



2 February 2017

Submission to the Health Select Committee:

Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendment Bill

The New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine (NZCPHM) would like to thank the Health Select Committee for the opportunity to make a submission on the Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendment Bill (the Bill).

The NZCPHM is the professional body representing the medical specialty of public health medicine in New Zealand. We have 228 members, all of whom are medical doctors, including 185 fully qualified Public Health Medicine Specialists with the majority of the remainder being registrars training in the specialty of public health medicine.

Public Health Medicine is the branch of medicine concerned with the assessment of population health and health care needs, the development of policy and strategy, health promotion, the control and prevention of disease, and the organisation of services. The NZCPHM strives to achieve health gain and equity for our population, reducing inequalities across socioeconomic and cultural groups, and promoting environments in which everyone can be healthy.

Water fluoridation is a public health issue. District health boards (DHBs) are required under legislation to improve, promote, and protect the health of people and communities. Therefore the NZCPHM supports the transition from local authorities to DHBs to make decisions and give directions about the fluoridation of local government drinking water supplies in their areas.

The NZCPHM supports community water fluoridation as it is an effective and safe measure that prevents tooth decay. It improves oral health for people of all ages who retain their natural teeth and helps to reduce health inequities¹. In the last 20 years, the oral health of the New Zealand population has improved. However, significant inequities still exist, particularly in Māori and Pacific children and those living in deprived neighbourhoods².

Although fluoridation is safe and effective, it is important to continue to objectively monitor and review the scientific evidence of effectiveness and safety. This should be undertaken at a national level to assist DHBs with their proposed new responsibilities.

A significant proportion of our population do not have access to fluoridated drinking water. Around 44% of people on public drinking water supplies receive unfluoridated water³, so there is considerable scope for improvement across the country.

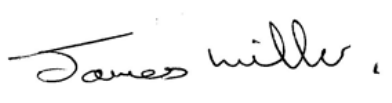
Although community water fluoridation is an important tool to improve oral health, it must be recognised that this is just one of many measures to improve oral health¹. Other measures include regular dental check-ups, a low sugar diet and tooth brushing with fluoride toothpaste¹.

In summary, the NZCPHM supports the Bill as an important step in improving the dental health of New Zealanders and reducing inequities.

We also recommend that this legislation establishes or identifies a national entity with the specific role of monitoring and reviewing evidence of effectiveness and safety of water fluoridation, providing objective information for DHBs and the public.

Thank you for the opportunity for the NZCPHM to submit on the Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendment Bill. We hope our feedback is helpful and please do not hesitate to contact the NZCPHM if we can be of further assistance.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Miller". The signature is written in a cursive style and is contained within a thin black rectangular border.

Dr Jim Miller

Chair Policy Committee, NZCPHM

References:

1. New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine. Policy Statement Water Fluoridation. Wellington: New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine, 2013.
(http://www.nzcpm.org.nz/media/62858/2013_06_05_water_fluoridation_policy_statement.pdf)
2. Ministry of Health. 2010. Our Oral Health: Key findings of the 2009 New Zealand Oral Health Survey. Wellington: Ministry of Health.
(<http://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/our-oral-health-2010.pdf>)
3. Sapere Research Group. 2016. The benefits and costs of water fluoridation - a summary for DHBs. Wellington: Ministry of Health.