

Queensland Government Position Statement on Water Fluoridation

Whilst recognising that the balance of the scientific argument favours the use of fluoride in the pursuit of oral health, it is a principle of ethical public health that mass, involuntary medication must never proceed without the express consent of the community. The balance of argument rests on evidence which suggests that the prevalence of dental caries in both adults and children is reduced in communities where the water supply contains certain levels of fluoride.

In Queensland, referendum guarantees the consent of the community under the *Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Act (1963)* (the Act). Queensland Government recognises that there is not a unanimity of opinion on the health and environmental impacts of fluoridation, but in view of the prevailing balance of argument, encourages public debate aimed at enhancing oral health.

Water fluoridation was introduced in all Australian States in the 1960's, and about 80 per cent of the population of most states now receive fluoridated water supplies. The Nicklin Government introduced the Act in Queensland in 1963. It places the responsibility for proposing this public health measure to communities, and carrying out their decisions, on individual local governments. At present, only about 5% of the Queensland population have consented to the fluoridation of their water.

Queensland Government supports the introduction of water fluoridation wherever it receives the consent of the community affected. It acknowledges the endorsement of fluoridation by many science and health organisations, including the National Health and Medical Research Council, Fédération Dentaire Internationale (FDI), the International Association for Dental Research (IADR), and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The achievement of improvements in oral health in the population is one of the Key Performance Objectives set out in the *Queensland Health Corporate Plan 1996-2001*. The fluoridation of water supplies may be one avenue for the achievement of the oral health objectives set out in this document, and the *Public Health Services Plan for Achievements 1996-1999*.