



SDG 6 is about ensuring the availability and sustainable management of clean water and sanitation for all.



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATIONS
OF CANADA

**The Learning
Institute**

Many community foundations are exploring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within their planning, granting, convening, Vital Signs and more. This Fact Sheet is part of a series that focuses on specific SDGs to engage and inspire community foundations of all sizes to deepen their work around these goals.

What is this approach?

The [targets of SDG 6](#) outline a global approach that guarantees safe, clean and affordable drinking water, adequate and equitable sanitation services, increased water efficiency and improved water management, including the protection of natural ecosystems and watersheds. Despite action on these targets, 1 in 3 people still lacks access to safe drinking water. Worldwide, only 2 out of 5 people have access to basic hand-washing facilities, increasing the risk of contagious diseases such as COVID-19 ([source](#)). Climate change is likely to increase the strain on our water systems, and studies indicate that concerted effort is needed to avoid a global water crisis by 2050 ([source](#)). In Canada, we are blessed with abundant water resources, but 400,000 people still lack access to safe drinking water ([source](#)), the majority of whom are Indigenous people, with 50 long-term boil water advisories in 31 Indigenous communities around the country ([source](#)). Clearly, more action is needed to fully achieve SDG 6 both at home and around the world.

Nationally, Canada does not have a federal water strategy to guide its approach to SDG 6 but is in the process of creating a new [Canada Water Agency](#). Canada's implementation of SDG 6 is led by Indigenous Services Canada, and our national approach is captured in the [Federal Sustainable Development Strategy](#) as well as the [Investing in Canada Plan](#).

WORDS YOU SHOULD KNOW



Watershed

A watershed is the area of land that drains into rivers and lakes, which, in turn, flow to a common outlet. Watersheds may also drain into river basins, which can encompass larger areas. Watershed management is a continuous process. It requires a multi-disciplinary approach, the use of sound science, and the implementation of well-planned actions to achieve specific objectives.

— [UNDERSTANDING WATERSHEDS](#)

National SDG 6 priorities include:

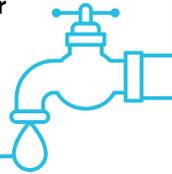
- Improving water quality for Indigenous peoples, including ending all boil water advisories.
- Increasing Indigenous control and management of water and sanitation services.
- Improving water infrastructure for wastewater and water treatment.
- Investing in green infrastructure to support adaptation to climate change.
- Improving management of water resources through greater coordination.
- Protecting and restoring Canada's lakes and rivers, including tackling pollution.

The Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) Calls to Action require the Canadian government to close gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous health outcomes ([Call to Action 19](#)). Ensuring access to clean water is fundamental to meeting this commitment. Despite the goal of ending all boil water advisories in Indigenous communities by March 2021, the government has failed to meet this target and admitted that more work needs to be done ([source](#)).

At the local level, water is an important part of all our lives, but SDG 6 priorities look different across communities. Rural towns are dealing with huge water infrastructure costs, Northern communities face greater impacts from climate change, large urban communities are dealing with pollution and the need to protect rivers and lakes, while many Indigenous communities are struggling to access basic water and sanitation services.

Public opinion surveys consistently show that Canadians consider fresh water to be the country's most important natural resource, far ahead of oil and gas and other resources. They also show that Canadians are becoming increasingly anxious about what will happen to our water resources over the next 10 years.

— THE FUTURE OF FRESHWATER FUNDING IN CANADA



Local approaches to SDG 6 include:

- Protecting local watersheds from deforestation and dumping.
- Preventing untreated run-off from reaching lakes and rivers.
- Developing water solutions by and for Indigenous communities.
- Training community technicians to maintain community water systems.
- Advocating for climate action through communities, funders and municipalities.
- Working to conserve water in our homes by installing water-efficient appliances.
- Working with local and district councils to support sustainable water management.
- Advocating for public access to water and sanitation services, including more public toilets and drinking fountains.
- Developing agricultural crops and irrigation systems that are more water-efficient.
- Community monitoring of lakes, rivers and watersheds.

Why is it important for grantmakers?

Access to clean water is essential for the survival of our communities, for healthy ecosystems, and for a thriving economy. With over \$185 million granted by Canadian foundations in 2016/2017, water and sanitation is the sixth most funded SDG in Canada ([source](#)).

Despite these efforts, Canada is facing several significant water challenges:

1. Degraded water quality in natural ecosystems with watersheds under stress ([source](#)).
2. Aging infrastructure that is threatening water quality with drinking and wastewater systems often 50 to 100 years old ([source](#)).
3. The impact of climate change, which will increase the stress on natural and community water systems, including floods, droughts, algae blooms and the spread of waterborne diseases ([source](#)).
4. The lack of coordinated water management, including poor water monitoring with 100 of Canada's 167 sub-watersheds not having sufficient water quality data ([source](#)).
5. The urgent priority for reconciliation with Indigenous communities through ensuring access to safe drinking water and sanitation systems.



