

Community Water Fluoridation Toolkit:

Resources for Assessment,
Communication, and
Sustainable Policy

2025





The Community Water Fluoridation Toolkit

For decades, Michigan has relied on Community Water Fluoridation (CWF) as one of the most effective, evidence-based ways to improve oral health and reduce disparities in children and adults. CWF refers specifically to the adjustment of fluoride levels in public tap water systems to the optimal level for preventing tooth decay. Yet, the decision to adopt, sustain, or expand CWF often happens locally—where policymakers, advocates, and community members need access to trusted information, practical tools, and proven strategies.

This toolkit equips **local communities, elected officials, advocates, and advisory committees** with the resources they need to make informed decisions and build support for fluoridation efforts. It combines educational materials, messaging strategies, case studies, and policy guidance into a single resource adaptable for different audiences and contexts.



Role of the CWF Advisory Council

The **Community Water Fluoridation Advisory Council (AC)** centrally supports this work. As a statewide body of experts, practitioners, and advocates, the AC provides guidance, shares lessons learned, and helps communities navigate both technical and political aspects of fluoridation. This toolkit extends that mission offering practical, evidence-based support that communities can rely on in protecting and strengthening oral health.

This toolkit was created by the Michigan Oral Health Coalition (MOHC) with support and funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to promote evidence-based strategies for improving oral health across Michigan.

How to Use This Toolkit

Multiple audiences—including policymakers, advocates, technical experts, and community members—can use each section independently or as part of a step-by-step process.



Public Outreach Materials

includes original resources, such as social media guides, op-eds, template letters, position statements, Q&A items, and reframed technical language, to help communities communicate clearly and effectively about fluoridation.



Community Assessment Tools

explains how to determine whether a community's water is fluoridated, whether the levels meet recommended standards, and how to engage partners in reviewing the results.



Educational Resources for Advocates

provides evidence-based messages and resources that build understanding and trust in fluoridation.



Communication Tools

offers practical strategies, templates, and talking points for sharing accurate information across different audiences.



Best Practices

highlights lessons from successful communities and strategies for building coalitions and responding to challenges.



Policy Guidance and Sustainability

outlines approaches for protecting CWF through laws, governance, and long-term planning.



Conclusion and Next Steps

summarizes key goals, provides resources for ongoing support, and suggests immediate actions communities can take.

By working through these sections, communities can strengthen oral health through one of the safest, most cost-effective public health measures available.

A stylized, light gray world map is centered in the background. Overlaid on the map are several light blue circular icons, each containing a white tooth. The map is surrounded by soft, abstract shapes in shades of yellow, orange, and light blue, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The title "Public Outreach Materials" is written in a bold, brown, sans-serif font, centered over the map.

Public Outreach Materials



Public Outreach Materials

Effective public outreach is crucial for building community understanding and support for Community Water Fluoridation (CWF). This section provides adaptable materials designed to inform, engage, and address concerns, fostering a positive perception of CWF as a vital public health measure.

Responses to Questions/Comments

Clear, conversational answers to questions and misconceptions about fluoridation, helping local leaders and advocates respond with accuracy and empathy.

[Click here for Q/A materials](#)

Reframing Technical Language

Translates complex or technical terminology into plain language to ensure that materials are accessible and understandable to all community members.

[Click here for reframing materials](#)

Position Statements

Customizable templates with sample position statement language to help organizations, coalitions, or local boards publicly express their support for CWF.

[Click here example position statements](#)

Social Media Guide

Provides ready-to-use posts, graphics, and guidance for promoting accurate information about fluoridation across social media platforms.

[Click here for the social media guide](#)

Op-Eds

Adaptable templates and examples to help community members and advocates craft compelling opinion editorials advocating for CWF.

[Click here example op-eds](#)

Letter Templates

Customizable templates for individuals and organizations to effectively communicate with elected officials and advocacy groups regarding CWF.

[Click here for letter templates](#)



Community Assessment Tools



Community Assessment Tools

Laying the Groundwork

Effective oral health advocacy begins by determining whether a community's water contains fluoride and whether levels meet standards. Without this baseline information, communities cannot make informed decisions about sustaining or initiating community water fluoridation (CWF).

