

24 April 2024

National Water Reform 2024

Productivity Commission

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To whom it may concern,

RE: National Water Reform 2024

The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry on the National Water Initiative (NWI).

In improving water management effectiveness and outcomes, Commonwealth, State and Territory governments must consider the health impacts of water infrastructure, namely water fluoridation.

On average, approximately 90% of Australian communities benefit from fluoridated water, yet access for those residing outside major metropolitan areas often falls significantly lower¹. Rates of State and Territory fluoridation vary, from 100% in the ACT to 71% in Queensland².

Water fluoridation is especially advantageous for children and individuals with lower incomes, as they typically experience higher rates of tooth decay and have limited access to dental care and other fluoride sources. Nonetheless, there are benefits for the entire population.

Research from La Trobe University found that every dollar spent on fluoridation saves between \$7 and \$18 due to avoidance of dental treatment costs. In addition, recent analyses showed that water fluoridation in Victoria saved around \$1 billion over a 25-year period through avoided costs from dental treatment and days absences from work/school³.

Commitment is needed from all levels of government for all reticulated water supplies to be fluoridated in Australia. Therefore, consultation for the new national water agreement must consider water fluoridation infrastructure and management.

Yours sincerely,

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Chief Executive

¹ National Health and Medical Research Council. [Water fluoridation and human health in Australia](#). Canberra: NHMRC; 2017.

² Senevirathna, L., Ratnayake, H.E., Jayasinghe, N., Gao, J., Zhou, X. and Nanayakkara, S., 2023. [Water fluoridation in Australia: A systematic review](#). Environmental Research.

³ 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>