



National Water Reform 2024
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601
Email: water.reform.2024@pc.gov.au

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Dear Productivity Commission

RE: National Water Reform 2024 Public Inquiry

As Victoria's lead oral health agency, Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV) drives better access to oral healthcare and outcomes for Victorians. DHSV delivers care through the Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne and in partnership with community dental agencies across Victoria. DHSV also works collaboratively with key stakeholders, including local councils, to promote access to water fluoridation.

DHSV broadly supports the work to optimise the outcomes for renewing the National Water Initiative. We particularly wanted to highlight the important role all levels of government have in promoting the public health benefits of community water fluoridation aligning with the theme "Actively pursue public benefit outcomes where they do not compromise environmental outcomes".

About 90% of Victorian water supplies are fluoridated, but this distribution is inequitable, particularly for people living in regional and rural areas where access to fluoridated water drops to around 87%.¹ Community water fluoridation is a cost-effective and safe public health intervention to prevent dental caries (tooth decay) in the community.^{2,3}

In Australia, it is cost-effective to implement community water fluoridation to water supplies that cover populations of more than 1,000 residents.⁴ The decision to plan and commence community fluoridation varies between the states and territories. However, the renewal of the National Water Initiative provides an important opportunity to include the role of government in feasibility and sustainability assessments for capital works for community water fluoridation.

Yours sincerely

Dr Clare Lin
Director Policy
Dental Health Services Victoria

¹ Dickson-Swift V, Crocombe L, Bettiol S, Bracksley-O'Grady S. Access to community water fluoridation in rural Victoria: It depends where you live.... Aust J Rural Health. 2023; 31: 493–502. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12973>

² Nguyen TM, Tonmukayakul U, Le LK, Calache H, Mihalopoulos C. Economic Evaluations of Preventive Interventions for Dental Caries and Periodontitis: A Systematic Review. Appl Health Econ Health Policy. 2023 Jan;21(1):53-70. doi: 10.1007/s40258-022-00758-5

³ Australian Government. NHMRC Public Statement 2017. Water Fluoridation and Human Health in Australia. 2017. Available from: <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/file/2856/download?token=1NCowyyvX>

⁴ Cobiac LJ, Vos T. Cost-effectiveness of extending the coverage of water supply fluoridation for the prevention of dental caries in Australia. Community Dent Oral Epidemiol. 2012 Aug;40(4):369-76. doi: 10.1111/j.1600-0528.2012.00684.x