

Position Statement on Community Water Fluoridation July 2016

Northland has consistently had one of the country's highest tooth decay rates, especially among children and adolescents with significant ethnic (Māori: non-Māori) oral health inequalities¹. The high rate of tooth decay affects general health and well-being and results in significant costs to the health sector – yet, much of this is potentially preventable.

Community water fluoridation (endorsed by the Ministry of Health)² is considered worldwide as one of the cornerstones of prevention and one of the top ten greatest population-based public health measures in reducing the occurrence of tooth decay^{3,4}. However, Northland remains non-fluoridated after a brief foray into reticulated fluoridation in two Far North communities (Kaitaia and Kaikohe) was abandoned in 2009.

Te Whatu Ora is committed to taking a lead role in reducing the tooth decay rates and oral health inequalities in the community.

Te Whatu Ora Te Tai Tokerau:

1. **Affirms** the Ministry of Health's position on community water fluoridation to provide protection against tooth decay across the whole community.
2. **Supports** community water fluoridation at accepted safe levels being introduced into reticulated drinking water supplies to increase access to fluoridated water.
3. **Agrees** that community water fluoridation of drinking water supplies is the most cost effective population-based strategy to assist in the prevention of tooth decay in communities of over 800 people.
4. Is **committed** to reducing oral health inequalities through community water fluoridation.
5. **Promotes** awareness and advocates for fluoridating all reticulated water supplies in Northland in collaboration and engagement with Northland Primary Health Organisations (PHO), Iwi health providers, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's), and other relevant agencies.
6. **Considers** community water fluoridation as an important component of an overall oral health promotion that also includes: twice daily tooth brushing with a fluoridated toothpaste; regular visits to a dental therapist or dentist; reduced consumption of sugars; well-balanced nutrition; fruit and vegetable consumption; breastfeeding of infants; a smokefree environment; and reduced alcohol consumption.

¹Ministry of Health. (2013). Age 5 and Year 8 oral health data from the School Dental Services. Oral Health Retrieved 18 October 2013, from <https://www.health.govt.nz/nz-health-statistics/health-statistics-and-data-sets/oral-health-data-and-stats/age-5-and-year-8-oral-health-data-community-oral-health-service>

²Ministry of Health. (2013). Fluoridation. Retrieved 18th October, 2013, from <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/fluoride-and-oral-health>

³Petersen, P. E. (2008). World Health Organization global policy for improvement of oral health - World Health Assembly 2007. International Dental Journal, 58, 115-121.

⁴Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. (2013). Community Water Fluoridation. Oral Health Retrieved 13th October, 2013, from <https://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/index.html>.