



Ref No: MC19-016470

Andrew Parry  
Fluoride Free Australia  
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Dear Mr Parry

Thank you for your correspondence of 11 October 2019 to the Attorney-General, the Hon Christian Porter MP, regarding water fluoridation and impacts on human health. This matter has been referred to the Minister for Health, the Hon Greg Hunt MP. The Minister has asked me to reply on his behalf.

As Australia's leading expert body on the development and maintenance of public health and clinical standards, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is responsible for providing health advice based on the best available scientific evidence. Part of the ongoing monitoring and maintenance of publications such as the 2017 Public Statement – water fluoridation and human health in Australia (the Statement) involves keeping a watching brief on any studies regarding human health effects of community water fluoridation.

NHMRC has noted the recent study *Association Between Maternal Fluoride Exposure During Pregnancy and IQ Scores in Offspring in Canada* (Green *et al*, 2019). Many Australian and international experts, including those on the NHMRC Water Quality Advisory Committee, have identified several problems with the scientific methodology used by the authors. It is best practice when reviewing the evidence to consider issues with the research methods and how they might affect the overall confidence in the results reported in the published study. This is important in reaching a conclusion about whether water fluoridation causes any benefits or harms. This approach was used by NHMRC when reviewing the evidence that underpins the Statement.

You have mentioned that you have concerns regarding NHMRC's scientific methods and ethical conduct in developing the Statement and the 2017 NHMRC Information Paper – Water fluoridation: dental and other human health outcomes (the Information Paper) that supports it. I would like to assure you that NHMRC used internationally-recognised systematic review methods and best practice approaches to develop this advice. Details on the methods used are provided in the Evidence evaluation and Technical reports. NHMRC, the then Fluoride Reference Group and the Australian Health Ethics Committee also consider it ethical to fluoridate community water supplies because it provides important dental health benefits and reduces tooth decay across the population. This is especially important for children and those who are on a lower income with less access to dental treatment or other forms of fluoride.

As outlined in the Information paper, the conclusion reached by NHMRC and the Fluoride

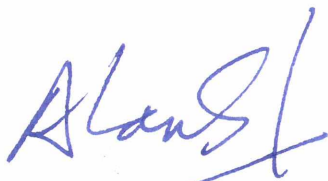
Reference Group in 2017 is that the existing body of evidence is consistent in showing that fluoridated water reduces tooth decay. Please note, NHMRC does not re-evaluate advice in response to individual published studies but rather in response to a body of evidence and research outcomes. While NHMRC monitors what studies are published on this topic, a review of NHMRC's fluoride advice is not being considered at this point in time.

While many other countries choose not to fluoridate their public water supplies due to their high levels of naturally-occurring fluoride or other population-level fluoridation programs, New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland and the United States of America continue to support public water fluoridation to ensure dental health. Any additional concerns you may have about the chemicals used to fluoridate water and the causes of tooth decay may be addressed in our [Questions and Answers resource on the NHMRC website](#).

NHMRC continues to support community water fluoridation as there is no reliable evidence that water fluoridation at current Australian levels causes health problems. I would like to remind you that the implementation of this advice continues to be the responsibility of the state and territory governments as clarified by the recent action of the Therapeutic Goods Administration to name fluoridated water as an 'excluded good'. This decision was made in consultation with and supported by federal and jurisdictional health authorities, including NHMRC.

I trust this letter and the aforementioned documents will help address any outstanding issues you may have on community water fluoridation.

Yours sincerely



**Alan Singh**  
Executive Director  
11 November 2019