

25 May 2022

s 9(2)(a)

By email: s 9(2)(a)
Ref: H202205498

Dear s 9(2)(a)

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA) to the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) on 19 April 2022 for information relating to the cost of implementing community water fluoridation.

In the preamble to your specific requests, you expressed concern that the costs of fluoridation may have been underestimated. I would therefore like to provide some background to the Ministry's engagement with local authorities about community water fluoridation. In December 2021, the Ministry wrote to all local authorities requesting information on their drinking water supplies, fluoridation "readiness" and estimated capital costs of fluoridation for planning purposes. Responses were received from all local authorities by March 2022. This request for information is separate and distinct from the statutory engagement required under Part 5, 116G of the Health Act 1956 if the Director-General of Health is considering issuing a direction on whether to fluoridate the water.

I will now respond to each part of your request below.

1. Please provide all Ministry of Health evidence that requirements as per sections 2.2 to 2.4 of the Beca report including ancillary requirements, potential further requirements and operating costs over time (as summarised above) for fluoridated community water supplies that service over 500 people have been fully assessed by local authorities in their returns in response to the Director General of Health's letter of 15 December last year.

This part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act, as the information requested is not held by the Ministry and there are no grounds for believing it is held by another agency subject to the Act. The Ministry did not require evidence of the process which councils used to reach their cost estimates.

2. Please provide the national aggregate total from all local authorities of fluoridation capital costs and operational costs supplied to the Director General of Health in response to his letter of 15 December last year

The national aggregate total of estimated fluoridation-related capital costs received from local authorities was \$150,545,911. A small number of councils could not provide capital cost estimates.

3. Please provide assessment of costs associated with operating, maintaining and upgrading existing community fluoridation plants that service over 500 people.

This part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act, as the Ministry does not hold the information requested. The Ministry did not request information on operating, maintenance, or upgrade costs from local authorities. Estimated maintenance and operating costs will be requested by the Director-General during any statutory consultation, as required under the Health Act.

4. Please provide all scientific Ministry of Health analysis of the effects of discharging the neurotoxin fluoride into the wider environment from all New Zealand fluoridated community water supplies that service over 500 people.

All information on the safety and efficacy of community water fluoridation is publicly available. Therefore, this part of your request has been refused under section 18(d) of the Act as the information is publicly available.

The Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, Professor Dame Juliet Gerrard, has been leading the evidence review for community water fluoridation. In June 2021, it released an evidence update on community water fluoridation. This report confirmed that there are no significant negative health effects caused by fluoride at the levels used in New Zealand. You can find this report and further information on the safety and efficacy of community water fluoridation here: www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/fluoride-and-oral-health/water-fluoridation/effective-and-safe.

Under section 28(3) of the OIA, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā



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