



The Honourable Judy A. Sgro, P.C., M.P.
Chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on
Transport, Infrastructure and Communities
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Ms. Sgro:

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, we are pleased to respond on behalf of the Government of Canada to the recommendations made in the Twenty-First Report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities entitled *Lead in Drinking Water*, presented to the House on December 11, 2017.

The Government would like to thank the Committee for its work and express its appreciation to all who appeared before the Committee or provided the Committee with written submissions to share their views.

The Government Response accepts the Report's recommendations, acknowledges that the replacement of lead service lines is a legitimate public health concern, and affirms that Infrastructure Canada, Health Canada, the Department of Indigenous Services Canada, and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation will continue to work with provinces, territories, municipalities and First Nations to address this issue.

Please find enclosed a copy of the Government Response to the recommendations of the Report.

Yours sincerely,

Amarjeet Sohi, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Infrastructure
and Communities

Ginette C. Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Health

Jane Philpott, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Indigenous
Services

Enclosure

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE TWENTY-FIRST REPORT OF
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE
AND COMMUNITIES ENTITLED
*LEAD IN DRINKING WATER***

The Government of Canada is pleased to respond to the Twenty-First Report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities entitled *Lead in Drinking Water*, presented to the House on December 11, 2017. After carefully reviewing the Committee's report, the Government has chosen to respond to each recommendation individually.

CLEAN AND SAFE DRINKING WATER FOR CANADIANS

The Government recognizes the importance of access to clean drinking water for Canadians, as it is a basic necessity and fundamental to public health and quality of life. The Government also recognizes the effects that a lack of clean drinking water can have on a community's residents, including the significant impacts in First Nations communities. This is why access to clean and safe water is a critical part of the Government of Canada's historic plan to invest more than \$180 billion in infrastructure over 12 years. Of this, \$9.2 billion will be provided to provinces and territories over the next decade under the Green Infrastructure stream of the Investing in Canada Plan. This is also reflected in the 2016–2019 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy's long-term goal for Clean Drinking Water which reads: *All Canadians have access to safe drinking water and, in particular, the significant challenges Indigenous communities face are addressed.*

The Government of Canada commends the work that is already underway in many Canadian municipalities and First Nations communities across the country to support the removal and replacement of lead pipes in both public infrastructure and private and commercial properties. These local decision-makers are well-placed to know the unique needs of their communities; and by identifying these potential infrastructure projects to their respective provincial or territorial government for prioritization, they can ensure that their communities' needs are known and submitted under available funding programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the Committee recommends that *the federal government work with the provinces, territories, municipalities and other stakeholders to address the public health problem of lead in drinking water and to accelerate the replacement of lead service lines.* Specifically, the Committee recommends that three priority measures be addressed by the Government of Canada.

The Government of Canada supports this overall recommendation and is committed to working with all levels of government, First Nations communities, and stakeholders to address this public health issue. Addressing drinking water safety concerns is fundamental to ensuring Canadians have confidence in the quality of the water they drink.

The Government of Canada actively supports the efforts of provinces, territories, municipalities, and First Nations communities to replace public water service lines containing lead and support corrosion control in water treatment. The federal government will continue to pursue action in this regard as suggested by the Committee's report. In particular, the Government of Canada will pursue the three priority measures set out in the report.

Recommended Measure 1: Working with the Office of Infrastructure Canada and other partners to identify potential sources of funding for provinces and municipalities to address their specific corrosion control and lead piping replacement challenges.

The Government of Canada supports this recommendation. As addressed above, the Government of Canada recognizes access to clean drinking water for Canadians as a basic necessity and fundamental need for public health and quality of life. Modern and effective water and wastewater infrastructure is essential to keeping our communities healthy, and economically and environmentally sustainable.

While the Government of Canada does not generally have a direct responsibility for water service lines or water treatment, the Government provides ongoing funding and other support to provinces, territories, municipalities, and First Nations partners in this area across a number of fronts.

Drinking water infrastructure, including the replacement of lead pipes found in public infrastructure, has been an eligible category of investment under several past and current Infrastructure Canada programs, such as the Clean Water and Wastewater Fund, the New Building Canada Fund, the Building Canada Fund and the Gas Tax Fund. In particular, through the \$2-billion Clean Water and Wastewater Fund, over 1,100 drinking water projects have been approved in communities across the country.

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation provides funding to provinces and territories that could be used to replace lead service pipes within a community housing project or on a property occupied by a low-income homeowner or tenant. The proposed updated Guideline for Canadian Drinking Water Quality for Lead, together with the existing Guidance on Controlling Corrosion in Drinking Water Distribution Systems, will form the basis for provincial, territorial, municipal, and First Nations communities' strategies for reducing exposure to lead from drinking water. Similarly, the Department of Indigenous Services Canada supports First Nations in providing safe drinking water

on reserve in areas such as supporting water treatment facility construction and associated funding for operation and maintenance in accordance with relevant federal and provincial standards and regulations, and drinking water quality monitoring in accordance with the Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality.

Looking ahead, the next decade will see over \$33 billion in new funding delivered through integrated bilateral agreements between the federal government and each of the provinces and territories under the Investing in Canada plan. Eligible public infrastructure investments will include infrastructure projects to support clean, safe drinking water where prioritized by provinces and territories.

The Government of Canada is committed to engaging with key stakeholders, such as provincial and territorial governments, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, as well as First Nations communities to discuss options for addressing lead drinking water service lines.

