

Ms Carmel Donnelly PSM
Chair
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
ipart@ipart.nsw.gov.au

Cost of water services in Broken Hill and potential health risks for Aboriginal and lower socioeconomic households in Broken Hill

Dear Ms Donnelly

I am writing regarding potential public health risks to Aboriginal and lower socioeconomic households in Broken Hill because of proposed water pricing increases for Essential Water.

NSW Health supports equitable and affordable access to safe drinking water. I note the important role that water plays as one of the strategies to help protect children from exposure to lead dust in Broken Hill.

IPART's Issues Paper notes that Broken Hill is ranked in the lowest 11% of communities in New South Wales for relative socioeconomic disadvantage. Lead contamination has a disproportionate burden on Aboriginal children and Broken Hill has the largest Aboriginal population in the Murdi Paaki region.

I note that IPART's review will consider whether fully recovered costs will impact social outcomes and consider options for additional support.

I am concerned that increases to water pricing may result in further equity and affordability issues and affect the ability of households to manage lead dust. I have been advised by the Far West Local Health District (LHD) that similar concerns were raised by community members during previous price reviews.

Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation, an Aboriginal community-controlled health organisation, has made representation to me about this matter. Maari Ma is concerned that increases will disproportionately impact Aboriginal households in Broken Hill.

I note that proposed price increases are projected to be approximately double the typical annual household water bill for Greater Sydney by 2030-2031.

Water use is recommended in the following ways to help manage lead exposure in Broken Hill:

- The Broken Hill Lead Program (led by the Environment Protection Authority with Maari Ma Aboriginal Corporation and Far West LHD) provides education to help families reduce lead risks at home, including through washing hands and toys regularly and keeping floors and surfaces clean.

- The LeadSmart Broken Hill website (leadsmart.nsw.gov.au) also provides advice on the use of water, including recommendations to wash down or wet wipe outside play equipment and toys regularly, and, after windy or dusty days, wipe down windows, door screens, verandahs, play equipment and other outdoor surfaces with a wet cloth or mop. LeadSmart Broken Hill also provides advice on the use of water for renovating and managing cleaning materials to avoid spreading lead.

Evaporative air conditioners are also used in Broken Hill and contribute to increased water usage during summer. The ability to afford to cool homes during extended heatwaves is important for the health of residents. Broken Hill experiences regular heatwaves, with frequency and intensity increasing under climate change.

As noted in the [National Water Reform Report 2024](#) and the recent [NSW Productivity and Equality Commission review of funding models for local water utilities](#), regional and remote services face challenges resulting from lower population density compared to urban areas. NSW Health is working with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and other agencies on the implementation of the NSW Government response to the Productivity and Equality Commission review. The response may include a community service obligation funding mechanism or other delivery models to support basic levels of service.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input to the Essential Water pricing review. Should officers of IPART require more information, please contact [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

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Dr Kerry Chant AO PSM

Chief Health Officer and Deputy Secretary, Population and Public Health

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