Community Organizer Advocate and Former Downtown Women’s Action Coalition Co-Chair/Secretary.
- Katherine McNenny, co-founder of Industrial District Green
- Charles Porter, United Coalition East Prevention Project
- Jason Robison, SHARE!
- Cassandra Schultz, Midnight Mission
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- Sara Short, The Peoples’ Concern
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