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MEDIA RELEASE

Public Health Association of NZ issues Three Waters Caution

'Be proactive and cautious with the water we use' is the New Zealand Public Health Association's message after the Water Services Entities Bill was recently passed into law.

The Public Health Association of NZ last week acted on concerns by adopting a 'Water, Nitrates, and Health' policy position statement calling for a public health focus to help protect communities from degraded drinking water sources and recognise water as a life-sustaining resource for future generations.

It also sends a message to Government not to let public health considerations **like these** slip in the transition - "there needs to be a precautionary and proactive approach" says the authors Dr Gayle Souter Brown, Chris Webber, and Dr Tim Chambers.

"Nitrate pollution of freshwater poses an intergenerational challenge due to the extent of the pollution, the lag times to cleanse freshwater sources and the cost of treatment."

Adverse health outcomes from nitrate contamination in drinking water may occur at concentrations considerably below 50 mg/L - the currently permitted 'Maximum Acceptable Value' (MAV) of Drinking-water Standards for New Zealand. Associations between nitrate contamination and bowel cancer, breast cancer, ovarian cancer, preterm birth, congenital abnormalities and paediatric cancer have been reported so far.

“Public health policy must move to protect water sources from contaminants such as nitrates and ensure kaitiaki can monitor for health effects on people and their environments.” There are concerns gaps are being left in the transition away from public health practitioners.

We urge decision-makers to look past the political swings, to respect te mana o te wai, and embed public health across all sector stakeholders.

For interview requests please contact the Public Health Association of NZ at comms@pha.org.nz or read our policy position statement [here](#).