When you ask the question about why is the water so sacred, it's not just because we need it, and nothing can survive without water. It's because for years and years our ancestors have passed on traditional oral knowledge that our water is alive, and our water has a spirit.

— AUTUMN PELTIER, CHIEF WATER COMMISSIONER, ANISHINABEK NATION

The Lake Winnipeg Watershed Initiative

The Lake Winnipeg Watershed Initiative (LWWI) came about several years ago as a result of a group of community foundations who were meeting to discuss environmental initiatives. At that meeting they began to consider the idea that foundations could have a greater impact if they could think “like a watershed”—we’re all upstream of someone else and water connects us regardless of political boundaries.

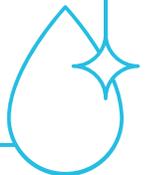
— [H₂O: IDEAS & ACTION FOR CANADA’S WATER](#)

Indigenous peoples living on reserves are 90 times more likely to have no access to running water compared to other Canadians ([source](#)), and 73% of water systems in First Nations communities are at a high or medium risk of contamination ([source](#)). As of August 9, 2021, there were 50 long-term boil water advisories in 31 Indigenous communities ([source](#)) and an additional 826 boil water advisories across Canada ([source](#)). Though Canada’s per capita water consumption is decreasing, water quality was fair or poor in 67 of 167 Canadian watersheds. Only 70% of Canada’s wastewater is safely treated ([source](#)), and urban growth and pollution threaten many of Canada’s rivers and lakes. An intersectional lens reveals that Indigenous women and people of colour are particularly affected by the impacts of unsafe drinking water, climate change and water pollution. In the Aamjiwnaang First Nation near Sarnia, “the water supply is so contaminated that babies are twice as likely to be born female than male” ([source](#)). In Toronto’s low-income neighbourhoods, people of colour have a higher rate of water contamination due to poorly maintained water infrastructure, including dirty water pipes ([source](#)).

Nationally, Canadian grantmakers see the importance of these water issues and are continuing to support action on SDG 6. The [Great Lakes One Water Partnership](#) (GLOW) brings together 32 community foundations from Canada and the U.S. to advance a new era of water management for the benefit of people and businesses in the Great Lakes Basin. Forty million people in Canada and the US get their drinking water from the Great Lakes, and GLOW is working to create a sustainable water future for communities throughout the region. Ten Canadian community foundations are part of GLOW’s [Lake Ontario regional partners](#), which collaborate with Canadian NGOs to prepare for the impacts of climate change and support the sustainable management of Lake Ontario ([source](#)). Their work is currently focused on an annual [Flood Awareness Week](#), which will “highlight citizen action, provide a forum for necessary policy changes, [and] showcase effective green infrastructure.”

An encouraging trend occurring across Canada is the increasing awareness and recognition of the idea of integrated watershed planning and management. Several provinces and territories have now established watershed entities or boards that undertake planning, educate the public and lead local water protection initiatives. There are also emerging models of co-management between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

— [THE FUTURE OF FRESHWATER FUNDING IN CANADA](#)



The importance of SDG 6 to community foundations can be seen in the range of initiatives that are supporting access to clean water, protecting lakes and rivers, promoting sustainable water management and building relationships for reconciliation:

- The [Bowen Island Community Foundation](#) is funding a new drinking fountain and water bottle filling station at the ferry terminal. This simple project will provide clean water to the thousands of people who wait for the ferry.
- Many community foundations are using Vital Signs to track the frequency of boil water advisories in their communities, including the [Campbell River Community Foundation](#), which includes information on First Nations reserves.
- The [Nanaimo Foundation](#) is partnering with Vancouver Island University to support research on the capacities needed for managing drinking water systems in coastal communities.
- Many community foundations are providing grants for protecting and restoring lakes and rivers through their environmental funds, such as that of the [Community Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador](#).
- The [Lake Winnipeg Watershed Initiative](#) brings together community foundations from across the Prairies to raise awareness and support solutions to the challenges facing Lake Winnipeg including “toxic algae blooms, boil-water advisories, and an increasing frequency in both droughts and floods” ([source](#)).
- The Community Foundation Grey Bruce is one of GLOW’s [Lake Huron regional partners](#) and also administers the [Walkerton Clean Water Legacy Award](#). The Award supports “the next generation of students embracing environmental stewardship and the protection of clean water” ([source](#)).

