



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 14, 2020

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Spokane City Council approves contract to begin water fluoridation

Residents' oral health and overall health will benefit due to public health investment

SPOKANE – Spokane residents will benefit from a significant public health investment that will improve oral health, address health inequities, and contribute to overall health. Spokane City Council voted 6-1 on a contract to begin community water fluoridation.

Since 2015, Smile Spokane, a local network of organizations across health care, public health, social services, and community groups, has been working to transform oral health in Spokane. Better Health Together, a local nonprofit that tackles health inequities throughout eastern Washington, joined the network in asking Spokane City Council to begin fluoridating Spokane's water supply.

"We joined together because we knew this was the right thing to do for our community," says Mike Wisner, a member of Smile Spokane, as well as VP of Planning at CHAS Health. "I'm relieved Spokane will join the majority of communities across our country that provide this public health benefit to their citizens."

Almost 73 percent of people — over 240 million American — in U.S. towns or cities live where fluoride is provided at a good balance. The CDC calls community water fluoridation one of the 10 greatest public health achievements of the 20th century.

Spokane is the largest city in Washington state without water fluoridation. Spokane also has significant oral health challenges, with a higher rate of cavities and other oral health problems than many other communities across the state. A kindergarten student in Spokane is more likely to have rampant tooth decay than the average child in Washington. Forty percent of kindergarten-age kids in Spokane have had a cavity, and 60 percent of Spokane children experience preventable cavities by 3rd grade.

“Community water fluoridation is a perfect example of sound public policy,” says Alison Poulsen, Executive Director of Better Health Together. “It prevents health issues upstream, promotes equity for under-resourced communities, alleviates costs to the health care system as a whole — while still benefitting *everyone* in our community.”

Smile Spokane and Better Health Together were joined by a coalition of organizations in Spokane, including MultiCare Health System, Providence Health Care, CHAS Health, Unify Community Healthy, Kaiser Permanente, Spokane County Medical Society, Spokane District Dental Society, Washington State University College of Medicine, UW School of Medicine, Eastern Washington University Department of Dental Hygiene, Spokane NAACP, The Carl Maxey Center, Latinos en Spokane, the Spokane Chapter of Asian Pacific Islander Coalition, Spokane Public Schools Board of Directors, Spokane Public Schools Foundation, Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP, and School Nurse Organization of Washington. The coalition also includes over 20 nonprofits, 120 dentists and physicians, and 200 individuals.

For decades, supporters have been advocating that the City of Spokane adjust the level of fluoride in the water supply to provide a good balance for health. It’s no coincidence these supporters were often physicians, dentists, hygienists, and public health officials, who see firsthand the impact of unnecessary tooth decay on the community’s most vulnerable populations: children, seniors, communities of color, and low-income populations.

Fluoridation is especially critical to health equity, as under-resourced populations often lack access to preventive dental care. Fluoride is nature’s cavity fighter, proven to reduce tooth decay and cavities. A mineral found naturally in water, including lakes, rivers, oceans and aquifers, fluoride is often found at levels below what’s needed to prevent tooth decay — as is the case in Spokane. Community water fluoridation is the most efficient and cost-effective way to get a good balance of fluoride to everyone in the community.

Better Health Together and eight other locally-operating organizations worked together to raise \$1,000,000 toward capital funding to begin water fluoridation, including Empire Health Foundation Community Action Fund, Providence Health Care, MultiCare Health Systems, Kaiser Permanente, Molina Health Care, Amerigroup, Community Health Plan of Washington, and Coordinated Care. Arcora Foundation, funded by Delta Dental of Washington, is contributing \$3,000,000 toward capital funding.

“We are so grateful City Council listened to our call for better oral health in Spokane,” says Wisner. “With this vote, they have demonstrated that they care about children, health equity and racial justice.”

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About Smile Spokane

Smile Spokane is a local network of organizations across health care, public health, social services, and community groups. The network formed in 2015 in the hopes of solving our region's oral health challenges. Smile Spokane collaborates to serve our community's most under-resourced populations—

by connecting Medicaid patients to dentists, integrating oral health screenings into doctor visits, and providing sealants to kids in schools. Together, these partners work to transform oral health in our region so everyone can enjoy better oral health, overall health and well-being. smilespokane.org

About Better Health Together

Better Health Together tackles health inequities throughout eastern Washington. We believe everyone deserves a fair shot at being healthy. To make this happen, we work with more than 100 organizations across seven counties to promote practical solutions that meet the needs of the people and communities we serve. BHT was founded on the principle that when we step back and let local community lead, we find the best and most sustainable solutions to some of our most complex problems. We advocate for policies centered on accountability, accessibility, and affordability. We disrupt the status quo by facilitating conversations and partnerships that level the playing field for community health throughout our region. www.betterhealthtogether.org