

Lack of fluoridated water a health risk for disadvantaged Queenslanders

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Researchers have found Queenslanders from lower socio-economic areas

are at higher risk of dental disease due to a lack of fluoridated water.

University of Queensland biostatistician Christopher Sexton led a team that investigated the link between geographical areas' socio-economic status and access to fluoridated [water](#) across the state. The research is [published](#) in the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

"We estimated almost 80% of people in Queensland have access to fluoridated water, mostly thanks to councils in the southeast, in areas of higher socio-[economic status](#)," Sexton said.

"But areas of socio-economic disadvantage in the state were less likely to have access to fluoridated water and its benefits for [oral health](#).

"It means those people have an avoidable greater risk of poor oral health outcomes."

The researchers from UQ's School of Dentistry said the current model for implementing [water fluoridation](#) across Queensland could be improved.

"Decisions regarding fluoridation were transferred to local councils in 2012," Sexton said. "To eliminate socio-geographic inequality of this important evidence-based health intervention, all Queenslanders should have the resources to maintain good oral health."

The researchers said access to fluoridated water was particularly important for people living in rural and remote Queensland, where dental services can be limited.

"Avoidable dental pain and infections can end up being treated by GPs in these areas, placing an unnecessary burden on health care systems," Sexton said.

Co-author Professor Loc Do said Queensland has the lowest access to fluoridated water in Australia, despite strong evidence of its benefits.

"Research has found water fluoridation reduces the prevalence of decayed, missing and filled teeth in Australian children by up to 42%," Do said.

"It is a cost-effective and safe way to help reduce rates of dental disease and helps to improve quality of life.

"Queensland's water fluoridation policy should be revised to help improve oral health of all Queenslanders, particularly those living in low socio-economic areas."

More information: Christopher T Sexton et al, Socio-economic status and access to fluoridated water in Queensland: an ecological data linkage study, *Medical Journal of Australia* (2023). [DOI: 10.5694/mja2.52196](https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.52196)

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