



Media Release

New California drinking water report to guide distribution of \$855 million to communities in need

Annual Needs Assessment helps prioritize financial assistance for water systems most at risk

Since 2019, the SAFER program has benefitted more than 2 million people with drinking water projects

June 25, 2024

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SACRAMENTO – Advancing the state’s ongoing work to provide access to safe drinking water for every Californian, the State Water Resources Control Board today released its fourth [Drinking Water Needs Assessment](#) and proposed plans to distribute about \$855 million in financial assistance over the next year for projects that address drinking water needs in disadvantaged communities and emerging contaminants.

The Needs Assessment informs the priorities of the State Water Board’s [Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience \(SAFER\)](#) drinking water program, which was established in 2019 under legislation signed by Governor Newsom. SAFER advances sustainable solutions for access to safe drinking water in disadvantaged communities, and the annual plans for the [Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund \(SADWF\)](#) and the [Drinking Water State Revolving Fund \(SRF\)](#) guide the distribution of the bulk of this drinking water assistance.

Since 2019, over two-and-a-half times more grant funding has gone to disadvantaged communities than was provided during the five years prior to the program’s creation. In this time, **251 failing water systems returned to compliance** with drinking water standards, **benefiting over 2 million people**. Compared to five years ago, more than 700,000 Californians have gotten connected to clean drinking water, a **43% drop in those lacking access**.

“In California, we have the irony that 98% of the population receives water from systems that meet or exceed our nation-leading drinking water standards, but the systems serving the last 2%, mostly in rural communities, must navigate a host of complexities to achieve the same thing,” said Joaquin Esquivel, chair of the board. “What our analysis has shown time and again is that the common denominator is size. Small systems struggle, especially in communities that have experienced discrimination and disinvestment, and their challenges will be amplified as weather grows more extreme, new contaminants emerge and costs increase.”



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

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This year, the SAFER program will prioritize water systems that consistently fail to provide safe drinking water, consolidations, and expedited planning and technical assistance. These priorities are informed by SAFER's annual Drinking Water Needs Assessment, which leverages data and analysis to describe the overall health of the state's water systems and domestic wells.

"A central principle of the SAFER program is to let the data guide the work," said Chair Esquivel. "Before 2019, we didn't even know how many people were served by failing water systems in California. Over the past five years, we've built a foundation of data and analysis through our Needs Assessments that empower communities with information about drinking water issues and also guide how we target our funding and regulatory work so it has the most impact."

In addition to its analysis of systems' failure, risk and affordability, the report this year assesses the overall statewide cost to achieve the Human Right to Water by using an enhanced cost model with new assumptions and methodology. The report estimates that failing and at-risk public water systems would require over \$6.6 billion over five years to provide safe drinking water and that high-risk state small water systems and domestic wells would need \$4.9 billion. These figures, compared to the prior [cost assessment](#) (2021), are a result of the improved data and analysis of the past five years – more water systems have been included, water shortage risks have been incorporated for the first time, and models have been improved to select for the most sustainable long-term solutions which are more cost efficient over a longer timeframe, rather than short-term lower-cost solutions.

The SAFER [Fund Expenditure Plan](#) and Drinking Water SRF's [Intended Use Plan](#) are available for public comment through July 24. They will come before the State Water Board for adoption in August.

More information about the SAFER program, including the Needs Assessment and [SAFER dashboard](#), can be found on the board's website.

The State Water Board's mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.