

# PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Select Committee on PFAS (per and polyfluoroalkyl substances)

Inquiry into the extent, regulation and management of PFAS

5 September 2025

PDR Number: IQ25-000087

UCSF's Program on Reproductive Health and the Environment Evidence-to-Decision Framework

Written

Senator: Lidia Thorpe

**Question:**

1. Do you agree that the tool developed by [UCSF's Program on Reproductive Health and the Environment Evidence-to-Decision Framework](#) is the best practice for prioritising health in assessing and regulating chemicals?

**Answer:**

- NHMRC is aware that different evidence-to-decision frameworks are available, including the UCSF's Navigation Guide Evidence-to-Decision Framework for Environmental Health. These frameworks have been tailored for diverse types of evidence and purposes.
- NHMRC guidelines typically use the relevant factors from the GRADE evidence-to-decision framework and the WHO-INTEGRATE framework to guide the evidence-to-decision process in guideline development. These frameworks are widely accepted in the guideline development community, including NHMRC, as best practice models.
- In line with best practice, NHMRC adopts the evidence-to-decision process that was fit for purpose and considered the factors relevant to the topic and guideline purpose.
- Refer to IQ25-000088 for further information.

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**PDR Number: IQ25-000088**

**NHMRC “gold standard” method**

**Written**

**Senator:** Lidia Thorpe

**Question:**

2. You said the NHMRC follows the “gold standard” method.
  - a. Can you please clarify whether/how the NHMRC’s processes—including for the review of the Drinking Water Guidelines—compares to UCSF’s process?
  - b. Can you please identify for the committee in what aspects the NHMRC’s process differs from that of the UCSF Framework?

**Answer:**

2a

- The NHMRC Standards for Guidelines (available at <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelinesforguidelines/standards>) outlines best practice standards for Australian guidelines, including evidence to decision (EtD) processes.
- NHMRC’s EtD process for the *Australian Drinking Water Guidelines* is informed by relevant factors from the GRADE and WHO-INTEGRATE frameworks that are relevant to the Australian drinking water context.

This includes consideration of factors such as exposure, health benefits versus harms, consumer/community values and preferences, feasibility, equity, and resource impacts. Other factors can be added as required if considered appropriate by NHMRC and the Water Quality Advisory Committee.

- Similarly, UCSF’s Navigation Guide Evidence-to-Decision Framework for Environmental Health also draws on GRADE and WHO-INTEGRATE frameworks and identifies these two as the most comprehensive and well-developed EtD frameworks out of 18 frameworks they reviewed.

2b.

- While both NHMRC and UCSF EtD frameworks share similar criteria that are considered during decision-making (see table below), the UCSF framework appears to place greater emphasis on social and ethical dimensions, including environmental justice, human rights, and sociocultural feasibility, as core decision-making criteria alongside health evidence.
- NHMRC and the Water Quality Advisory Committee consider potential impacts of different guideline values during the EtD process, but ultimately the decision about the PFAS guideline values were based on what was considered the best available health evidence. This aligns with NHMRC Standards for Guidelines.

<b>UCSF EtD criteria</b>	<b>NHMRC EtD criteria</b>
-	Exposure profile
Environmental justice	-
Maximising benefits and reducing harms	Health benefits vs harms
Sociocultural acceptability and feasibility	Values and preferences (consumers, communities) Acceptability (other key stakeholders)
Essentiality	-
Human rights	Health equity impacts
Quality of the evidence	Health evidence profile

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**PDR Number: IQ25-000091**

**NHMRC engagement with the NSW Government**

**Written**

**Senator:** Lidia Thorpe

**Question:**

5. The NSW Government “expert” panel recently released a report which relied on a number of industry funded studies for its claims about no health impacts, which is already being shared with doctors and community members to dispel concerns. Has NHMRC had any engagement with the NSW Government on this report?

**Answer:**

NHMRC has not had any engagement with the NSW Government on this report.

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**PDR Number: IQ25-000097**

**Schedule 7 assessments**

**Written**

**Senator:** Lidia Thorpe

**Question:**

6. Regarding the essential use assessment for the Schedule 7 assessments, can you please provide further information on how essentiality is assessed?

**Answer:**

6. This is best answered by the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

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5 September 2025

PDR Number: IQ25-000103

**GP in Wreck Bay recommended standard population screening for cancers, cardiovascular and other conditions**

**Written**

**Senator:** Lidia Thorpe

**Question:**

4. A previous GP in Wreck Bay recommended standard population screening for cancers, cardiovascular and other conditions be made at least 10 years earlier for the population of Wreck Bay. What would be required for this to occur?

**Answer:**

- The Australian Government has an agreement with NSW Health, facilitated by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication, Sport and the Arts, to provide health services to Jervis Bay Territory residents. These services are provided in line with NSW Health's policies, including the *NSW Health Aboriginal Health Plan 2024-2034*.
- Additionally, through the Indigenous Australians' Health Program, the Australian Government is investing \$14.5 million over two years to support two Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in delivering primary health care, as well as maternal and child health services to the Wreck Bay community and surrounding regions.
- As advised in IQ25-000042, the Australian Government works with state and territory health departments to run a range of population level health screening programs available to the population of Wreck Bay. More information about these programs is available at [www.health.gov.au/topics/cancer/screening-for-cancer](http://www.health.gov.au/topics/cancer/screening-for-cancer).

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**Inquiry into the extent, regulation and management of PFAS**

**05 September 2025**

**PDR Number: IQ25-000104**

**Engaging with states and territories to provide the necessary health support to people with high exposure to PFAS**

**Written**

**Senator: Lidia Thorpe**

**Question:**

5. How are you engaging with states and territories to provide the necessary health support to people with high exposure to PFAS in other areas?