In accepting the Committee's recommendations, Infrastructure Canada, the Department of Indigenous Services Canada and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation will undertake coordinated engagement with provinces, territories, municipalities and First Nations communities in the coming months to ensure they have the most up-to-date information on existing federal funding opportunities and other support to address lead pipe replacement and corrosion control (water treatment) challenges. Health Canada will also support these engagement efforts by providing technical expertise on lead in drinking water issues. This collective effort will ensure Government of Canada resources and expertise are available to communities to support their access to clean and safe drinking water.

Recommended Measure 2: Working with First Nations communities to address their specific corrosion control and lead piping replacement challenges.

The Government of Canada supports the recommendation to work with First Nations communities to address their specific corrosion control and lead piping replacement challenges.

As part of its core mandate, the Department of Indigenous Services Canada supports First Nations in providing safe drinking water through funding for community infrastructure and public health activities. Federal funding and programming to support communities in the delivery of safe drinking water has been in place since the 1990s and has evolved over time to respond to emerging risks and changing science, technology and environmental contexts. Addressing issues with drinking water in First Nations communities is a priority for this government, as is shown through the commitment to and progress made in eliminating long-term drinking water advisories on reserve by March 2021. Between November 2015 when the commitment was made and February 6, 2018, 52 long-term drinking water advisories on public systems have been lifted and projects are underway that will benefit 275 First Nations communities.

Working with First Nations to address specific corrosion control and lead piping replacement challenges will take time. As owners and operators of water and wastewater systems in their communities, First Nations determine and prioritize their infrastructure needs in the context of other pressing infrastructure needs (e.g., housing, roads) through the Capital Facilities and Maintenance Program's First Nations Infrastructure Investment Plans. The Department then aligns the infrastructure needs of the communities with program criteria, priorities, and resources. Some First Nations have chosen to enter into Municipal Transfer Service Agreements with nearby municipalities to meet their drinking water and wastewater needs.

From a First Nations perspective, monitoring for lead and other drinking water quality parameters in accordance with the Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality and providing associated advice is a long-standing core activity for Environmental Health Officers, who are public health inspectors that deliver a range of public health activities in First Nations communities south of 60° as either federal or community employees. In British Columbia, these services have been transferred to the First Nations Health Authority. North of 60°, the territorial governments are responsible for safe drinking water in all communities in their territories.

The Department of Indigenous Services Canada is aware of and preparing for distribution and promotion of the proposed updated guideline for lead in drinking water and will be ready for monitoring of occupied schools and children's facilities in accordance with the new lead guideline. This approach is being taken because children are most at risk of being exposed to lead. Full implementation of the proposed updated lead guideline will take time and will be done in consultation with community leaders.

In support of these efforts, Budget 2016 announced \$1.8 billion over five years for water and wastewater infrastructure investments and \$141.7 million over five years for the Department of Indigenous Services Canada to improve monitoring and testing of on-reserve community drinking water systems, improve recruitment and retention of Community-Based Water Quality Monitors, and support increased monitoring, testing, public health engineering reviews and communication associated with increased infrastructure investments, including \$3 million for additional lead monitoring and educational activities within schools and other children's facilities. Budget 2017 announced \$4 billion in infrastructure investments for community infrastructure in First Nations communities, which includes funding that could be used for water and wastewater on-reserve. Capital Facilities and Maintenance Program funding could be used to support the construction, acquisition, renovation, expansion, repair and replacement of lead supply lines and distribution system piping.

The Department of Indigenous Services Canada will work with First Nations and municipalities, where relevant, to gather data to identify the approximate amount of lead piping on reserve. The Department of Indigenous Services Canada, together with Infrastructure Canada, will undertake coordinated engagement with First Nations partners in the coming months to ensure they have the most up-to-date information on federal funding opportunities and other support to address lead pipe replacement and corrosion control (water treatment) challenges. Health Canada will also support these engagement efforts by providing technical expertise on lead in drinking water issues.

Recommended Measure 3: Working with the provinces, territories and municipalities to harmonize the implementation of Health Canada's lead guidelines and testing protocols across Canada.

The Government of Canada supports this recommendation. Health Canada is committed to supporting provinces and territories as they move toward the adoption of the proposed updated Guideline for Canadian Drinking Water Quality for lead, while respecting their jurisdiction in this area. Meaningful discussions are ongoing with provinces and territories pertaining to the implementation of the proposed updated guideline, with an emphasis on the need to measure lead levels at the tap to provide a better representation of the exposure of Canadians.

Recognizing the challenges associated with the full removal of lead sources within distribution and plumbing systems, Health Canada is also providing guidance to provinces and territories on controlling corrosion, and on the possible use of residential treatment devices. The department has developed and posted public information (<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/environmental-workplace-health/reports-publications/water-quality/water-talk-minimizing-exposure-lead-drinking-water-distribution-systems.html>) on simple actions Canadians can take to reduce exposure to lead from drinking water until sources of lead are eliminated, and will further support provinces and territories to develop information specific to their jurisdiction.

Health Canada has developed a close collaborative relationship on the issue of drinking water with all provinces and territories through the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Committee on Drinking Water. This longstanding collaboration has resulted in the continued development and update of the Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality. Also, it is through this collaborative relationship that Health Canada will support provinces, territories and federal departments in the implementation of the proposed updated Guideline for Canadian Drinking Water Quality for lead. This support will include advice and guidance on testing protocols, scientific expertise on the human health assessment of lead, and the development of communication products for stakeholders, in collaboration with provinces, territories, and other federal departments.

CONCLUSION

The Government would like to thank the Committee for its work and express its appreciation to all who appeared before the Committee or provided the Committee with written submissions to share their views. The Government shares the Committee's commitment to safe and clean drinking water for all Canadians.