

## ADA NSW Position on Bottled and Tap Water

### Bottled and tap water as alternatives to sugar-containing drinks

Tooth decay and obesity continue to be significant health problems for the Australian community. Tap water is the healthiest drink for children and adults. In Australia, tap water is safe to drink and in most places contains fluoride. It is a fundamental right to have community access to fresh water and wherever possible community water should be fluoridated, good tasting and easily accessible.<sup>1,2</sup>

Sugars from drinks and foods are broken down into acids by oral bacteria causing demineralisation (the earliest stage of decay) of teeth. Fluoride has a protective effect by assisting tooth remineralisation by helping to re-build minerals back into teeth before cavities form. Community water fluoridation (CWF) has been shown to reduce decay by 26-44% in children and adolescents and by about 27% in adults.<sup>2</sup> It has also been found to reduce the rate of hospital admissions for dental causes.<sup>2</sup>

Sugar-containing drinks are the largest contributor to overall sugar intake in the Australian diet.<sup>3</sup> Sugar (especially added sugar) is the single most significant contributor to tooth decay<sup>2</sup> and also contributes to diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disease.<sup>4</sup> Sugar-containing drinks include - soft drinks, sports drinks & energy drinks; fruit juices; cordials and flavourings and flavoured milk.

For the prevention of tooth decay, diet is the factor that can be most easily modified by individuals, especially limiting the consumption of sugar-containing drinks.<sup>3</sup> Choosing to drink unflavoured water reduces sugar intake and if the water contains fluoride it adds greater protection against decay.

Ideally, reusable bottles should be refilled with tap water but where this is not practical, bottled water is a better choice than alternatives such as carbonated drinks, fruit juices, cordials, sports drinks, energy drinks or flavoured milk.<sup>5-7</sup> The “Choose Tap” app (<http://choosetap.com.au/>) can be used to locate public access to tap water. Bottled water often does not contain fluoride and this may not be apparent on the labelling.

### ADA NSW Position on Bottled and Tap Water

ADA NSW recommends consuming tap water as the usual drink for children and adults. Bottled water is preferable to any sugar-containing drink including: carbonated drinks, cordials, fruit juice and flavoured milk when necessary.

ADA NSW supports a broad public health approach, promoting the increased consumption of water and decreased consumption of sugar-containing drinks. This approach should involve education, industry engagement and legislation including advertising-restrictions, availability to children and taxation targeting sugar-containing drinks.

ADA NSW recommends fluoridation of all drinking water supplies in NSW and the ACT where practical and offers support to councils and communities considering CWF. The level of fluoridation should be in accordance with the NHMRC guidelines of 0.6-1.1 mg/L.<sup>2</sup>

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For good oral health and general health, ADA NSW advocates that any type of water is better than sugar-containing drinks.<sup>3,7</sup> Tap water is ideal because (in most places) it contains fluoride.

### Facts:

- Sugar-containing drinks are the primary source of added sugars in the Australian diet accounting for 52% of consumption.<sup>8</sup>
- Not all Australians have access to fresh water particularly remote indigenous communities.<sup>9</sup>
- Revenue from the bottled water industry was estimated to be \$765 Million in Australia in 2018.<sup>10</sup>
- 91% of bottled water contains less than the minimum recommended CWF level of 0.6mg/L<sup>11</sup>
- Bottled water represents an ecological hazard due to plastic waste.
- Bottled water uses approximately 2000 times the energy of tap water to supply to consumers.<sup>12</sup>
- Tap water is approximately \$3 per 1000 litres, compared to bottled water, which is approximately \$3 per litre<sup>13</sup>
- 93% of bottled water showed some sign of microplastic contamination.<sup>14</sup>

### References

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