Dear Dr Smith

The British Dental Association in Scotland strongly welcomes the recent statement on water fluoridation by you and the other UK Chief Medical Officers. We have long campaigned for the introduction of water fluoridation in Scotland where practical and appropriate, most recently in a letter to the newly appointed Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport in June.

In the manifesto we published ahead of the Scottish Parliamentary elections earlier this year we argued that water fluoridation is a cost-effective, evidence-based preventive measure where practical and appropriate for local needs. Data published by Public Health England show it leads to a 52% reduction in dental caries for 5-year-olds in deprived areas, and that for every £1 invested, it saves over £12 after 5 years and £22 after 10 years in treatment costs. The Scottish Government already recognises that water fluoridation could make a positive contribution to improvements in oral health and while its implementation is a matter for local NHS Boards, we've been arguing that the Government needs to provide a clear lead on this issue. This includes setting up a feasibility study of the potential benefits of fluoridation for the local population in each NHS Board (or at least supporting Boards to carry out such studies), along with investment to help facilitate its introduction where applicable.

Your joint statement recognises that there are other effective methods for getting fluoride onto teeth, and in Scotland the Childsmile programme has been credited for contributing to the long-term improvement in child oral health. However, it is worth noting that most of Childsmile (including nursery toothbrushing) stopped during Covid, whereas water fluoridation would have continued throughout the pandemic. The latest report of the National Dental Inspection Programme, published last October, showed that stark and persistent oral health inequalities remain, with Primary 1 children from the most deprived communities experiencing more than four times the level of tooth decay compared to their counterparts in the least deprived areas (1.78 versus 0.40 decayed, missing or filled teeth per child). We therefore need a comprehensive package of complementary measures to improve child oral health and reduce inequalities.

We repeat our call for the Scottish Government to show real leadership on this issue. Following your joint statement, how do you plan to take things forward with Government colleagues? The BDA is ready to offer our full support to your welcome intervention, and to work constructively with you to finally make progress on introducing water fluoridation in Scotland.
We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

Robert Donald  
Chair, Scottish Council

David McColl  
Chair, Scottish Dental Practice Committee

Graham Smith  
Chair, Scottish Public Dental Service Committee

Manar Elkhazindar  
Lead, Scottish Hospital Dentists Reference Group

CC. Mr Humza Yousaf MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care
CC. Ms Maree Todd MSP, Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport
CC. Mr Tom Ferris, Chief Dental Officer
CC. Professor Jason Leitch, National Clinical Director