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Hon Annette King

Forum wants more water supplies to be fluoridated

Health Minister Annette King has told participants in today's National Water Fluoridation Forum in Wellington she hopes they can develop far-reaching strategies to persuade more communities to fluoridate their water supplies.

The forum is being held to develop recommendations for strategies to protect areas that have water fluoridation, and to promote fluoridation in those areas that do not have it.

Mrs King said: "We know water fluoridation can reduce dental decay in the permanent teeth of children by as much as 50 percent, and at a population level it is estimated that water fluoridation prevents between 58,000 and 267,000 decayed, missing or filled teeth in New Zealand each year. The most important primary preventative strategy for reducing dental decay is to extend the number of reticulated water supplies that are fluoridated at the optimal level.

"I know the issue is controversial in many communities, but it is a controversy I will never look on back away from."

Currently 56 percent of the population in our communities with reticulated water supplies containing appropriate

level of fluoride, Mrs King said.

"This results in an annual cost saving for dental treatment of up to \$15.7 million, but if water fluoridation was extended to reach 75 percent of New Zealanders the estimated savings could be as high as \$23.5 million per annum.

"One simple preventative public health care measure, and \$23.5 million a year in savings! That is just one reason the Government is so determined to begin tipping the funding balance in health more in favour of preventative health measures."

Mrs King, a former school dental nurse and tutor, told the forum that the main reason she was committed to water fluoridation was to "give our children a healthier future. It is heart-breaking to see a community turn against the fluoridation evidence and put the health of its children at greater risk."

Mrs King said that following the forum the Ministry of Health would present her with an analysis of the forum's recommendations

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