Public Health Association of Australia submission on the draft NHMRC Public Statement 2017: Water fluoridation and human health in Australia

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Introduction

The Public Health Association of Australia

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is recognised as the principal non-government organisation for public health in Australia working to promote the health and well-being of all Australians. It is the pre-eminent voice for the public’s health in Australia. The PHAA works to ensure that the public’s health is improved through sustained and determined efforts of the Board, the National Office, the State and Territory Branches, the Special Interest Groups and members.

The efforts of the PHAA are enhanced by our vision for a healthy Australia and by engaging with like-minded stakeholders in order to build coalitions of interest that influence public opinion, the media, political parties and governments.

Health is a human right, a vital resource for everyday life, and key factor in sustainability. Health equity and inequity do not exist in isolation from the conditions that underpin people’s health. The health status of all people is impacted by the social, cultural, political, environmental and economic determinants of health. Specific focus on these determinants is necessary to reduce the unfair and unjust effects of conditions of living that cause poor health and disease. These determinants underpin the strategic direction of the Association.

All members of the Association are committed to better health outcomes based on these principles.

Vision for a healthy population

A healthy region, a healthy nation, healthy people: living in an equitable society underpinned by a well-functioning ecosystem and a healthy environment, improving and promoting health for all.

Mission for the Public Health Association of Australia

As the leading national peak body for public health representation and advocacy, to drive better health outcomes through increased knowledge, better access and equity, evidence informed policy and effective population-based practice in public health.

Preamble

PHAA welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the draft NHMRC Public Statement 2017: Water fluoridation and human health in Australia. The reduction of social and health inequities should be an overarching goal of national policy and recognised as a key measure of our progress as a society. The Australian Government, in collaboration with the States/Territories, should outline a comprehensive national cross-government framework on promoting a healthy ecosystem and reducing social and health inequities. All public health activities and related government policy should be directed towards reducing social and health inequity nationally and, where possible, internationally.
PHAA Response to the draft statement

Whether the information is presented in a format and manner that is useful and easy to understand

The information presented is well-organised and convincingly addresses the key policy issues of risk, safety and population health benefits of water fluoridation. The language seems to indicate that it is targeted at well-educated readers and not the general public. It may be helpful to consider that the audience may include non-specialists.

The paper information in the paper on the sources of fluoride, its modes of action and why it is so critical could be strengthened. This could be done either in place of the final page of Supporting documents etc, or by having the Statement be 4 pages rather than 3.

Whether the boxed “NHMRC Statement” (page one) is clearly justified

The boxed “NHMRC Statement” is clearly justified by reference to the NHMRC Information Paper – Water fluoridation: dental and other human health outcomes.

Options for disseminating the Public Statement once finalised

The potential audience for this Statement would include policy makers (with the Statement used in combination with the Information Paper); governments (through the Council of Australian Governments); public health services, advocates and organisations; rural and remote non-government organisations; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations; Local Councils (especially in Queensland); concerned members of the general public; dental/oral health industry and academic institutions.

PHAA recommends that the Statement be disseminated and accessible in both hard copy and electronic versions, and suggests that a public launch may be helpful in distributing knowledge of the Statement.

Conclusion

PHAA supports the NHMRC public statement on water fluoridation and human health in Australia, and supports its wide dissemination and public launch. However, we would be keen to see the information on the sources of fluoride, its modes of action and why it is so critical strengthened, and the for the language to take account of non-specialists included in the target audience.

PHAA appreciates the opportunity to make this submission. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require additional information or have any queries in relation to this submission.

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