



Australian Drinking Water Guidelines – Draft Guidance for Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)

In November 2024, Cancer Council Australia completed a submission to the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) on the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines draft guidance for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). This consultation aimed to provide information and evidence on the proposed updated PFAS guideline values and supporting documentation. These values indicate the amount of PFAS in drinking water that a person can consume on a daily basis over a lifetime without any appreciable risk to health (“health-based guideline values”).

Cancer Council Australia welcomes a cautious approach to PFAS exposure through Australia's water supply considering the International Agency for Research on Cancer's (IARC) classifications of Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) as carcinogenic to humans (Group 1) and perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) as possibly carcinogenic to humans (Group 2B). Additionally, epidemiological evidence for a link between PFAS and cancer is conflicting.

Cancer Council's submission included the following areas:

- A more comprehensive review of the current literature is recommended in addition to the assessment of other jurisdiction's PFAS guidelines.
- Greater consumer and sector engagement is recommended during the development and implementation of the guidelines.
- More accessible, user-friendly guidance is required to promote its use across a wider audience. Well-informed public awareness is needed considering the increasing media attention on PFAS and subsequent community concern.
- Greater acknowledgement and guidance are needed on the time, resources and monitoring required to implement the guidance, with consideration of potential flow-on costs to consumers.
- Smaller water suppliers will require access to the necessary resources to implement the guidelines to ensure water equity.
- The guidelines must be responsive to new evidence as it emerges. The intention and process for re-evaluating these guidelines should be established and clearly outlined in the implementation plan.

Information about the progress of the consultation can be found on the consultation's webpage: <https://consultations.nhmrc.gov.au/environmental-health/australian-drinking-water-guidelines-2024-pfas/>