

Tooth decay and doctor shopping top State Budget wish list

Queensland doctors are urging the State Government to mandate fluoride in all Council water supplies with a \$530,000 call for urgent action in the upcoming State Budget.

Australian Medical Association (AMA) Queensland President Dr Dilip Dhupelia said 19 local governments removed fluoride from their water supplies in 2013 when State laws were amended to give Councils the choice on providing the mineral in drinking water.

Dr Dhupelia said the adverse health impacts of this decision were now coming to light.

“Some of the largest regional centres in Queensland removed fluoride from their drinking water, including Cairns, Rockhampton and Bundaberg where dentists are now seeing extensive tooth decay amongst elderly people, resulting in the need for multiple extractions,” he said.

“These 19 Councils are seemingly unwilling to accept the extensive body of evidence proving the health benefits and safety of fluoride and so we are calling on the State Government to rectify the problem urgently by mandating fluoride in all drinking water supplies.”

Queensland Health oral health services data has revealed 43% of children aged 5-6 years and 55% 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.

“Community water fluoridation is a cost-effective and equitable means of increasing exposure to the protective effects of fluoride, thereby reducing tooth decay across the populationⁱ,” the report found.

Dr Dhupelia said water fluoridation was not financial prohibitive, costing between 60 cents and \$1 per person per year.

In its Budget submission to the State Government, AMA Queensland also called for \$300,000 to help stop the practice of ‘doctor shopping’ that allowed patients to receive multiple prescriptions from different GPs.

“A Real Time Prescription Monitoring (RTPM) system will stop this practice and the State Government intends to introduce the program next year, however, GPs will need training, information and resourcing to be able to use the system,” Dr Dhupelia said.

He also called for more than \$2 million in the 2019-2020 State Budget for Wellbeing at Work resilience programs for all interns and junior doctors to help them cope with the pressures, conditions and demands of their jobs.

“The need for this is clear from the latest AMA Queensland Resident Hospital Health Check that revealed 38 per cent of more than 600 junior doctors had personally experienced bullying, harassment or discrimination at work and 46 per cent were concerned that fatigue caused by long working hours may cause clinical errors,” Dr Dhupelia said.

“If we want world class health care in this state, we need to ensure doctors are physically, mentally and emotionally able to provide it.”

Other items in the AMA Queensland budget wish-list included:

- \$640,000 for a trial to add childhood motor neurone disorder, Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA), to the newborn heel prick test, following the lead of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.
- \$10 million for local councils to build extra bikeways, lighting on walking paths and public exercise equipment to promote healthier lifestyles across Queensland communities.
- \$265,000 for a collaborative, innovative public education campaign to battle obesity, curb chronic disease rates and promote healthy lifestyles.
- \$362,400 to establish an Office of Sustainable Healthcare to reduce costs to Queensland Health in energy use and climate change emission.

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ⁱ *The Health of Queenslanders 2018*, Report of the Chief Health Officer Queensland, Queensland Health.