



Fact Sheet

2024 SAFER Drinking Water Needs Assessment

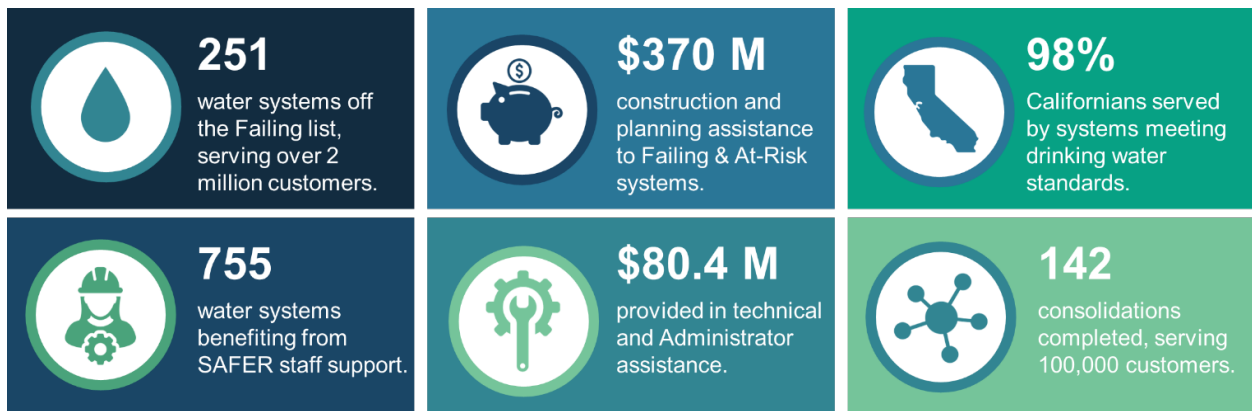
The State Water Resources Control Board's fourth annual [Drinking Water Needs Assessment](#) describes the overall health of the state's water systems and domestic wells and California's challenges and progress to achieving the [Human Right to Water](#). The annual report also helps direct funding and regulatory work of the [Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience \(SAFER\)](#) drinking water program. The 2024 report:

- Identifies **communities** with water systems that are failing or at risk of failing to provide safe drinking water.
- Explains **the total cost** to implement sustainable solutions and the **gap between the funding available and what is needed** to provide safe drinking water access to all Californians.
- Identifies **affordability challenges** that could pose barriers to the implementation of these solutions.

SAFER PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS (2019 – 2023)

As of April 2024, nearly five years into the SAFER program, the State Water Board has distributed over \$831 million in grants for drinking water projects in California's disadvantaged communities—accelerating the pace of assistance so that over two-and-a-half times more funding has been delivered since 2019 than the \$310 million distributed in the five years prior to the program. Since 2019, over 250 failing water systems have returned to compliance with drinking water standards, benefiting more than 2 million people.

Figure 1: SAFER Program Accomplishments (2019 - 2023)



Failing Water Systems

98% of California's population receives water from systems that meet or exceed drinking water standards. 79% of water systems have continually been in compliance with drinking water standards since 2017. On January 1, 2024, there were 385 failing public water systems, serving 913,500 Californians. Approximately 56% of failing systems serve disadvantaged communities and 67% serve majority communities of color. 45% of these systems have received \$352 million in funding and technical assistance from the State Water Board.

Risk Assessment Results

The 2023 Risk Assessment correctly predicted approximately 91% of the water systems that were on the failing list in 2023. No changes were made to the Risk Assessment's methodology between 2023 and 2024. As of January 1, 2024, there were 613 at-risk public water systems, serving a population of approximately 1.5 million people. The results of the 2024 Risk Assessment are summarized below. 16% of at-risk public water systems have received \$136 million in funding and technical assistance from the State Water Board.

System Type	Total Systems Analyzed	2024 At-Risk	Change from 2023
Public Water Systems	3,055	613 (20%)	↑ 101 (20%)
State Smalls Water Systems	1,282	195 (19%)	↓ 50 (20%)
Domestic Wells	296,283	73,431 (25%)	↓ 8,157 (10%)

Cost Assessment & Fund Gap Analysis Results

Senate Bill 200 (Monning, 2019) directs the State Water Board to “estimate the funding needed for the next fiscal year based on the amount available in the fund, anticipated funding needs, other existing funding sources.”¹ Thus, the Cost Assessment estimates the costs related to the implementation of interim and longer-term solutions for failing and at-risk public water systems, state small water systems, and domestic wells.

- Estimated 5-year funding needs for modeled long-term and interim solutions for failing and at-risk public water systems are approximately \$6.6 billion and \$4.9 billion for high-risk state small water systems and domestic wells.
- The State Water Board has a projected \$3.5 billion in 5-year funding availability, \$2 billion for grants and \$1.5 billion for loans. The estimated 5-year funding gap is \$5.5 billion for grant eligible needs. All estimated 5-year loan eligible needs are met by projected available loan capacity.

¹ California Health and Safety Code section 116769.

- If the State Water Board were to prioritize funding failing and at-risk public water systems only, excluding high-risk state small water systems and domestic wells, the estimated 5-year funding gap is \$3.9 billion for grant eligible needs. All estimated 5-year loan eligible needs are met by projected available loan capacity.

Figure 3. 5-Year Funding Gap Analysis Results for Estimated Capital & Managerial Assistance Needs

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Affordability Assessment Results

The Affordability Assessment identifies community water systems that serve disadvantaged communities (DAC/SDAC) that may face financial management issues due to customer fiscal stresses. No changes were made to the Affordability Assessment’s methodology between 2023 and 2024. The 2024 results identified 94 (3%) DAC/SDAC community water systems with high drinking water affordability burden and 311 (10%) that may be experiencing medium affordability burden. It is worth noting that the average statewide monthly customer charge for 6 HCF is \$69. Small drinking water systems charge on average \$74 a month, which is \$32 higher compared to larger water systems (\$42).

ABOUT THE SAFER PROGRAM & THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The SAFER program is a set of tools, funding resources, and regulatory authorities coordinated to assist California communities as they work to develop local compacity to ensure reliable access to safe drinking water. The results of the annual Needs Assessment are used by the State Water Board’s SAFER program and the [SAFER Advisory Group](#) to inform the prioritization of available state funding within the [Safe and](#)

[Affordable Drinking Water Fund Expenditure Plan.](#)

Figure 2: How the Needs Assessment is Utilized by the SAFER Program



White papers, presentations, received public feedback, and webinar recordings related to the development of the 2024 report can be found on the State Water Board's [Drinking Water Needs Assessment](#) webpage. The report includes the following core updates:

- Expansion of the Failing criteria to include new Source Capacity and Water Outage related violations. The updated Failing criteria includes a handful of additional violation codes to the existing Failing categories and the removal of some violation codes.
- Results from an updated and enhanced Cost Assessment Model that better assesses long-term and interim modeled needs for Failing and At-Risk public water systems, state small water systems, and domestic wells.
- A 5-year estimated State Water Board Funding Gap Analysis.
- A 5-year SAFER program retrospective that highlights the program's accomplishments.

(This Fact Sheet was last updated on June 25, 2024)