

Invest in Safe Drinking Water & Food Security



Lack of safe drinking water disproportionately affects Californians who live in disadvantaged communities. The State Water Board estimates that around 400 disadvantaged communities in the state receive water from a public water system that does not meet drinking water standards (1). While this is a statewide problem, it is felt most deeply in the Central Valley, Sierra Foothills, and Central Coast. As a result, these communities are forced to purchase more expensive bottled or filtered water for drinking and cooking. Stretching their already limited grocery dollars to buy both water and food worsens food insecurity for families on CalFresh. In fact, recent research showed that adults who avoided tap water were 21 percent more likely to be food insecure (2).

Recognizing the need to provide short-term relief, the state launched in March 2022 the CalFresh Safe Drinking Water Pilot. The pilot provides \$50 per month in supplemental CalFresh benefits to around 3,000 in selected zip codes in Kern County with contaminated water. However, without additional funding, the pilot will end in fall 2025.

Low-income communities cannot afford to wait for long-term solutions to California's water crisis. Water-related emergencies will continue in our state, so we must extend successful interventions like the CalFresh Safe Drinking Water Pilot. A modest, one-time allocation in the 2024-25 state budget will let participating households continue to receive the crucial supplemental benefit and create a path for eventual expansion to additional impacted households.

"The water is not good here. You can't drink it and we have to buy [bottled water]. So, it is double the cost because they raised the prices and the bills are very high. When you used to pay \$60, \$50, at its highest \$70 in my case, now it is more than \$100. It is a lot and we still have to buy [bottled water] so we can drink water."

Kern County Focus Group Participant

- ACTION:** 1) Extend the CalFresh Safe Drinking Water Pilot to avoid cutting benefits for CalFresh households harmed by the lack of safe drinking water.
 2) Conduct a feasibility study for eventual expansion to additional impacted counties.

1) State Water Resources Control Board, 2024. SAFER Dashboard. Accessed January 2024. Available at: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/certlic/drinkingwater/saferdashboard.html

2) Rosinger AY, Bethancourt HJ, Young SL. Tap Water Avoidance Is Associated with Lower Food Security in the United States: Evidence from NHANES 2005-2018. J Acad Nutr Diet. 2022 Jul 21:S2212-2672(22)00695-5. doi: 10.1016/j.jand.2022.07.011. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 35872245