Common principles to get started

Canada’s communities are diverse, but water connects us all. Explore how your existing programs and granting connect to water issues in your community. There will be multiple ways that your programs, partners and grantees are using fresh water, sanitation or natural water ecosystems. Each of these provides important entry points for advancing SDG 6 and addressing important water challenges and opportunities facing your community.

01 Learn and understand

- Use Vital Signs to track boil water advisories in your community, and consider how Vital Signs could incorporate and support [community water monitoring](#).
- Use Vital Conversations to identify water issues in your community and to understand how community members are being affected differently.
- Visit this [map of Canadian boil water advisories](#) to see if communities in your region are being affected.
- Reach out to Indigenous leaders and organizations to see if there are opportunities to support their work on water security issues.
- Connect with national and provincial networks to learn more about water issues and solutions. Visit the websites of [Watersheds Canada](#), [Global Water Futures](#), the [Canadian Freshwater Alliance](#) and [Our Living Waters](#).

02 Strategic grantmaking

- Provide funding for [community monitoring of watersheds and water quality](#).
- Provide funding to support Indigenous leadership, such as training to operate community water treatment plants. See the work of [Water First and their support for Indigenous community internships](#).
- Consider simple community solutions to reduce run-off and stormwater that cause flooding and pollution, such as the work of [RAIN Community Solutions](#).
- For larger foundations: Consider partnering with provincial governments to administer watershed funds that address multiple conservation and water quality issues. See the involvement of the Winnipeg Foundation with the [Growing Outcomes in Watersheds](#) (GROW) program.
- Provide funding for low-income families to improve water quality and efficiency through water filtration, home retrofits and water-efficient appliances.

03 Lead and collaborate

- Connect with other community foundations and water organizations to address challenges in your catchment. See the work of the [Lake Winnipeg Watershed Initiative](#).
- Support sustainable water management, and participate in regional water governance efforts, such as the work of the [Great Lakes One Water Partnership](#).
- When supporting Indigenous communities, explore approaches to water issues that integrate Indigenous knowledge. See [Ohneganos](#) and their work developing tools and resources that combine Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches to water.
- Use the convening power of your community foundation to bring together different stakeholders whose work intersects with water issues, such as municipal officials, NGOs, citizens groups, water users, agriculturalists and industry.
- Participate in, and provide funding for, the kinds of multi-stakeholder partnerships needed to address complex water issues. See the work of the [Lake Winnipeg Watershed Initiative](#), [Unflood Ontario](#) and the [BC Water Funders Collaborative](#). See [this report](#) on the benefits and barriers to water collaborations.

Resource list

The Future of Freshwater Funding in Canada: Mobilizing Collective Resources for Healthy Watersheds

- Pages 6-10 look at key water issues for Canadian communities.
- Pages 11-15 identify grantmaker roles in addressing water challenges.
- Pages 36-64 look at ways that grantmakers can work better together.

Canada Water Decade

- A website with key resources on Canadian water issues with an SDG focus.
- The Act page has an extensive list of community and collaborative solutions to water issues in Canada.
- The Learn page has links to SDG 6-related frameworks, reports and resources.

Water Futures for the World We Want: Opportunities for Research, Practice, and Leadership in Achieving SDG 6

- A report focusing on Canada's performance on SDG 6.
- Pages 14-15 review key water challenges in Canada.
- Pages 16-29 identify opportunities for addressing these challenges.

Restoring the Lifeblood: Water, First Nations and Opportunities for Change

- Pages 1-3 look at the need for a new relationship between First Nations and philanthropy in order to address water issues.
- Pages 10-17 provide an overview of water challenges facing First Nations.
- Pages 18-24 consider opportunities for project development with First Nations.

Toward Water Sustainability: A Blueprint for Philanthropy

- A US guide that looks at large-scale action for water sustainability.
- Pages 12-19 present priority strategies for philanthropy.
- Pages 20-26 provide examples of funding action plans.

Securing Safe Drinking Water for All: A Guide for Funders Seeking Equitable & Sustainable Solutions

- A US guide that looks at the role of philanthropy in community water issues.
- Pages 6-13 look at common community water issues, many of which are relevant to Canada.
- Pages 14-17 provide a simple overview of ways that philanthropy can support communities to address these challenges.

Community Engagement in the Water Sector: An Outcome-Focused Review of Different Engagement Approaches

- An Australian report that reviews evidence for effective engagement with communities on water initiatives.
- Pages 13-39 review the effectiveness of different engagement techniques, including awareness raising, behaviour change and community stewardship.

Realizing the Potential of Community Based Monitoring in Assessing the Health of Our Waters

- Pages 4-6 introduce the concept and practice of community-based monitoring.
- Pages 7-8 look at challenges and opportunities for community water monitoring.
- Pages 9-18 provide case studies of community-based water monitoring.