



Position Statement on Community Water Fluoridation

June 2021

Purpose

This document presents the Te Rōpū Niho Ora's position on community water fluoridation. This Position Statement is evidence-based and supported by current literature (see Appendix); it will be reviewed bi-annually and updated in light of new evidence.

It is expected that this Position Statement will be considered by Local Government, District Health Boards and the Ministry of Health when making decisions about community water fluoridation.

Te Rōpū Niho Ora

Te Rōpū Niho Ora is a board comprising oral health practitioners from the Māori oral health provider sector. It was established by the Ministry of Health to provide advice about improving the oral health sector and, ultimately, the oral health of Māori people.

Position Statement

*Te Rōpū Niho Ora **endorses** community water fluoridation as it is a practical, effective, and safe means of protecting teeth and improving the oral health of all Māori.*

Specifically:

- Community water fluoridation at levels optimal for protecting teeth leads to oral health gains and improvement in health and well-being for all Māori, or all ages;
- Evidence clearly demonstrates that tamariki Māori who live without community water fluoridation experience significantly more decay and receive more fillings than tamariki Māori living with community water fluoridation;
- Evidence also demonstrates that community water fluoridation at levels optimal (range 0.7-1.0ppm) for protecting teeth and improving oral health is a safe and effective health practice;
- By improving Māori oral health and reducing oral health inequalities, educational achievement, sustained employment and other beneficial social outcomes are improved; consequently, community water fluoridation contributes to improving overall health and well-being for all Māori;

- It is endorsed by numerous New Zealand and international health authorities including Te Ao Marama (the New Zealand Māori Dental Association), New Zealand Ministry of Health, Public Health Association of New Zealand, World Health Organization and the International Dental Federation.

Te Rōpū Niho Ora acknowledges that:

- Community water fluoridation is an important public health measure within a range of strategies to address oral health inequities, and protect and improve Māori oral health
- Fluoride is a naturally occurring element. It is found in the air, soil, water, seawater, plants and many foods. In NZ, fluoride occurs naturally in all water supplies, but at a level that is too low to protect against tooth decay.
- Fluoridation of community water supplies contributes to total fluoride intake, which in turn may contribute to fluorosis. However, fluorosis can be prevented by using the minimum optimal level of fluoride in the drinking water. In New Zealand, there have been no reports of serious fluorosis as stated in the New Zealand Oral Health Survey 2009.
- Water fluoridation is a cost-effective way for communities to receive fluoride. New Zealand has reported net cost savings for even relatively small communities.

Te Rōpū Niho Ora affirms it will:

- Advocate to continue community water fluoridation or implement it where it is absent (if technically possible);
- Reinforce the oral health benefits of community water fluoridation by endorsing recommendations concerning healthy kai; continued effort on improving equity of access to oral health services for pēpi, tamariki, rangatahi, pakeke, and kaumatua Māori; promoting regular dental check-ups; endorsing the application of fluoride varnish and use of fluoride mouth rinses where appropriate; and good oral health care practices in the home, including the use of fluoridated toothpaste;
- Continue to monitor and evaluate the evidence on community water fluoridation and its impact on Māori oral health status.
- Commit to working with local and central government and public health organisations to actively promote the fluoridation of community water supplies.

Adopted by the Te Rōpū Niho Ora on 24 July 2017 (updated June 2021)

Signed:



Name: Justin Wall **Position:** Chair, Te Rōpū Niho Ora