

What is the “NFIS”?

The “NFIS” is the Hutt Valley District Health Board operating under a contract with the Ministry of Health to provide a “National Water Fluoridation Support and Co-ordination Service”. The contract is to assist DHBs and others in lobbying to promote fluoridation and, in particular, to oppose the efforts of FANNZ.

The HVDHB draws in a consortium of 5 partners to assist it in promoting fluoridation. It was established following FANNZ’ successes in 2010, with a \$1.25 million budget over 3 years.

Four of the five partners are funded by the Ministry of Health directly: Wellington Regional Public Health; Hutt Valley DHB Community Dental Services; National Poisons Centre; Centre for Public Health Research at Massey University.

The fifth member is ESR, which receives at least \$10 million annually in contracts with the Ministry of Health, and has since the late 1990s been the Ministry’s “go to” organization whenever it wants to discredit research against fluoridation,¹ or obtain advice on how to more effectively lobby councils to promote fluoridation.²

Misrepresentations are being made by the “National Fluoridation Information Service” and its representatives, in particular Dr Stephen Palmer, Medical Officer of Health, Regional Public Health Wellington.

The misrepresentation being made is that the NFIS is a politically independent body providing neutral independent advice, and that it is not involved in promoting fluoridation on behalf of the Ministry of Health.

The following appears on the NFIS’ website:

NFIS will offer robust and independent scientific and technical information around water fluoridation to District Health Boards (DHBs) and Territorial Local Authorities (TLAs).

What is our role?

- Provide a central authoritative, accurate and up-to-date source of information and critical commentary on research pertaining to water fluoridation
- Provide coordinated clinical and technical support and advice to DHBs, TLAs and the MoH
- Ensure DHBs and the MoH are able to communicate consistent, accurate and up to date information on water fluoridation

At Lower Hutt City Council Draft Annual Plan oral submissions on 1 June, Dr Palmer reiterated that the NFIS was completely independent and neutral in its advice to Council, even after excerpts from its contract, reproduced below, showed that its purpose was in part to promote fluoridation, and precluded it from providing objective advice:

¹ For example Michael Bates’ “critique” of Al Murieb’s NZ study on hip fractures, 1999.

² The Winstanley Report 2002

2.3. Considerations in provision of services

The Provider will ensure that any Provider staff involved in providing the Service will:

- be well-informed about water fluoridation and the research into its effectiveness and consequences;
- be trained in how to respond to the media;
- act in a manner that ensures there are high levels of accountability for the use of public money;
- maintain an objective and credible viewpoint when reviewing literature and framing communications on water fluoridation;
- inform the Ministry on becoming aware of any significant risk that would be considered to have high media or public interest; and
- not act in a way that may contradict or be inconsistent with Ministry policy on water fluoridation or with *Good Oral Health for All, for Life*.

Note that bullet 4 seems to require objectivity, but this is impossible under the last bullet point.

2.4.3. The Provider will –

- monitor the environment in which water fluoridation is publicly discussed and decisions made by public bodies in New Zealand;
- seek and identify opportunities to extend water fluoridation in New Zealand; and
- identify risks to continuation of water fluoridation in already fluoridated areas of New Zealand;

2.4.5. The Provider will support the Ministry and DHBs in advancing water fluoridation in New Zealand by:

- coordinating water fluoridation activity by DHBs through facilitating information sharing between DHBs;
- providing clinical and technical advice to DHBs and the Ministry;
- providing clinical and technical representation at relevant local authority or community meetings as identified to be necessary by DHBs or the Ministry;
- providing advice on alternative ways for local authorities to address the fluoridation issue;

2.4.6. The Provider will communicate information on water fluoridation and, as relevant, the activities of the Service, by:

- Leading and facilitating the fluoridation discussion for the Oral Health Forum website and Knowledge Library;
- monitor and update the content of the fluoridation pages on the Oral Health Forum website;
- ensuring information such as media clippings and summaries of new research studies and reports are disseminated via the Oral Health Forum website;
- maintaining a database of sector contacts with interest in promoting water fluoridation (for example PHUs, Public Health Dentists and Principal Dental Officers);
- engaging in regular communication with sector contacts with interest in promoting water fluoridation including, but not limited to, regular updates on the activities of the Service;
- establishing linkages with organisations involved in supporting or promoting water fluoridation in New Zealand (for example, the New Zealand Dental Association, Te Ao Marama, University of Otago, and Auckland University of Technology) and other non-government health organisations involved in child health (such as Plunket);
- regularly communicating about water fluoridation with organisations involved in supporting or promoting water fluoridation and child health in New Zealand; and
- pro-actively communicating with local authorities to promote water fluoridation including, but not limited to, making presentations on water fluoridation at local government meetings, seminars or conferences at national or regional levels.

Does this sound like an independent advisory service, or a lobby service committed to promoting fluoridation?

Finally, to put the last nail in the coffin, NFIS National Co-ordinator Emmeline Haymes was reported in the NZ Herald on 6 July 2013 as saying "more is needed than reassuring messages. DHBs do not have staff dedicated to the issue and do not take a pro-active approach" "Other than me, there's nobody working permanently on this in the country."

Objective? Yeah, right!