Steps for Local Leaders

- 1

Assess fluoridation status:
Nearly 3 in 4 U.S. residents receive fluoridated water, yet local variation is significant.¹ Confirm that local systems meet the CDC-recommended level of 0.7 mg/L.²
- 2

Use available tools:
Refer to public databases like the My Water's [Fluoride](#) site from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) which allows you to search the fluoridation status of your community or the annual Consumer [Confidence](#) Reports (CCR) site from the United State Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to find your local CCR which reflect the annual drinking water quality report from local water suppliers.
- 3

Engage both technical and community partners:
Licensed water operators and engineers play a critical role in monitoring fluoride levels. Equally important are local leaders such as city officials, educators, librarians, and human service providers who are established, trusted voices in communities.
- 4

Integrate community feedback:
Assessment goes beyond technical review and includes conversations with residents, including conversations about perceptions, needs, and questions. Invite input early to build trust.
- 5

Plan for action if gaps exist:
If water is not fluoridated or levels fall short of standards, refer to leaders to know where to begin (e.g., reviewing feasibility, cost, equipment, and state approval processes) in your community.

Checklist for Local Leaders

Confirm fluoridation status

Confirm whether the community water supply is fluoridated, and note whether fluoride occurs naturally or through the addition of fluoride to the water system.

Check fluoride levels

Ensure levels meet the optimal 0.7 mg/L standard.

Identify monitoring responsibility

Determine who is responsible for monitoring and reporting fluoride levels (e.g., licensed water operators, local water utility staff).

Review reporting practices

Confirm whether fluoride results are reported publicly and on a regular basis (e.g., through annual Consumer Confidence Reports, annual reports by water systems or utility bills).

Assess regulatory and legal oversight

Identify oversight structures (NSF certification, state reviews, regulatory audits, legal opinions) and confirm how results are verified and communicated to the public.

List community partners

Develop a list of organizations and programs (schools, Head Start, WIC clinics, libraries, local health departments, senior centers, and faith-based groups) that can help frame findings within local context and communicate their relevance to residents and stakeholders.

Engage residents

Share assessment findings with community members, invite feedback, and document common questions or concerns.

Note infrastructure needs

Identify any equipment, staffing, or funding requirements to maintain optimal fluoridation levels.



Assessment Resources



Check your [county's](#) public water system!

[Click here to check yours](#)

[Click HERE for downloadable assessment resources](#)

Resources from the Centers for Disease Control

- [General](#)
- About community water [fluoridation](#)
- Water fluoridation [data](#) and [statistics](#)
- Community water fluoridation [recommendations](#)
- Estimating CWF [populations](#)
- Engineering and administrative [recommendations](#)

Michigan's Drinking Water and Environmental Health Division

- [General](#)
- [Community](#) water fluoridation
- [Laws](#) and [Rules](#)

Lansing Board of Water and Light (BWL)

- Water supply, [conditioning](#), and distribution
- Delta Dental [Foundation](#) and BWL article

See the "Case Studies" section below for examples of where expansion has succeeded



Educational Resources for Advocates



Educational Resources for Advocates

Building Understanding

Community Water Fluoridation (CWF) is recognized as one of the greatest public health achievements of the 20th century.³ It prevents cavities, saves families and communities money on dental care, and reduces health disparities. Yet, misinformation continues to challenge public understanding. Clear, accessible education is essential to build trust and sustain support.

Key Messages & Supporting Arguments

Community-Wide Benefits

Fluoridation benefits the whole community, not just individual dental care. It acts like a "baseline protection" for everyone, regardless of income, insurance status, or proximity to a dentist.⁴ Plus, unlike brushing or flossing, water fluoridation works behind the scenes for everyone who drinks tap water.

Global Strategy

Community water fluoridation is a global strategy. Over 400 million people across more than 25 countries benefit from fluoridated community water supplies worldwide.⁵ While some nations emphasize other delivery methods (fluoridated salt, milk, or topical use), many major public health bodies globally endorse fluoridation as a safe, effective, and equitable oral health measure.⁶

Natural vs. Added Fluoride

There is no difference between "supplemental" and "natural" fluoridation. Fluoride is not "man-made". Almost all water contains some naturally occurring fluoride, though not enough to prevent caries/tooth decay.²

Safety & Efficacy

Decades of evidence confirm safety and efficacy. For 80 years, evidence has confirmed that fluoridation at recommended levels is safe. Common misconceptions—linking fluoride to cancer, autism, or low IQ—are not supported by credible science at the optimal level of 0.7 mg/L.³

Clear Science

The science is clear. CWF reduces cavities by about 25% across children and adults, with even greater benefits for vulnerable populations.²

Economic Benefits

Both the economy and health systems benefit. Every dollar spent on fluoridation returns approximately \$20 in avoided dental treatment costs.⁷

Checklist for Advocates

Highlight the evidence clearly

Share simple, science-based points about how CWF reduces cavities, lowers costs, and improves access to oral health for everyone. Keep explanations straightforward and accessible.

