



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Human Right to Water (HR2W) recognizes that “every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking and sanitary purposes.” In 2019, to advance the goals of the HR2W, California passed Senate Bill 200 (SB 200), which enabled the State Water Board to create the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience Drinking Water program (SAFER program). SB 200 established a set of tools, funding sources, and regulatory authorities that the State Water Board harnesses through the SAFER program to help struggling water systems sustainably and affordably provide safe drinking water. The SAFER program is driven by collective responsibility: water systems, non-profit organizations, governments, a community advisory board, and other interested parties work together to develop and implement solutions.

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. In this same period, 251 water systems serving 2 million people have come back into compliance with drinking water standards and 142 consolidations, benefiting approximately 100,000 people, have been completed.

Figure 1: SAFER Program Accomplishments (2019 - 2023)



The Needs Assessment is a comprehensive, data-driven analysis that:

1. Identifies communities served by Failing public water systems;
2. Predicts which public water systems, state small water systems, and domestic wells are at risk of failing;
3. Estimates how much it may cost to achieve the Human Right to Water for Failing and At-Risk systems and the communities they serve;
4. Estimates the potential five-year funding gap between estimated funding needs and state funding availability; and
5. Identifies disadvantaged communities that may be facing affordability challenges, which may limit their ability to address existing and future drinking water challenges.

The results of the annual Needs Assessment are used by the State Water Board’s SAFER program and the SAFER Advisory Group¹ to inform the prioritization of available state funding in the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund (SADWF) Fund Expenditure Plan (FEP).²

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



The Needs Assessment serves to highlight and track progress in achieving safe drinking water in communities that have historically lacked access. It also serves to document the pace of implementing drinking water solutions, measure water system performance to encourage resiliency, explore sustainable long-term solutions like consolidation, and estimate the cost of implementing these solutions.

By incorporating this Needs Assessment into the SAFER program and implementation of SADWF, the State Water Board will continue to lead long-term drinking water solutions. At the same time, the Needs Assessment brings clarity to the amount and type of work that must be done by state, federal, local and stakeholder partners collectively to realize the Human Right to Water for all Californians.

¹ [SAFER Advisory Group](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/safer/advisory_group.html)
https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/safer/advisory_group.html

² [Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/sustainable_water_solutions/safer.html)
https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/sustainable_water_solutions/safer.html

2024 NEEDS ASSESSMENT RESULTS



385
FAILING
Public Water
Systems

Population Served
913,500

45% Receiving \$352 M in
State Funding & Technical
Assistance



613
AT-RISK
Public Water
Systems

Population Served
1,535,200

16% Receiving
\$136 M in State Funding &
Technical Assistance



727
HIGH-RISK
State Small
Water Systems



143,663
HIGH-RISK
Domestic Wells

KEY FINDINGS:

- 1 98% of California's population receives water from systems that meet drinking water standards. 79% of water systems have continually been in compliance with drinking water standards since 2017.
- 2 Approximately 56% of Failing public water systems serve disadvantaged communities and 67% serve majority communities of color.
- 3 The Risk Assessment was able to predict risk of failure for 91% of water systems on the Failing list in 2023.
- 4 Estimated 5-year funding needs for modeled long-term and interim solutions for Failing and At-Risk public water systems is approximately \$6.6 billion and \$4.9 billion for high-risk state small water systems and domestic wells.
- 5 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.
- 6 In the long-run, local communities and private well owners may need to cover \$13.9 billion to achieve the Human Right to Water.
- 7 Small drinking water systems charge on average \$32 more a month for the same volume of water compared to larger water systems.
- 8 Approximately 94 (3%) of community water systems face high drinking water affordability burden and 311 (10%) may be experiencing medium affordability burden.