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DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH STATEMENT ON COMMUNITY WATER FLUORIDATION

Community water fluoridation is the process of adjusting the fluoride content that occurs naturally in a community's water to the best level for preventing tooth decay. Community water fluoridation is a safe, effective and well-tested public health program that benefits millions of people worldwide. Throughout the world over 320 million people receive the benefits of fluoridation. In the United States, there are approximately 130 million persons served by water supplies whose content has been adjusted to the recommended optimal levels, or whose natural fluoride content is dentally significant for prevention. In Wisconsin, over 3 million people, or 90% of the population living on public water supplies, have the advantages of optimally fluoridated water. There are approximately 249 public water systems in Wisconsin that fluoridate and 28 that have sufficient natural fluoride levels.

A former Surgeon General of the United States has called water fluoridation one of the most successful public health programs in history. All major health organizations, such as the World Health Organization, the U.S. Public Health Service, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Public Health Association, the American Medical Association, and the American Dental Association give strong endorsements to community water fluoridation. In Wisconsin, a few of the many organizations that support fluoridation include the State Medical Society of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Public Health Association, the Wisconsin Dental Association, the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Wisconsin Academy of Family Physicians. Therefore, it is not only dentists that recommend fluoridation but a wide variety of health professionals including physicians, nurses, toxicologists, chemists, and pharmacists. These endorsements were obtained after careful consideration and study of the scientific literature.

Hundreds of studies carried out in many different countries in the past 50 years have proven the effectiveness of fluoridation. Studies have repeatedly shown that drinking water with the optimal amount of fluoride (1.0 parts per million in Wisconsin) reduces the incidence of tooth decay by approximately 30%. It is a popular misconception that fluoridation helps only children. Adults as well as children benefit from drinking fluoridated water throughout their lives. Several studies show that people in their sixties who have lived all of their lives in areas with sufficient fluoride in the drinking water have much less tooth loss and tooth decay than do adults in non-fluoridated communities.

Fluoridation has been estimated to have a cost-benefit ratio of about 1:38; that is, every dollar invested in fluoridation saves approximately thirty-eight dollars (\$38.00) in dental expenditures. The economic importance of fluoridation is underscored by the fact that frequently the cost of treating dental disease is paid not only by the affected individual, but also by the general public

through services provided by health departments, welfare clinics, health insurance premiums, and other publicly supported programs.

Many indirect benefits result from the prevention of dental decay. These benefits include a reduction in pain, a more positive self image, fewer missing teeth, fewer teeth requiring root canal treatment, a reduced need for dentures and bridges, and fewer cases of malocclusion aggravated by tooth loss. In addition, there is less time lost from school or work from dental disorders or visits to the dentist. These intangible benefits are impossible to measure economically and are often taken for granted.

In summary, community water fluoridation is the most efficient way to prevent tooth decay because:

- Fluoridation is the least expensive and most effective way to reduce tooth decay.
- Fluoridation is safe.
- Fluoridation benefits children and adults.
- Fluoridation provides benefits that continue for a lifetime when consumption of fluoridated water continues.
- Fluoridation reduces the need for and cost of dental treatment.
- Fluoridation is the surest way for everyone in the community to benefit.
- Fluoridation benefits everyone when they drink fluoridated water and consume foods and beverages prepared with it.