Use trusted messengers

Partner with local pediatricians, dentists, teachers, coaches, and other community voices who can communicate confidently and credibly.

Focus on real-world impact

Show what happens when fluoridation is maintained (improved oral health, lower costs) and what happens when it is discontinued (higher decay rates, greater treatment needs).

Emphasize long-standing safety

Communicate that CWF has been studied for decades and remains one of the most effective, safe public health practices at the recommended level.

Connect to community priorities

Frame messages around values that resonate locally — such as protecting children and adults, preventing costly dental care, or supporting overall community health.

Educational Resources

Click [HERE](#) for downloadable education resources

American Dental Association Resources:

- [Fluoridation](#) Facts

American Academy of Pediatrics/Campaign for Dental Health Resources:

- AAP [Fluoridation](#) Page
- Learn About [Fluoridation](#) (Q&A section, education materials, fluoridation debate primer, evidence-based tools in English and Spanish)
- Common [Questions](#) About Fluoride

American Fluoridation Society Education Page:

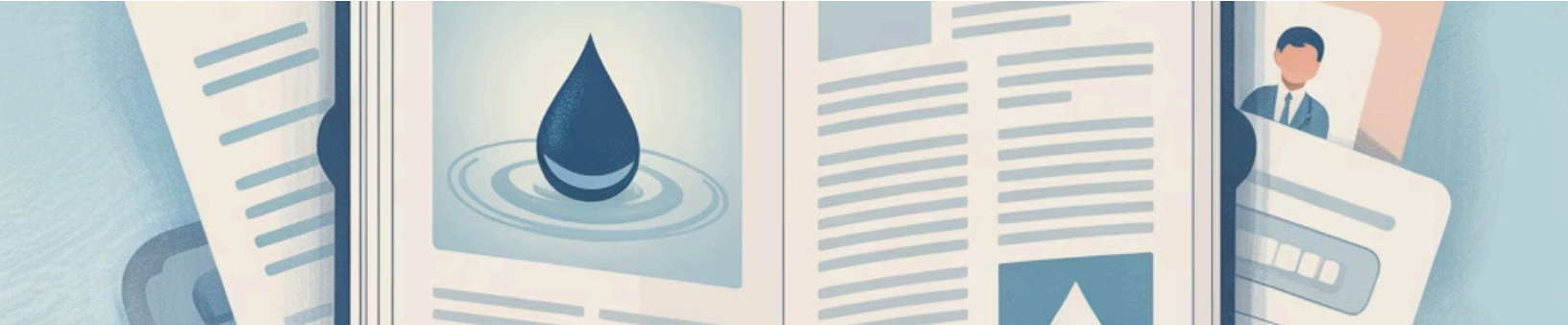
- [Education](#) Page
- Common Myths [Answered](#)

Additional Resources:

- Smiles for Life National Oral Health [Curriculum](#)
- British Dental Journal [Collection](#) Spotlight (global evidence + public consultation)



Communication Tools for Providers



Communication Tools for Providers

Sharing the Message

Misinformation can easily undermine even strong evidence when advocates lack clear, accessible tools. Effective messaging builds public trust, equips leaders with talking points, and ensures accurate information reaches communities. Trusted healthcare professionals, such as pediatricians and dentists, serve as the most persuasive messengers but need ready-to-use resources to speak with confidence.

Communication Strategies



Develop **clear talking points** for advocates and healthcare providers to share in conversations, public meetings, and interviews ([see Communication Resources](#) section below for guidance and examples)



Offer **templates** for emails, letters, and social media posts that can be customized for local use.



Share **press release formats** and tips for engaging local media, especially when policy changes or ballot measures are under consideration ([see "Example Position Statements" in Policy Resources](#) below)



Encourage **community meetings and presentations** to foster dialogue and build trust through transparency.



Develop a speakers bureau of **local, trusted leaders** working in oral health care, parents who support fluoridation, and elected officials who can be tapped to **speak to media, public meetings and more.**

Checklist for Provider Communicators

Lead with clarity

Use plain, neutral language to explain the benefits of fluoridation, avoiding technical jargon. (e.g., say "tooth decay" instead of "caries"; use analogies like: "Fluoride is like a shield for your teeth").

