



FLUORIDATION TO DELIVER BETTER ORAL HEALTH FOR QUEENSLANDERS

Premier Anna Bligh and Health Minister Stephen Robertson announced today that the Government would tackle the poor condition of Queensland's oral health by introducing fluoride into the State's water supplies.

In a move that will bring Queensland into line with all other States and Territories, Ms Bligh said 80 percent of Queenslanders would be drinking fluoridated water within two years, growing to more than 90 percent by 2012.

"When I became Premier, I set myself the task of staying ahead of problems," Ms Bligh said.

"Together with oral hygiene and good nutrition, fluoridation has been proven to reduce tooth decay by up to 40 percent, and a Smart State cannot ignore the extensive scientific evidence that shows fluoridation is the missing link in Queensland's oral health system.

"Queenslanders have the worst teeth in the country – for example, our 5-12 year olds have twice the tooth decay compared to kids living in the ACT, which has had 100% fluoridation for more than 40 years.

"Research has shown that Queensland six-year-olds have nearly 30 percent more decay in their baby teeth than the national average, with a similar result for permanent teeth in 12 year olds.

"And we are experiencing this disparity here in our own state – children's tooth decay rates in Townsville– our only major fluoridated centre - are up to 65 percent lower than Brisbane.

"While fluoride will begin to benefit Queenslanders immediately, the real winners will be our future generations of Queenslanders – this is about delivering better oral health for our children and our children's children," she said.

Ms Bligh said the Government had committed \$35 million to rolling out a capital program to ensure that more than 90 percent of Queenslanders would have access to fluoridated water by 2012. Nominal increases in water rates will cover ongoing operational costs.

"Current estimates suggest that as fluoridation comes online across the State, most consumers' water rates will increase by around \$1.50 per person per year – less than the cost of a toothbrush.

"This is a nominal cost when compared to what families could save in dental bills – the Australian Council of Social Services suggests that for every dollar invested in water fluoridation, the estimated saving can be up to \$80 per person.

"Obviously due to economies of scale, the larger the population area, the cheaper the fluoridation however the Government will offer subsidies to make sure fluoridation is affordable for small communities.

"The Government has based its decision to introduce fluoride on a range of factors - scientific evidence, public support, the state of Queenslanders' oral health, and the timing of our water reforms.

"We are determined to tackle Queensland's epidemic of tooth decay and shift the focus to prevention over cure," she said.

Health Minister Stephen Robertson said tooth decay ranked highly as one of Queensland's biggest and most expensive health problems.

"While Queensland delivers a much wider range of public oral health services – and will continue to do this - the overall poor state of Queenslanders' oral health is placing an enormous burden on our health system. Nationally, oral health treatment costs the system more than cancer each year.

"The best safeguards of good oral health are hygiene, nutrition and water fluoridation.

"We have done a lot of work in two of these areas, such as expanding public oral health services and influencing positive behaviour change around nutrition.

"But the missing link is water fluoridation and we are going to change that," he said.

Fluoridation involves a small amount of fluoride being added to top up the natural levels already in the water. This equates to between 0.6 and 0.9 parts of fluoride per million parts of water - roughly equating to one drop in a bathtub of water.

Ms Bligh said the Department of Local Government would advise Queensland councils in coming months on the implementation and funding of this program.

For more information about fluoridated water, visit www.health.qld.gov.au/fluoride.

Media: 3224 4500 (Premier's office) or 3234 1185 (Health Minister's office)

Anticipated rollout program attached.

Below is a timetable for the anticipated rollout, however the State Government will work with industry and councils and where possible, will deliver fluoridation sooner.

Calendar Year	Area	Percentage population coverage*
2008	SEQ major water treatment plants - Mt Crosby (2 plants), Landers Shute, Molendinar, Mudgeeraba and North Pine	54%
2009	A) SEQ minor water treatment plants B) Cairns (partial), Gladstone (partial), Mackay(partial), Rockhampton(partial), Toowoomba (partial) and C) Indigenous communities	80%
2010	A) Completion of Cairns, Gladstone, Mackay, Rockhampton and Toowoomba; and B) Cooloola, Esk, Inglewood, Kingaroy, Mareeba, Maryborough, Warwick	83%
2011	Blackall, Bowen, Emerald, Goondiwindi, Hinchinbrook, Johnstone, Longreach, Monto, Mt Isa, Murilla, Murweh, Wambo	92%
2012	Balonne, Banana, Barcaldine, Belyando, Bendemere, Broadsound, Burdekin, Burnett, Cambooya, Cardwell, Carpentaria, Charters Towers, Cloncurry, Flinders	95%

*relates to percentage of people on reticulated water supplies.