

23 July 2018

Hon Dr David Clark
Minister of Health
Freepost PO Box 18888
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160

Dear Hon Dr Clark

Fluoridation of Drinking Water

Pegasus Health (Charitable) Limited is a large primary health care organisation in Canterbury with over 400,000 people enrolled in its general practice services, representing the majority of the Christchurch population. Pegasus is committed to promoting, maintaining and restoring the health of its enrolled population, and to working with other organisations across the health sector to improve access to health services and reduce health inequities.

Oral health is a priority for Pegasus. In Canterbury, dental decay is highest among our Pacific and Māori populations, particularly affecting the oral health of children in these communities. As you know, the most effective way to reduce the risk of dental decay is through the fluoridation of drinking water because it can be delivered at a population level. No adverse effects of water fluoridation have been found at the levels used in New Zealand¹.

The Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendment Bill is currently undergoing its second reading. The Act is likely to empower District Health Boards (DHBs) to give direction to local authorities in their regions about fluoridation of local government drinking water supplies.

While Pegasus will strongly support the Canterbury DHB in directing the Christchurch City Council to fluoridate its drinking water supplies, we believe the authority to fluoridate the water supply belongs centrally (rather than regionally with individual DHBs, where there is the risk that individual Board members could be lobbied and/or fail to make evidence-informed decisions). National regulation legislation has been applied to give a universal approach to public health interventions such as compulsory use of seatbelts and the provision of smokefree environments. We believe a national regulation should also be applied to the fluoridation of drinking water.

We note and support the following statement in the cabinet paper in early 2016.² *“A legislative requirement to fluoridate would significantly increase water fluoridation coverage and would link decision-making more closely to the scientific evidence than under the status quo”*. The status quo is a variable mish mash of coverage with only approximately half of New Zealanders enjoying the proven benefits of fluoridation. The statistics would suggest that the detrimental health and flow on effects on the remainder missing out result in a strong equity imbalance.

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*. Auckland, New Zealand.

² <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/cabinet-paper-decision-making-fluoridation-drinking-water-supplies.pdf>

We believe that all major parties in New Zealand would support political leadership on this issue and a regulatory approach to national water fluoridation would bring us in line with most countries we generally compare ourselves with.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Les Toop', with a long, sweeping underline.

Professor Les Toop

General Practitioner, Ferry Road Medical Centre
Head, Department of General Practice, University of Otago, Christchurch
Chair, Pegasus Health (Charitable) Ltd