Tailor the message

Adjust emphasis based on the audience—parents (protecting children's teeth), policymakers (reducing healthcare costs), healthcare providers (supporting prevention and access).

Highlight history

When advocating or educating, communicate enough about CWF's long track record as a long-established tool and strategy that is both accessible and effective.

Tell stories, not just numbers

Use relatable narratives: how a child's cavity was prevented, how a small town saved money, how schools or local clinics benefited.

Build trust

Research shows doctors and dentists are the most trusted sources on fluoride, far more than legislators or media outlets. Position them as frontline messengers.⁸

Affirm shared values

Begin conversations by naming what you and your audience care about in common—such as wanting healthy kids, saving families money, or keeping the community strong—before sharing information. (e.g., "I know you care about your child's health. We all want the best for our families. This is why I use fluoride with my children..."; "I want to understand your position and help you make the best choice for you."). Focus on shared goals: healthier kids, stronger schools, and safer communities.

Be proactive

Share accurate, evidence-based information that frames fluoridation as safe, effective, and equitable. Avoid repeating false claims directly; instead, emphasize community benefits and relatable analogies.

A vertical illustration on the left side of the page features stylized teeth and dental tools. At the top, a tooth is shown with a blue shadow. Below it, two dental mirrors are positioned. Further down, a large, detailed tooth is depicted with a blue shadow. At the bottom, another dental mirror is visible. The background is a light blue with subtle patterns.

Communication Resources

[Click HERE](#) for downloadable communication resources

Infographic Examples

Centers for Disease Control

- Benefits of [fluoridation](#)
- How [fluoride](#) works
- Laying a healthy [foundation](#)
- Fluoride water [operators](#) (1)
- Fluoride water [operators](#) (2)

American Dental Association

- Benefits of [fluoridation](#)

National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research

- [Fluoridation](#) fast facts

Communication Templates

- Fluoride for Smiles Social Media [Toolkit](#)
- Materials for [Community](#) Advocates (conversation guide)
- Materials for Health [Professionals](#) (conversation guide, slideshow, faculty curriculum)
- [Letter/Email](#) Template
- [Sample](#) Social Media Posts

Family-Facing Materials

- [HealthyChildren.org](#)
- Top 10 [questions](#) parents ask from CareQuest
- Healthy Teeth Trail [Coloring](#) Book from the Illinois Department of Public Health

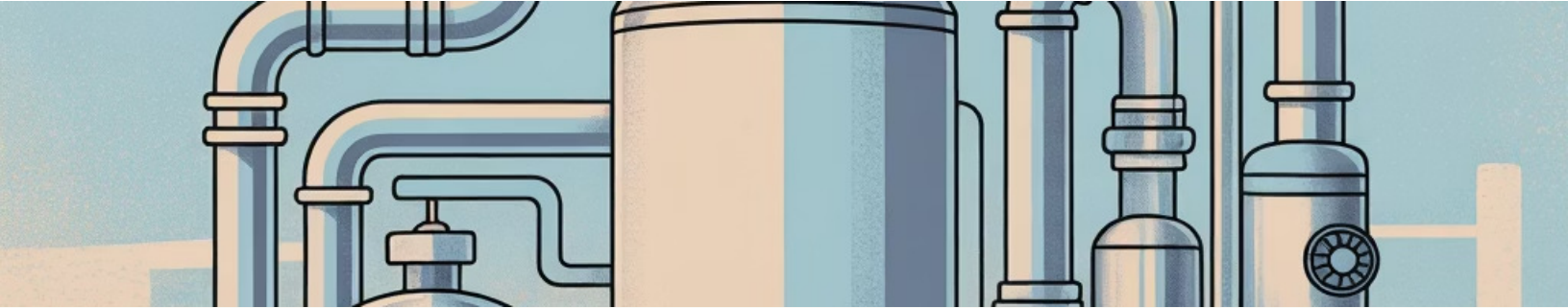
Additional Resources

- American Fluoridation Society [Education](#) Page
- Common Myths [Answered](#)
- [Campaign](#) for Dental Health (I Like My Teeth)
- [Fluoride](#) Myths and Facts
- [CareQuest](#) CWF National Survey Results: Attitudes about Fluoride
- [How to talk about fluoride with patients](#)

See *Policy Guidance and Sustainability* section for sample position statements

Best Practices





Best Practices

Learning from Success

Across the U.S., many communities overcame challenges to sustain or re-establish fluoridation, offering the opportunity to apply lessons from others. Documenting and sharing these success stories helps advocates replicate what works—from grassroots organizing to policy-level strategies.

