Fluoridation of drinking water: a must for people in rural and remote areas

Fluoridation of drinking water is regarded by public health experts as the most cost-effective health promotion intervention available in a wealthy country like Australia.

Yet millions of Australians do not have ready access to fluoridated drinking water. In rural and remote areas special measures are justified to fix this.

Over 3 million people in Australia live in places smaller than 10,000 people, with about 700,000 in communities of less than 1,000 people. Adding fluoride to reticulated water is an expensive matter for small local authorities in areas such as these.

The Alliance supports the Australian Dental Association’s guidelines which state that while fluoridation of community water supplies is the preferred method of fluoridation, fluoride supplements can be used to promote reduction in dental caries for people living in areas that are not optimally fluoridated. The Commonwealth Government should consider appropriate fluoridation methods for non-reticulated drinking water. The World Health Organisation has proposed a range of measures for this.

The Alliance believes the Commonwealth Government should encourage and assist local Councils to do the right thing for the oral and dental health of people in smaller communities. Those people with most to gain are infants and children. With effective national leadership on fluoridation, the basis can be laid for the next generation of adults to have better dental health than their parents.

In 2010-11 there were over 60,000 preventable hospitalisations related to dental conditions, with children between the ages of five and nine having the highest number of hospital stays for such conditions. Many of these can be prevented for the next generation through the fluoridation of drinking water.

The Alliance also encourages Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to be brave and imaginative in promoting a scientific understanding of the benefits of fluoride.

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