

2021-06/18-01

17 June 2021

Committee Secretariat
Health Committee
New Zealand Parliament

Online submission via website: www.parliament.nz

Tēnā koe

Inquiry into Supplementary Order Paper No. 38 on the Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendment Bill

Tōpūtanga Tapuhi Kaitiaki o Aotearoa, New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) welcomes the opportunity to make a written submission on the Inquiry into Supplementary Order Paper No. 38 on the Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendment Bill.

NZNO is the leading professional nursing association and union for nurses in Aotearoa New Zealand, representing 51,000 nurses, midwives, students, kaimahi hauora and health workers on professional and employment matters. NZNO embraces te Tiriti o Waitangi and contributes to the improvements of the health status and outcomes of all people of Aotearoa New Zealand through influencing health, employment, and social policy development.

Furthermore, we share the intent of the Ministry of Health's definition of equity which equally applies to NZNO work across professional, industrial and member activities.

NZNO has consulted its members and staff in the preparation of this submission.

NZNO supports community water fluoridation as a safe and effective public health measure to reduce the risk of oral disease and address health equity. Despite dramatic improvements in oral health over the last few decades, caries distribution remains skewed, with Māori, Pacific and low-income groups, carrying a disproportionate share of the disease burden¹.

NZNO supports the Supplementary Order Paper No. 38 that confers a power on the Director General of Health to direct a local authority to add or not to add fluoride drinking water supplied through its local authority supply.

¹ Royal Society of New Zealand and the Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor. (2014). *Health effects of water fluoridation: A review of the scientific evidence.*

This structured, nationally consistent approach would address many of the shortcomings of the limited coverage attained by the current system, and would promote oral health and address equity. It is also likely to reduce the political volatility of decision making on fluoride.

We are aware that there are low cost alternatives (e.g. water filters and community fluoride free water taps in some areas enable those who oppose fluoride to exercise their right to access water without fluoride.

We take this opportunity to suggest that the Committee recommends that the Ministry of Health considers how information about these alternatives could be used to encourage those opposed to fluoridation to act according to their individual interests, and allow the public majority to exercise their right to have the protection fluoride offers, particularly to Māori, Pacifica and underserved populations.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the consultation process.

Please note that we do not wish to make an oral submission.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lucia Bercinskas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.

Nāku noa nā

Lucia Bercinskas
Senior Policy Analyst
(04) 912 1099