Community-Level Strategies

Local Advocacy Groups

Support the formation of **local advocacy groups** that can respond quickly to misinformation.

Train Volunteers & Professionals

Train volunteers and professionals to **testify at hearings** and participate in council meetings.

Collect Case Studies

Collect and publicize relatable **case studies** of communities that experienced rising cavity rates after ending fluoridation—and those that saw improvements when reinstating it.

Engage Water Operators

Proactively **engage licensed water operators and utility managers**. Share cost-saving data, address safety misconceptions, and provide access to operator-focused training (e.g., CDC/ADA operational guidance, equipment maintenance cost calculators) to engage these key stakeholders in community water fluoridation.

Monitor Social Media

Monitor **social media sentiment** to identify emerging concerns and target neutral or undecided audiences with accurate, timely information.

Frame Conversations for Collective Win

Frame **conversations so no one "loses"**. Winning an argument can make others feel dismissed or defeated. Instead of debating, emphasize shared values and reframe concerns in ways that allow everyone to agree on the goal—healthier kids, stronger families, and a fiscally responsible community. This reframes fluoridation as a collective win rather than a zero-sum fight.

Checklist for Community Organizers

Build coalitions

Unite health officials, dental associations, schools, and civic groups. Strong alliances between these groups help to unify voices in support of fluoridation.⁹

Engage community influencers

Partner with faith leaders, teachers, and business owners to carry the message in resonant ways for residents.¹⁰

Use local data

Share statistics on oral health outcomes and economic benefits to make the case relevant to decision-makers.¹¹ Make the data relatable to the audience.

Engage water operators

Make policy practical and safe, and earn buy-in from the people who run it daily. Engage early so they can pressure-test safety, cost, and workload assumptions and help co-design a feasible, compliant plan—turning potential pushback into ownership.

Learn from others/Document case studies

States like Connecticut have passed protective legislation, while communities in Louisiana and Michigan have mobilized grassroots coalitions to defend fluoridation against ballot challenges.¹²

Monitor sentiment

Track local conversations and social media to address concerns early and effectively.

Best Practices Resources

Click [HERE](#) for downloadable best practices resources

Guidance for Advocacy Work

- The [Advocate's](#) Gateway Toolkits
- Coalition [Checklist](#) from the Alliance for Justice
- Ballot [Measure](#) Toolkit from the Alliance for Justice

Case Studies

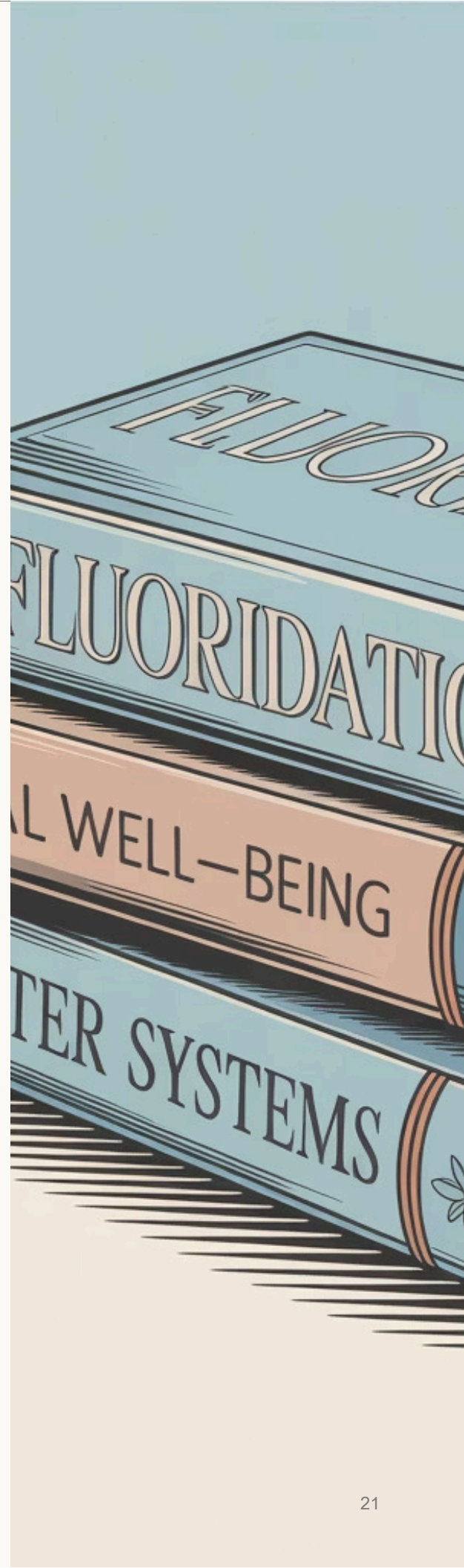
- "The Impact of Water Fluoridation on [Medicaid-Eligible](#) Children and Adolescents in Alaska"
- [Kentucky](#) Law Ex. of mandate for fluoridation in communities exceeding a certain population
- "Minn. State Bd. of Health v. City of [Brainerd](#)" Case Ex. of mandated fluoridation and legal enforcement
- California State Water [Resources](#) Control Board Ex. of monitoring/reporting methods

