

## **Recurrent funding of community water fluoridation; the NHS should step up to the plate.**

1. Launching his vision document “Prevention is better than cure” on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2018 the recently appointed Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock, contrasted NHS expenditure on treatment, £97 billion per year, with expenditure on prevention, £8 billion per year, and argued that a shift in this imbalance needed urgent attention. There is no better example of this imbalance than when we compare expenditure on hospital admissions of children for dental extractions under general anaesthetic, around £34 million per year (or £850 per case), with the expenditure on community water fluoridation, around £6 million per year; this in spite of the fact that we can expect, as a result of water fluoridation, a reduction of 68% in hospital admissions in deprived areas of England (PHE, 2018).
2. The current expectation is that the recurrent costs of water fluoridation would be covered by local authorities, although it is clear that much, if not most, of the financial savings would accrue to the NHS. However, it need not be that way. The relevant Act allows, but does not require, the Secretary of State to recharge local authorities for the running costs of water fluoridation. In other

words, the Secretary of State has discretion as to who pays.

3. Indeed, as explained by Lord O'Shaughnessy, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health (Lords), in a letter earlier this year (15<sup>th</sup> January 2018) to Lord Philip Hunt (President of the British Fluoridation Society);

“On the question of which organisations fund the running costs of fluoridation there is nothing to prevent joint working on funding where this is locally agreed although the legal responsibility remains with the local authority”

4. Taking up this theme the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health supported by the British Dental Association and others have written to Simon Stevens (6<sup>th</sup> March 2018) the Chief Executive of the NHS requesting that he encourages NHSE to invest in the recurrent costs of water fluoridation particularly in those areas with high dental needs. The British Fluoridation Society was pleased to join other organisations in supporting this intervention by the Royal College.

Public Health England (2018). Water fluoridation; health monitoring report for England in 2018

05.12.18/MAL