



18 April 2013

Media Release

Commonwealth asked to intervene on fluoride

Six national health bodies have come together to promote the benefits of water fluoridation and to oppose the recent decision of Queensland and some other State Governments to permit Local Councils to decide whether or not to add fluoride to their water supplies. Tomorrow's COAG meeting is an opportunity for the Commonwealth to make its view and intentions on the matter clear, and for Governments to call for a consistent national approach.

The six peak bodies are concerned both for the health of individuals and also that broader public health activities are being undermined.

Australia's most prevalent health problem is dental decay, and fluoridation of water is the most cost effective and equitable means of reaching the population and reducing associated health risks and preventable hospitalisations. It has one of the highest cost-benefit ratios of any public health measure and its benefits are greatest for lower income children.

World Health Authorities, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the Australian Dental Association and the Australian Medical Association recognise the benefits to dental health from fluoridation of water supplies. Cessation of fluoridation is contradictory to the current development of a national oral health promotion plan.

The six peak organisations joining their voices on this issue are the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA), the Australian Dental Association Inc (ADA), the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA), the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) and the Australian Health Care Reform Alliance (AHCRA).

They see the decision of some Local Councils to discontinue water fluoridation as a failure to protect the public's oral health, and the cost will be paid by the individual and the taxpayer. Fluoridation reduces dental decay by making teeth less susceptible to the acids formed by micro-organisms living on and around the teeth. Fluoride can also assist in reversing the process of decay in its early stages. The benefits of fluoridation far outweigh the risks.

From 2014 the Federal Government will deliver a dental care plan to under 18-year-olds. This scheme to improve children's oral health will be undermined by the withdrawal of water fluoridation.

Concern is not limited to the issue of water fluoridation, but more broadly about the impact on health promotion and chronic disease prevention infrastructure. The Federal Government is being asked to intervene to ensure the successful achievement of health promotion and public health goals.

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