**Answer:**

- The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing works with states and territories through the Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth), a sub-committee of the Australian Health Protection Committee, to produce nationally consistent health advice that the jurisdictions can use in providing advice to impacted communities.
- The States and territories provide day-to-day health services in line with their respective legislation. This includes work by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts to provide health services in Jervis Bay and other territories.

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**Inquiry into the extent, regulation and management of PFAS**

**5 September 2025**

**PDR Number: IQ25-000106**

**Hiding evidence and spreading disinformation, the implications of legal actions against chemical companies**

**Written**

**Senator:** Lidia Thorpe

**Question:**

7. Due to legal action, tobacco companies were forced to not only pay compensation for hiding evidence and spreading disinformation but also had to release all their internal documents showing their attempts to cover up the science. What do you think would be the implications of similar legal actions against chemical companies, which are already happening overseas?

**Answer:**

The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing noted that the question asks for an opinion about a hypothetical legal case. As such we are unable to respond to this question.

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**5 September 2025**

**PDR Number: IQ25-000107**

**PFAS challenge to inform future assessment of chemical risks**

**Written**

**Senator:** Lidia Thorpe

**Question:**

8. What has been learned from the PFAS challenge to inform future assessment of chemical risks to the public?

**Answer:**

- The experience of PFAS has reinforced the value of preventative health and in particular in having strong surveillance systems to detect threats to public health.
- On 3 September 2025, the Australian Government introduced draft legislation to Parliament to establish the Australian Centre for Disease Control as an independent agency.
- One of the priorities of the Australian CDC will be to use enhanced data to strengthen the surveillance systems used to detect threats to public health.

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PDR Number: IQ25-000108

**Lack of evidence to support the clinical benefit of testing PFAS levels in the blood**

**Written**

**Senator:** Lidia Thorpe

**Question:**

9. Can you please expand on the lack of evidence to support the clinical benefit of testing PFAS levels in the blood. Is it that a dose-response relationship has not yet been established?

**Answer:**

- The results from blood samples from the National Health Measures Survey published on 27 May 2025 indicate a baseline level of key PFAS in the blood of most Australians, arising primarily from the historical use of these chemicals. These results are available at: [www.abs.gov.au/articles/per-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances](http://www.abs.gov.au/articles/per-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances).
- A blood test can measure the level of PFAS in a person's blood and can tell a person how their blood levels compare with the levels seen in the general Australian population.
- Blood testing cannot provide the evidence required for a medical practitioner to be able to tell a person whether their blood level of PFAS will make them sick later in life, or if any current health problems are related to the PFAS levels found in their blood. Hence, blood testing for PFAS is not generally recommended due to the limitations of these tests for individuals.
- The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing continues to review scientific research into the potential health impacts of PFAS and considers new evidence to ensure policy advice and guidance is appropriate.
- To date that research has shown associations with particular health effects, rather than causation, and tend to arise from studies where the exposure levels have been much greater than the general Australian population.

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**5 September 2025**

**PDR Number: IQ25-000109**

**Department's advice to people who have had high exposure to PFAS and who wish to have their blood levels tested**

**Written**

**Senator: Lidia Thorpe**

**Question:**

10. What is the Department's advice to people who have had high exposure to PFAS and who wish to have their blood levels tested but have to travel and pay a substantial fee for this?

**Answer:**

- The Australian Government does not recommend blood testing for PFAS because it cannot provide the evidence required for a medical practitioner to be able to tell a person whether their blood level of PFAS will make them sick later in life, or if any current health problems are related to PFAS levels found in their blood.
- As the biomonitoring study by the Australian Bureau of Statistics also demonstrated, most Australians will have some level of PFAS in their body due primarily to the historical use of these chemicals.

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**5 September 2025**

**PDR Number: IQ25-000111**

**Plan for community education about the sources of PFAS**

**Written**

**Senator:** Lidia Thorpe

**Question:**

12. What is the plan for community education about the sources of PFAS, and how to minimise exposure in daily life?

**Answer:**

- The Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth) provides national advice on environmental health risks. For PFAS, it has commenced a process to update its Guidance Statement and Factsheet to reflect developments since the last update in February 2024. That updated guidance will be publicly available on the department's website.
- This work complements more general government initiatives, such as the creation of a central government website with information and links on PFAS by the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, which is available at <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/about/initiatives/pfas>
- For individuals who live in PFAS affected communities, state or territory health departments also provide local advice on how to minimise exposure to PFAS.

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**5 September 2025**

**PDR Number: IQ25-000112**

**State and territories entities that are now left with the responsibility to address PFAS contamination**

**Written**

**Senator:** Lidia Thorpe

**Question:**

13. To what extent can state and territories entities that are now left with the responsibility to address PFAS contamination, such as water utilities and councils, expect additional government support so as not to increase the cost burden on customers and communities?

**Answer:**

- Together with the state and territories, the department provides high level national health guidance through enHealth, AHPC's Environmental Health Standing Committee.
- Commonwealth departments, including the Department of Defence and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts, are also involved in addressing PFAS contamination.

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5 September 2025

PDR Number: IQ25-000113

## Actions that have been taken from PFAS Inquiry

### Written

**Senator:** Lidia Thorpe

### Question:

14. What actions have been taken so far in your department as a result of what we have learned in this inquiry?

### Answer:

- The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing continues to monitor developments in PFAS research to ensure policy advice and guidance is appropriate. During the period of inquiry this has included:
  - Funding the inclusion of PFAS sampling and data gathering as an element of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' National Health Measures Survey 2022-24.
  - Contributing to the NHMRC review of PFAS guidelines values in the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.
  - Commissioning independent research into the latest evidence on PFAS health impacts.
  - Working with the Environmental Health Standing Committee of the Australian Health Protection Committee to update their PFAS guidance materials