Response to correspondence received since August 2014 regarding NHMRC’s review on the health effects of water fluoridation

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has appointed a team from the University of Sydney to undertake an evaluation of the evidence on the health effects of water fluoridation. This evaluation will update the body of evidence to include more recent studies and assess their relevance in the Australian context since NHMRC’s 2007 Systematic Review of the Efficacy and Safety of Fluoridation.

A Fluoride Reference Group (FRG) has been established to guide the evaluation of the evidence and consider the findings in an Australian context. Members of this group were selected to ensure appropriate expertise in the key areas of science and review methodology, not on the basis of pro or anti fluoridation views. A community nominee was elected by the Consumers Health Forum of Australia.

Members of the FRG disclosed their interests to NHMRC prior to being appointed. The expertise and disclosed interests of committee members is available on the NHMRC website at http://www.nhmrc.gov.au.

From 23 July to 22 August 2014, NHMRC held a “call for evidence” inviting the Australian community to submit citations for published studies to be evaluated in its systematic review, a key component of the evidence evaluation. Under the National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992, there is no requirement that NHMRC call for evidence from the public prior to developing its health advice. The call for evidence was an additional opportunity to engage the public in NHMRC’s work.

Evidence provided during the call and in scope of the systematic review, will be evaluated by the University of Sydney in the same way that it evaluates studies found in its own searches. Submissions will also be provided to the FRG and will serve as a record of what the Australian community identifies as relevant research evidence. The Australian community will have a second opportunity to be involved once the current evaluation of the evidence is complete, during public consultation in 2015 on the draft Information Paper. The evidence evaluation report will be available at the same time.

The National Health and Medical Research Council is committed to providing Australians with reliable advice on the health effects of water fluoridation based on the best available evidence. At its meeting on 21 June 2013, the Council of NHMRC considered the NHMRC Public Statement on The Efficacy and Safety of Fluoridation 2007. Council reaffirmed its position that “Fluoridation of drinking water remains the most effective and socially equitable means of achieving community-wide exposure to the caries prevention effects of fluoride. It is recommended that water be fluoridated in the target range of 0.6 to 1.1 mg/L, depending on climate, to balance reduction of dental caries and occurrence of dental fluorosis.”.

The National Health and Medical Research Council does not regulate or enforce water fluoridation. The addition of fluoride to public water supplies is regulated by the states and territories who regulate water quality in accordance with the standards outlined in the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (2011).