



## Guiding Principles for Securing our Water Future

The current crisis in Flint, Michigan is a stark reminder of the essential value of water and the role of water infrastructure in protecting the health and well-being of all people. Every member of the Value of Water Coalition stands ready to offer our help to Flint.

The [Value of Water Coalition](#) believes this is an important moment for America to commit to a future where everyone can count on reliable and safe water service -- now, and for future generations.

Modern water and wastewater systems are one of the greatest public health achievements in this country, dramatically increasing life expectancy. Water is essential to everything we do, and no community can thrive without water. Our water systems cannot be taken for granted.

This country is capable of doing great things when we commit to a vision, and align resources and leadership to make it happen. Now is the time to do that for water. To secure a sustainable water future for all, the Value of Water Coalition offers the following principles:

### 1. **Invest in Water Infrastructure Renewal to Ensure Public Health and Safety**

America is the richest nation in the world. We pioneered sanitary sewer and drinking water infrastructure more than a century ago. But the nation's water and wastewater infrastructure is aging and decades of deferred maintenance have ballooned into a massive challenge. The American Water Works Association estimates that more than \$1 trillion in upgrades is needed to replace aging underground pipes. Somewhere in America a water main breaks every two minutes, and changing weather patterns and drought are putting extra stress on water and wastewater infrastructure. These systems need ongoing stewardship, continued investment, and modernization to ensure public health and safety. This will require a renewed co-investment by water providers and local, state, and federal governments.

While rates for water bills across the country vary widely, this essential service is affordable relative to other utilities. While communities are investing in their systems, the timing and pacing of infrastructure renewal is simply not happening fast enough in most places to keep up with the need. Often, the average water bill does not reflect the cost of service. We must appreciate the true value of water and increase investment in the systems that bring water to and from homes, businesses, and farms -- each and every day.

### 2. **Take A Long-Term View in Making Water Decisions and Build a Partnership with the Public**

Water is essential to life. As a nation, we cannot be short-sighted in the decisions we make in how we invest in, maintain, and operate water and wastewater systems. The public health and safety of residents must be our guidepost. Priorities, challenges, changes, and decisions must be approached with a long-term view.

Water providers must create and maintain a deep relationship with the communities they serve. Communities need to know that their public servants and water providers are prioritizing health and safety. The most effective water providers are transparent with their customers about the challenges their systems face, and the priorities and plans to fix those issues. Many water utility leaders around the country make

themselves publicly available at town halls and open up their treatment facilities for public tours. This should be the model for all water providers. Demonstrating that decisions are made with residents' health and safety first, and building public trust, are all critical to securing our nation's water future.

### 3. **Build a Water Safety Net**

America is a nation of great abundance. Every community should have access to clean, safe, and reliable water and wastewater service. We need to guarantee some base level of access to this essential service—regardless of income. As costs for system improvements and maintenance increase, affordability for lower-income people is a growing concern. While there are assistance programs, such as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, for other utilities, there is no equivalent for water. We must work together as a nation, with co-investment by water providers and local, state, and federal government, to ensure that everyone in this country has safe and reliable water service. This is fundamental to public health and well-being.

The Value of Water Coalition hopes that these principles provide a platform for sustained national dialogue and action to secure a sustainable water future for all.

If you have thoughts about how we can work together for a secure water future, we'd love to hear from you.