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| **Fighting obesity: Surveying drinking fountains in public places in three New Zealand local authority districts and successfully working with local government to increase their density** |
| **Background/Objectives**As one way to address the obesogenic environment in many countries, health organisations including the New Zealand (NZ) Ministry of Health, recommend that plain water should be the beverage of choice for children and adults. The lack of access to drinking water in areas where children exercise and play is therefore potentially an important health problem. Taranaki (a region in the far western side of the middle of the North Island of NZ) has one of highest rates of childhood obesity in the country. The installation of more drinking water fountains in public areas also makes sense, as summer temperatures around NZ and elsewhere increase due to climate change (with associated risk of heat waves). The aim of this study was to survey the presence, quality and operation of drinking fountains in public parks, playgrounds and major walkways in Taranaki. **Methods**All New Plymouth District, South Taranaki District and Stratford District parks, playgrounds and major walkways were visited by a solo observer over a four week period during November to December 2017. At the playgrounds, the observer walked around the perimeter and surveyed the area within 100 metres of the play equipment using a previously published survey methodology. **Results**88 public parks, playgrounds and major walkways over the 3 districts of Taranaki were surveyed and it was found that only an average of one in five (19.3%) provided a drinking water fountain for public use. Six of the 17 (35%) drinking water fountains were also covered in moss or mould around the nozzle.**Discussion**These results were consistent with two previously published NZ studies showing a relative lack of drinking water fountains in childrens’ playgrounds and other public places. The recommendation from this study was for the Taranaki Public Health Unit to work with District Councils to increase the number of playgrounds and public areas with well maintained drinking water fountains. Stand-alone drinking water fountains are not expensive to install if near existing water reticulation. Following the completion of the study, the New Plymouth District Council immediately installed two new drinking water fountains and has requested advice on the location of further fountains. The “windows of opportunity” approach used to achieve this successful public health outcome will be discussed and the applicability of the process to other countries.**Keywords**ChildrenChildhood obesityDrinking water fountainPlaygroundsClimate changeWindows of opportunity |