Additional Case Studies

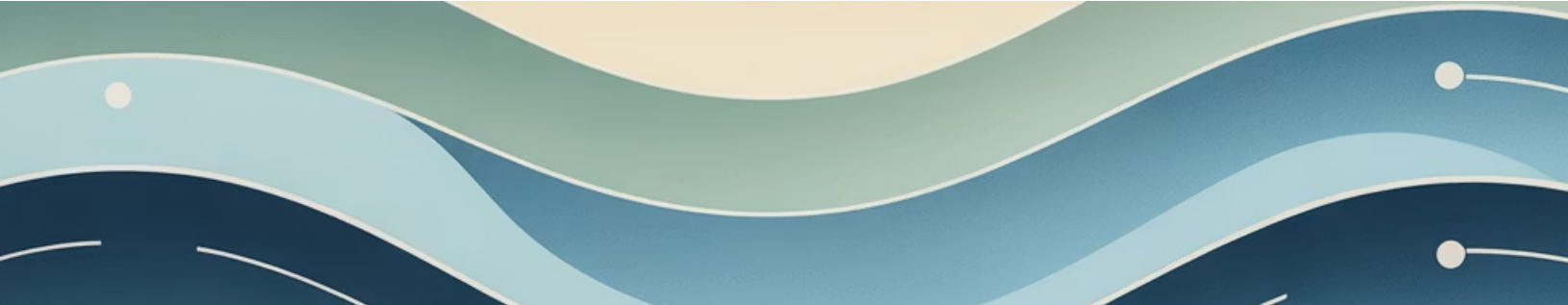
- **CareQuest:** Winning on Water [Fluoridation](#): Lessons from Louisiana and Connecticut
- **Journal of Public Health Dentistry:** Mapping the "X" Debate: Water Fluoridation [Sentiment Analysis](#) With Advanced Machine Learning (formation of public opinion & role of social media)

Resources for Water Operators:

- I Like My Teeth: Helpful [Information](#) for Water Operators
- ADA: Fluoride Facts for Water [Operators](#)
- [Wisconsin](#) DHS
- [Implementation](#) Guide



Policy Guidance and Sustainability



Policy Guidance and Sustainability

Securing the Future

To achieve lasting impact, build policy protections, ensure stable funding, and anticipate opposition, we need strong evidence and practical recommendations to support communities in adopting and maintaining fluoridation.

Policy & Sustainability Strategies for Long-Term Success

Use cost estimates/emphasize cost savings to strengthen arguments.

For example, removal of fluoridation is projected to increase national dental costs by \$1.48 billion over 5 years¹¹ OR for every \$1 invested in community water fluoridation, communities save about \$20 in avoided dental treatment costs, including fewer emergency room visits and less burden on Medicaid.

Frame beyond prevention.

CWF helps cut dental ER visits and missed school/work, improves access for neighbors facing care barriers, and **supports whole health**, as oral health connects to children's learning/behavioral health and to conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Showcase state-level successes

such as Connecticut's proactive fluoridation law, as models for replication.

Understand local governance structures

and create a plan for navigating them. Start with identifying who makes decisions (city, county, or water district), what form of action is needed (manager decision, council/board resolution/ordinance, or ballot), and checking state rules (notice/open-meeting rules/sign-offs).

