



## **Position Statement**

### **Water Fluoridation**

#### **Key message:**

Water fluoridation<sup>1</sup> is a safe, cost-effective and equitable public health measure and should be provided to all communities with populations over 600 in the Miwatj region.

#### **Key policy positions:**

1. Fluoridation of drinking water remains the most effective and socially equitable means of achieving community-wide exposure for preventing tooth decay (PHAA 2020).
2. Communities in the Miwatj region have insufficient naturally occurring fluoride in the water supply to prevent tooth decay.

#### **Miwatj seeks the following actions:**

- Reinstatement of water fluoridation for Nhulunbuy town lease.
- Implementation of water fluoridation for communities in East Arnhem with population over 600L: Yirrkala, Gapuwiyak, Milingimbi, Galiwin'ku, Ramingining, Numbulwar.
- Employment and training of Yolngu to monitor and maintain plant equipment.
- Increased access to public drinking water fountains.

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<sup>1</sup> Water fluoridation is the process where fluoride is added to the community's drinking water to reduce dental decay and promote remineralisation of tooth structure.

**Background evidence:**

- Oral health is fundamental to overall health. A range of health conditions are associated with oral disease. Advanced gum disease exacerbates diabetes by making it harder to manage sugar levels, and is associated with adverse pregnancy outcomes and coronary heart disease.
- Aboriginal people living in remote Northern Territory communities face barriers to accessing dental care including inadequate service provision, lack of preventative care, cultural considerations, low oral health literacy, access to transport.
- Indigenous children in the NT have average dental caries rates twice those of non-Indigenous children (AIHW 2019). In some communities these rates are up to 5 times higher than those seen in non-Indigenous children (NHMRC 2017).
- The National Health and Medical Research Council has publicly supported community water fluoridation as a population health measure since 1952, stating that there is reliable evidence for prevention of tooth decay (NHMRC 2017).
- The NHMRC provides assurances on the safety of water fluoridation (NHMRC 2017).
- The Northern Territory Government states that water fluoridation should be extended to all people living in communities with a fixed population of 600 or more (NTG 2010).
- The National Oral Health Plan 2015 - 2024 supports water fluoridation, particularly for communities at high risk of dental disease (COAG 2015).
- Water fluoridation has been endorsed by leading health organisations in Australia and internationally, including the World Health Organization (WHO 2019), Australian Medical Association (AMA 2019), and the Australian Dental Association (ADA 2020).

## References

Australian Dental Association 2020. Policy Statement 2.2.1 – Community Oral Health Promotion: Fluoride Use (Including ADA Guidelines for the Use of Fluoride),

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019. Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment: Oral Health Program July 2012 to December 2018. Cat. No. IHW 224. Canberra: AIHW.

Australian Medical Association 2019. Report Card on Indigenous Health – No More Decay: addressing the oral health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Coalition of Australian Governments Health Council 2015. Healthy Mouths Healthy Lives – Australia’s National Oral Health Plan 2015 – 2024.

National Health and Medical Research Council 2017. Public Statement – water fluoridation and human health in Australia.

Public Health Association of Australia 2020. Oral Health Policy Position Statement.

World Health Organisation 2019. Inadequate or excess fluoride: a major public health concern.