

# IT'S TIME TO INVEST IN AMERICA'S WATER INFRASTRUCTURE.

After decades of neglect, America's water infrastructure is failing our communities. But by increasing investment and prioritizing affordability and green solutions, we can create a national water infrastructure that works for everyone.

## America's Water Infrastructure Crisis

Water infrastructure—including drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure—directly affects our health and environment. When it works properly, it provides us with safe drinking water and limits pollution in our local rivers and streams. On the other hand, when it falls into disrepair, it can lead to contamination that can make people sick.



According to an NRDC study, more than 27 million Americans are served by water systems violating health-based standards established in the Safe Drinking Water Act.<sup>i</sup> These failures are especially common in vulnerable populations, such as low-income communities and communities of color.

*We're facing this crisis because America's water infrastructure is:*

**Aging.** Much of America's water infrastructure is nearing the end of its useful life. Older water systems are more likely to include lead pipes, and many systems across the country are literally falling apart. Old pipes are easily broken by roots and other disturbances, allowing drinking water to be wasted or contaminated, or sanitary sewers to leak or overflow.

**Threatened by climate change.** Climate change exacerbates the challenges of aging infrastructure and adds new challenges. The impacts of climate change on our water infrastructure include sea level rise, storm surge, extreme precipitation, decreased water quality, water shortages due to drought, flooding, increased water treatment requirements and costs, and higher energy demand for treatment plants.

**Insufficiently funded.** We need to invest at least \$743 billion in maintaining and repairing our drinking water and clean water infrastructure over the next twenty years just to meet current environmental and health standards.<sup>ii</sup> Yet at the same time that our nation's infrastructure faces increasing challenges, our society is committing less money to its upkeep and repair. Federal spending on water infrastructure is decreasing, leaving cash-strapped state and local governments to pick up the tab.

**Not affordable.** The costs of maintaining and improving water infrastructure are becoming increasingly difficult for communities to afford, and the passing on of those costs to consumers has created an affordability crisis for many in this country. Since the year 2000, water and wastewater prices have more than doubled.<sup>iii</sup> This affordability crisis is even more pronounced for lower-income customers, whose water and wastewater costs represent a higher proportion of monthly household expenses.



## Policy Solutions for Healthy, Sustainable Water Infrastructure

In order to tackle America's water infrastructure crisis and improve the health of our communities and environment, we must:

**Increase our investment.** We must significantly increase federal funding for our nation's water infrastructure by growing existing funding sources and developing new and innovative sources. Specifically, we should increase annual appropriations to the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds to \$6 billion each and maintain that level of funding into the future. Not only would this investment help to make a dent in our nation's substantial infrastructure backlog, it would also create thousands of jobs for America's workers.

**Ensure affordability for all.** Because every human being needs safe, clean water and sanitation, we must find ways to ensure that low-income households can afford water services. As we increase the overall amount of funding for water systems, we must ensure that it is directed, under principles of equity, to the communities that need it most, including disadvantaged areas that have critical needs but lack the ability to raise funds from local sources. We should also promote affordability at the local level by encouraging states and water utilities to adopt low-income customer assistance programs, equitable rate structures, and strategies that reduce system-wide costs.



**Support natural infrastructure.** Nature-based solutions offer a wide range of social, economic, and environmental advantages that conventional methods do not provide. As proven in communities around the country, these approaches can save money, grow the economy, and improve lives. Our infrastructure investments should prioritize these approaches before resorting to conventional methods, such as by setting aside a percentage of Clean Water State Revolving Fund capitalization grant funds for green projects.

**Maintain environmental safeguards.** Our nation's bedrock environmental protections must be maintained and enforced, and never sacrificed in the name of infrastructure "streamlining." Infrastructure projects can have enormous consequences for our

water. We must ensure that projects are carefully sited and designed to avoid damage to our waterways—or not built at all if the risks of harm are too great.

### Questions? Contact:

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**CLEAN  
WATER  
FOR ALL**

<sup>i</sup> NRDC, "Threats on Tap: Widespread Violations Highlight Need for Investment in Water Infrastructure and Protections" (May 2017), <https://www.nrdc.org/resources/threats-tap-widespread-violations-water-infrastructure>.

<sup>ii</sup> This total includes \$473 billion for drinking water infrastructure and \$271 billion for wastewater and stormwater infrastructure. EPA, Drinking Water Needs Survey (2018), <https://www.epa.gov/drinkingwatersrf/epas-6th-drinking-water-infrastructure-needs-survey-and-assessment>; EPA, Clean Watersheds Needs Survey (2016), [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-12/documents/cwns\\_2012\\_report\\_to\\_congress-508-opt.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-12/documents/cwns_2012_report_to_congress-508-opt.pdf).

<sup>iii</sup> Brookings, "Striking a Better Balance Between Water Investment and Affordability" (2016), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2016/09/12/striking-a-better-balance-between-water-investment-and-affordability/>.