Anticipate political shifts by building bipartisan support

grounding arguments in fiscal savings and overall health benefits.

Checklist for Policymakers

Be concise

Frame the issue in two sentences — one for the problem and one for the solution. For example: "Tooth decay leads to costly treatment, missed school, and missed work. Community water fluoridation is a proven, cost-saving solution that keeps people healthy, employable, and in the workforce."

Engage governance structures

City councils, county boards, and state legislatures all play roles in fluoridation policy. Advocates need to navigate these systems and build relationships in advance of debates.

Frame it as prevention

Emphasize that CWF is a preventive service saving millions in dental care costs. Economic data is often most persuasive to policymakers.⁷

Utilize legal references

Confirm and cite the state's start/stop rule for fluoridation (notice/approval steps), pull 2–3 relevant case summaries with one-line takeaways, and note the utility's CCR/testing schedule.

Codify protections where possible

Support ordinances or regulations that set and safeguard fluoride levels.

Plan for sustainability

Ensure stable funding, transparent public reporting, community engagement, and bipartisan support.

Educate and equip constituents

Anticipate that residents will have questions. Prepare concise responses and connect people to trusted resources (CDC, ADA, AAP, Campaign for Dental Health) and demonstrate responsiveness while keeping conversations fact-based.

Build bipartisan support

Lead with shared values, recruit cross-trusted messengers, make it local (one-page district briefs - current levels, costs, ER visits, quotes from local doctors), address fairness and access without partisanship, use plain language.

Encourage deliberation safeguards

Promote policies that require a cooling-off period (e.g., 90 days) before votes to discontinue fluoridation. Position safeguards to ensure transparency and community trust in decision-making, allowing time for fact-finding, community input, and informed decision-making rather than snap judgments.



Policy Resources

Click [HERE](#) for downloadable policy resources

Example Position Statements

- Centers for Disease Control and **Prevention**
- American Association for Dental, Oral, and **Craniofacial** Research
- American Dental Hygienists' **Association**
- **American** Academy of Pediatric Dentistry
- Michigan Public Health **Association**
- 2016 **Surgeon** General


Policy Resources

- **American Fluoridation Society**
- **Health Policy Institute & American Dental Association:** **State-Level** Costs of Removing Fluoride (economic consequences of removing fluoride)
- **Kaiser Family Foundation:** Water **Fluoridation** in the U.S.: The Federal Role in Policy and Practice

Additional Resources

- **American Dental Association:** Press **Release:** TEETH Act
- **World Health Organization:** Fluoride in **Drinking-water:** Background document for development of WHO Guidelines for **Drinking-water** Quality
- **Centers for Disease Control:** **Infographic** on cost savings
- **Sample** Social Media Posts
- **Fluoride Legislative User Information Database (FLUID Law):** database on legal decisions related to fluoride in the U.S.

Conclusion and Next Steps

A stylized illustration in the background features a large, light-colored tooth in the center. To its left is a smaller tooth, and to its right is a bottle of mouthwash. The background is composed of overlapping semi-circular shapes in shades of blue, orange, and white, creating a clean, modern aesthetic.



Conclusion and Next Steps

Recap of Toolkit Goals

The CWF Toolkit was created to serve as a **practical guide** for communities, policymakers, and advocates working to sustain or expand access to fluoridated water. By offering both narrative guidance and curated resources, the toolkit supports informed decision-making, consistent messaging, and long-term community engagement.

Resources for Ongoing Learning and Support

This toolkit forms part of a larger effort to **connect communities with national and state-level expertise**. In the resources directory, you will find links to organizations such as the CDC, ADA, AAP, and state oral health programs, along with key scientific studies, advocacy tools, and case examples. These resources ensure that communities have access to the most current and credible information.

Next Steps for CWF Advocacy

Next: **take action!** We encourage communities to:

- **Conduct a local assessment** of fluoridation status and public perceptions.
- **Use the messaging templates and strategies** provided here to strengthen communication.
- **Mobilize local support** by engaging partners, influencers, and community members.
- **Leverage best practices and policy tools** to secure long-term sustainability.

Together, these steps help ensure that Michigan communities — and communities across the country continue to benefit from one of the simplest, safest, and most cost-effective public health measures available.

[Click HERE to give us feedback on the toolkit!](#)

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13. University of Michigan School of Dentistry, Department of Cariology, Restorative Sciences, and Endodontics.

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