

Doctors call on MPs to sink their teeth into fluoride fight

Doctors are deeply disappointed with Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk's refusal to legislate for fluoride in all drinking water and have called on other MPs to take the bit between their teeth on behalf of Queensland families.

In a letter to the Premier, Australia Medical Association (AMA) Queensland President Dr Dilip Dhupelia said her decision denied overwhelming evidence that fluoridating water supplies was a proven safe, effective preventative health measure.

"It's costing the state millions to deal with the devastating effects of dental decay, instead of stopping the rot before it sets in," Dr Dhupelia said.

"The evidence is overwhelming – the COAG National Health Oral Health Plan has found fluoride in water supplies is a cost-effective, equitable measure and one of the most important public health interventions available while the National Health and Medical Research Council has said it helps reduce tooth decay at all stages of life.

"We need bipartisan support across the Parliament to reintroduce laws that mandate fluoride in all drinking water supplies in Queensland."

Australian Dentist Association Queensland (ADAQ) President Dr Adrian Frick said children were impacted most by the failure to fluoride drinking supplies.

"There are dental practices in Queensland that are providing up to 20 general anaesthetic procedures a month on children for multiple fillings, crowns and extractions," Dr Frick said. "We need urgent action on this."

In its wishlist for the upcoming State Budget, AMA Queensland asked for funding to assist Councils without fluoride to re-introduce the decay-fighting mineral to their water supplies.

"Nineteen local governments removed fluoride from their water supplies in 2013 when State laws were amended to give Councils the choice," Dr Dhupelia explained. "Some of the largest regional centres removed fluoride from their drinking water, including Cairns, Rockhampton and Bundaberg.

"The adverse health impacts are now coming to light. It's little surprise that these areas are seeing some of the highest rates of dental decay."

New research by the Grattan Institute has revealed Queenslanders have the worst oral health in the country. It found 20.5 per cent of Queenslanders missed out on dental care because they couldn't afford private treatment and pressure on the public system from a lack of fluoridation led to long waiting lists.

The most recent Queensland Health oral health services data showed 43 per cent of children aged 5-6 years and 55 per cent of those aged 5-14 had experienced dental decay, with the figure rising to 70 per cent for indigenous children.

The 2018 Report of the Queensland Chief Health Officer found children accounted for one quarter of all hospitalisations for dental conditions.

MEDIA CONTACT: Fran Metcalf, Sequel PR - 0417 627 867